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Wush!

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Wush!

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Part 1

Wush! Wush! Wush!

Listen carefully on this! I can't repeat it. Poems come when they want and go once they've been spoken:

Hide your secret! Say nothing from this day of your birth.

Hide your secret! We have lost all our precious things from the age of abundance.

Hide your secret! The cattle are gone.

Hide our secret! We have fallen beneath the grinding stone.

Hide your secret! Deny the things you know!

George Makana Clark

Chapter 1

Smoky Mimosa Comes to Joburg

The Southern African sun rose ceremoniously over an assembly of women of various ages, each splendidly layered and twirled in their traditional Xhosa best. The older women wore their turbans at rakish tilts and angles, and low over the brow, as was their right. They looked mysterious. The younger women wore theirs high up on the forehead.

Exquisitely beaded detail to their layered clobber and adornments twinkled from their elegant repose on the hardened and polished dung mud floor of a rondavel, to the right of the door. Outside, cloud-softened morning light tinged with gold played around birds sharpening the beaks against a thirsty, sturdy old mimosa. As one, these women leaned in towards a smolder of twigs and freshly plucked Sifudu leaves. A bony hand stuck itself out of the throng and wriggled a stick into the fire briskly. Smoke billowed over this ancient traditional Xhosa baptism ritual.

As the smoke cleared somewhat, a wrinkled, three day's young girl-child was passed, face down, swiftly through the remaining tendrils by an older, married sister of her mother, who waved the child through the smoke quickly to operatic chanting from the assembly in counterpointed low and dulcet registers:

"Deny the things you know, *Uze ukhanyele into Uyaziyo, wush! Wush! Wush!*"

Rolling thunder from afar had them fall silent and look at one another quizzically. There was another *wushuza,* or *hushuza:* 'to wave a newborn child in the smoke of herbs'.

"Deny the things you know, *Uze ukhanyele into Uyaziyo, wush! Wush! Wush!*"

Dark gray cloud shuffled heavily into the sky quite suddenly. The baby gurgled enchantingly and looked each woman in the eye brightly. She appeared to be following zephyrs of smoke with her nose and breathing it in. This was most unusual: normally there'd be gagging, writhing, kicking, coughing, and blue murder screaming from the newly born in response to the pungent sharpness of the smell of the smoking Sifudu leaves. Usually the child kept the eyes tightly shut. Much was said in the nothing spoken

amongst the women: this was a special child. Their gaze turned to the mother. Robustly, they chanted at the child:

"See to it that your mother's ointment pot is never dry, *Gcina ihlala likanyoko lingomi, wush! Wush! Wush!*"

The sky grew even darker. A deafening crack of lightening echoed sharply and a flash of hot white light illuminated the mother receiving her daughter from her sister, and in one smooth, enigmatic action passing the child under first her left, then right knee. From the safety of her mother's close embrace the infant held out both arms towards the fire and giggled, raising the hands and wriggling the fingers, as if tickling heaven's underbelly. A drizzle fell steadily. It was precisely what the parched mimosa needed, and it popped a bud immediately.

Tears formed in the eyes of the mother. The women drew closer, and caressed the infant tenderly. The elder women, or Gogo's, moved to one side where they speculated loudly about the meaning of it all with firm clicks of the flat top of a stiff tongue against the palate.

The child was named Nomsi, or Smoky, who would spend a great deal of her earlier years in the old mimosa outside her home. It was the first tree she'd tried to climb, and fallen from. She would often curve her diminutive child's self lightly into a crook of its lower branches and nap. Forever after she'd be trailed by its fragrance, which intoxicated all who met her.

*

In silhouette against the expansive Eastern Cape sky it has the outline of a woman carrying a child on her back and is so named: Belekazama, meaning, 'looks like a woman carrying a child on her back'. It is the peak of the Amatola Mountains, a natural fortress in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In a climate of extremes rain falls mostly in the winter months, particularly so in June and July. In summer the Amatola is a throbbing Arcadia of indigenous flora and bird life; sometimes, in particularly bitter winters, it becomes a snow-dome of frosted mystery; spring is fleeting.

Before written history, in the time of the very first Xhosa kings, in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, the natural order seemed then to be such that custody of the landscape fell to everybody equally. All who lived on and worked the land were equally responsible for its wellbeing. In this ancient time, the first family to settle in the

Amatola was a little known branch of the Sigcawus, who were related to the son of King Phalo, Rharhabe, through marriage to one of his nieces. Wedding gifts from Rharhabe's house to the Sigcawus included verbal title to land on the lower slopes of the Amatola, at Qabimbola. Here they settled in a kraal or homestead of round huts, or rondavels of mud and wattle walls under conical thatched roofs, the doors of which faced the sunrise. They prospered and grew in number substantially. Qabimbola developed into a sprawl of extended Sigcawu kin in which each immediate family had their own, smaller holding. Here at Qabimbola, meaning 'place where red clay for the face might be found' the clear-complexioned Sigcawu women made and traded traditional beer and grain coil pots of fired ox-blood colored clay.

The men watered and grazed livestock of mostly cows, which were representations of wealth and social status, and units of exchange. The women tended the fields; they milled grain and fermented beer; swept, re-plastered and re-thatched, and collected firewood and water. Gossiping and singing, at times scolding and laughing, they thrashed the laundry on flat rock far downstream with many a throaty ululation. Children played, and alert elders guided and meddled; praised or admonished. Life went on somewhere between the joy and occasional misery that bookend human experience, anywhere, at any time.

The River Sigcawu, the village's life-blood, ran along a valley curving around Qabimbola's bottom slope. It was one of few rivers in the region that flowed clear and strongly all year round, and it fed epic waterfalls that splashed into glades of giant fern and deep, sparkling pools. In the time of the ancestors the river was an easily accessible, broadly communal facility and resource. It was then a richly social space where culture and experience could be exchanged with other clans and travellers passing through. The river Sigcawu was the informal though generally acknowledged boundary to Sigcawu territory and a geopolitical gray area.

Over time the region became more populous. Too many of the newcomers behaved like they hadn't seen a river before. They'd do their laundry in quite the wrong place upstream. The Sigcawu's became resourceful about protecting the river. It is true that in their more recent history there had been moments in which they might perhaps have been over zealous in their guarding and defending the River Sigcawu for themselves, in so doing incurring the wrath of the ancestors, who could be unforgiving when the natural order was fucked with.

*

In 1939, the year of Smoky Mimosa's birth and baptism, the Amatola had an unusually hot early summer after an unseasonal dry winter. Drought and famine loomed. There was much anxiety. The adults and elders looked up at the sky rather a lot, and sniffed at the air. They shook their heads and muttered dolefully: how had they brought this upon themselves? A consensus had formed amongst the Gogo's at Smoky's baptism: the kid was of the best in them all. Here was a child who would stand her ground and never give in, who'd never betray her people or neglect her mother. It seemed also that she brought rain. At her baptism, the Gogo's had been in the process of discussing how they would give thanks to the ancestors for the rain outside when the drizzle stopped suddenly and the sky cleared over yet another arid day. The elders were perplexed. The next day they took the baby Smoky from her mother to a sacred place at the top of Belekazama where they engaged her in play to get her to tickle the heavens, to no effect. They played hard. Exhausted, Smoky fell asleep by lunchtime and was returned to her mother.

The following day the river dried up; livestock fell where they stood, curled up, blinked sweetly one last time and died. A bitter, erosive wind swept through the Amatola fuelling massive conflagrations. Entire forests and villages were razed. Many were displaced. The Amatola became a wasteland where only the Sigcawu's remained in a grind of poverty and degradation. It took a while for the clan to struggle on to a tattered functionality. The mimosa survived. Over the time of Smoky's childhood the tree flourished and became her escape from troubled times. When she got too heavy to clamber into the tree and nap, she'd read or reflect by herself under its scented branches.

As a child, Smoky was educated in play and instructive chores at home. She started out in the family business helping older girls find and collect the right kind of clay, at the right time of the season; and the thicker aloe leaves, which were dried and used to fire the dried clay into ceramic. She displayed a diviner's knack for locating the best clay and aloe. While she understood that these sources of raw material for the Sigcawu means of production were secret, she was nonetheless generous about sharing the information well beyond the village, feeling that there was more than enough to go around, much to the chagrin of the elders. They chided and reminded her about denying what she knew. It made little difference: the landscape belonged to everybody, felt Smoky. Why should its bounty not be shared? This put her relationship with the elders on edge, but they were aware that there was no conflict between Smoky's position and that of the ancestors. They hesitated to sanction her. Besides, was she not clearly intelligent and resourceful, more so than any other of her generation? The elders felt that

Smoky would serve her community well in the future. They were too quite confident that their pots were the best: they'd been at it harder and for longer than most, and felt that any new competition would serve only to confirm that.

Growing up, Smoky was educated at Methodist mission schools close to where she lived, and read voraciously, in particular Charles Dickens. Later in her adult life her firstborn, a son, entered the world wringing his puckered little hands and Smoky would name him Uriah. At seventeen she went to The University of Fort Hare in Alice, about an hour downhill from the mountain, where she studied the law. After a successful first three months of study her people on the mountain ran out of money and sunk themselves into debt due to a protracted drought. The ancestors were not pleased, which might have been due to a plan then under secret discussion to dam the river downstream to irrigate new fields for crops and grazing with what would be devastating consequences for the other clans who lived there.

Together with the drought, strong winds led to bush fires and dramatic erosion. Not for the first time the elders ask themselves: how might we lift this misfortune from our lives? How might we appease the ancestors? Smoky was recalled to her village from Fort Hare for a gathering of the clan. Beer was fermented from the last remaining grain, and drunk; the last bottom ends, *skitsels* or *majat,* of mountain dagga were smoked, and the last remaining animal, the Judas goat, it who led sheep to the slaughter, finally got what was coming, wrung of its milk, slaughtered and eaten. Over dessert, bones were thrown, with results that had the village meet and discuss well into the night, during which time Smoky retired to her family's rondavel by herself where she fell into a deep sleep under the mimosa tree.

As she slept, her ancestors sent her a misty vision that began inexactly around the thirteen to fourteen hundreds, the time of the origins of the Xhosa Royal House. King Xhosa appeared to Smoky in her vision indistinctly and transformed in sequence into each of his sons, and their sons, to become Phalo (1715-1775), son of Tshiwo. Smoky saw the young and frisky King Phalo looking to the future from a lofty hill at his Great Place at the beginning of his tenure. He struck a dashing figure in the skins of office and appeared to be anticipating an imminent arrival, shading his eyes with his hand, searching the horizon this way and that.

Phalo had much to look forward to. With dowries of substantial herds of sturdy cattle and a bull each he'd secured two luscious young brides of equal status from two antagonistic clans in the hope that these alliances would secure some peace in the region

during his reign. Traditionally, and in the normal course of these events, the wife who arrived first would be the First Lady, and her first son would be heir. In perhaps the most monumental schedule clash in history, or due to political mischief, the two wives arrived on the same day, at exactly the same time from opposite directions. Phalo had already paid for both. They were his and he wanted to keep them, which didn't go down well with anybody else. Kings do not compromise or back off for fear of being perceived as weak. A dilemma formed and congealed. Who becomes the First Wife? There was no precedent.

The new wives were overindulged, high-maintenance princesses who were used to things going their way. They were furious. They tore at their hair and beat their chests; they sobbed and howled, yelled at their retinues and beat the servants. Cynical messages were sent from one to the other. They pouted and sulked, poisoning Phalo's Great Place and court with enmity. Phalo feared they would drift into a perverse alliance against him. He settled them in at a distance from each other and sought advice from the wily old village druid, Majeke, he of the floating lower jaw with a radical overbite reminiscent of Sammy Davis Junior. Majeke agreed that it was a prickly impasse, and informed the king that he'd need time to think.

After a brief trance Majeke inquired: "Your Majesty, what is greater than your head and stronger than your right hand?"

"Absolutely nothing! How dare you! There is nothing greater than my head or stronger than my right hand!" exclaimed the King.

He slapped Majeke who ducked under the next blow with practiced agility, and continued nonplussed: "Perfectly right answer, Your Majesty: one could be the Head wife, the other the Right Hand wife, and they'd be of equal status."

Delighted with this solution, Phalo apologized to Majeke and gave him a farm, seeds, cows, one bull, tobacco and a chorus line of virgins.

Majeke danced a jig and chanted: "The day and the night; the sun, the moon and the stars; the wind and the rain belong to all; the land, the seas and the rivers belong to everyone, everyone, everyone."

It was a zinger of a vision that left Smoky with a clear sense of purpose. Going on eighteen at this time, she dropped out of University and went to Johannesburg to make money to send back to her clan in the Eastern Cape. In Joburg she lived with a long urbanized branch of the family and found work as a receptionist in training for

Hirsh (Myron, corporate law), Rajbansi (Tubby, entertainment and copyright law) and Dlamini (Jacob, criminal law) in the Joburg CBD, close to the courts.

Smoky started at the bottom. After cleaning the offices she moved up to making and serving tea. Soon she was in the mailroom, and shortly thereafter at the front desk to entertainment and copyright law, under the wings of the outgoing receptionist and Tubby Rajbansi, the morose head of department. Smoky displayed an attentive, discreet telephone manner. She passed messages on promptly and accurately. Her personable manner eased the mood of the department and Tubby was seen to smile tightly. This was misread to be a grimace by his colleagues of longer standing, who had never seen him attempt a smile, and they inquired after his health.

Shy and neurotic, Tubby retreated into an evenly gruff professional manner. He was originally from Durban and a skinny fellow, whose suit hung like he'd left the hanger in its shoulders. He was quite a bit older than Smoky. At first he responded as he might have to a younger sister. Smoky and Tubby worked well together and halfway through her second year at the firm she was employed as his full time receptionist. Clients included characterful artists, writers, actors and musicians who Smoky warmed to. She enjoyed their open minds and humor, courage and resilience. Smoky grew in confidence and was then turning into a comely young woman. No longer could Tubby view her as a sister. He felt sufficiently emboldened to inquire: "What *is* that perfume you're wearing? I've wanted to ask since the day we met. It's almost, mmmmmmm," sniff-sniff: "Mimosa I think." He fell madly in love with Smoky and courted her affections. Tubby was heard to laugh at the office, which inspired ribald speculation.

Toward the end of her third year at the firm Smoky and Tubby moved into a cheap, dilapidated but spacious, clean and centrally located apartment with good light, Apartment Three, on the corner of the first floor of Khan's Corner, an early Art Deco architecture brought to Joburg in the nineteen-thirties. The apartment had a generous balcony with good views of the intersection of De Beer and Juta Streets, a busy corner in Braamfontein, or 'the spring by the brambles'. At street level under Khan's Corner were a doctor's surgery and general dealer along De Beer and a mothballed restaurant along Juta.

Braamfontein was once one of many old Joburg farms to which early gold diggers and speculators flocked. The farm was unlucky. There was no gold to be found. Tunnels were dug and searches made, but not a single nugget. Luckless Braamfontein became populated from around the turn of the nineteenth century and in time grew over a

mostly sturdy honeycomb of old mining tunnels, and underground springs and streams, all monitored vigilantly by the City of Joburg, and diligently maintained by fulltime teams of specialists.

*

From history it is learnt that Phalo's one wife became the Great Wife, she of the head, the other the Right Hand wife, she of the arm, each with their own royal house and heir. First in succession to Phalo was Rharhabe, the eldest from the Right Hand House, born around 1722, followed by Gcaleka, of the Great House, born in 1730.

Rharhabe was noble, popular and in possession of kingly qualities of character and features of personality. He would someday be a very good king, was the general public opinion, which threatened Gcaleka. One consequence of Rharhabe's becoming king would be that *his* mother would become the greater mother, as mother of the chief, and Gcaleka's mother the lesser wife, inevitably. Her ointment pot would not be as big or as full as it once was. Gcaleka made a precocious grab for the throne but was thwarted by King Phalo and Rharhabe, who forgave Gcaleka, who resented Rharhabe's generosity bitterly. Open conflict between the brothers threatened. To keep the peace, Phalo separated them and accompanied Rharhabe across the great Kei River to Amabele, near Stutterheim, where Rharhabe and company, which included Sigcawus, settled in sanctioned and consensual exile. King Phalo returned to face the music at his Great Place.

All too soon, Rharhabe was made aware that at this new home, Amabele, he was perceived to be trespassing on the Khoi under Chief Hintisa, and his lovely wife, Hoho. Raids and counter-raids between Rharhabe and Hintisa escalated into vicious, bloody battle; the great river Kei choked with blood and corpses. Hintisa was killed, which put Hoho in a fix, Rharhabe in a bind and both over a barrel: do we continue fighting or make some sort of deal? They parlayed; Rharhade made Hoho an acceptable offer on a mountain fortress, the Amatola, between the Keiskamma and Buffalo Rivers; the Amatola Forests, and Hoho Hills between Middle Drift and King William's Town.

By 1960 in Braamfontein there were residual Khans who kept to them-selves on the ground floor in Number One at Khan's Corner and ran the general dealer on De Beer. An old widowed Jewish GP who had for many years lived and practiced in Braamfontein lived at Number Two and was in the process of handing over the surgery on De Beer to his son. A glamorous young lady and her son occupied Number Four on the first floor, and Number Five was boarded up, as was a second floor of two further

apartments. In Number Three Smoky and Tubby Rajbansi - Sigcawu, an unmarried couple of mixed race, lived in sin guiltlessly and flouted the law, which expressly forbad cross-pollination. Number Three was partly furnished with abandoned relics, most notably a huge, characterful old sofa, upholstered in faded scarlet corduroy. It was a happy home, around which formed a Popperian open society of lively radicals and Beatniks. There were many parties at which people in the arts and media met and helped one another to get ahead in their fields. Smoky and Tubby often used the roof, which had a very good view over central Joburg across railway yards along Smit Street.

Khan's Corner came up for auction in late 1963. Smoky was pregnant. They'd been thinking about starting their own firm of entertainment agents and lawyers. Why not, they thought, bid for Khan's Corner? They came in very low and won, to their great surprise. Uriah was born. Tubby detached Rajbansi from Hirsh and Dlamini and established a new firm of artists' agents and lawyers, Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Associates with offices and a small guest suite on the second floor. Their very first client as the new firm was a young and talented writer, Fikile Mankazana, referred to them by an American editor (originally from Ohio) of their acquaintance. The last remaining Khans moved on. Smoky and Tubby re-christened 'Khan's Corner'.

At eye-level on a wall to one side of the vestibule outside her glass doors, 'Lorelei Terrace' appeared freshly in deco font above a new, recessed panel of apartment buzzers, which read:

Ground Floor

Concierge	Blank
Number One	Musicians
Number Two	Wietzman

First Floor

Number Three	Rajbansi - Sigcawu
Number Four	Zenani
Number Five	Unavailable

Second Floor

Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Ass.

Tubby and Smoky proceeded to fix Lorelei up nicely, but their every attempt at maintenance or improvement seemed only to return Lorelei to the condition in which they'd found her. They gave up and accepted her as she was.

Chapter 2

Ntylo Ntylo

About a year after the birth of Uriah, Smoky and Tubby installed a recording studio in what was once a smart restaurant along Juta Street in the time of the Khans. Since then it had been boarded up. Smoky and Tubby had it soundproofed and it served them well as a studio where their musicians could record. The studio evolved into a notorious and fashionable club, Ntylo's, meaning 'birdsong'. There was always something cool happening at Ntylo's; if there was a famous muso in town and it was going to sit in anywhere, it would be at Ntylo's. Smoky and Tubby were devoted to their musicians. At Number Three there was an open door to their home: and a bar, a huge, comfortable old sofa, and an excellent Bang & Olufsen stereo often at full volume. In the bitterly cold and dry Joburg winter Smoky and Tubby would go abroad, to their north, west and east, to market their musicians. The club closed and became a rehearsal/recording, research and development studio where the resident trio explored fresh material, and new ways to interpret it, which helped them form choices about the repertoire and possible guest stars for the season ahead; media interviews and photo shoots kept the image sharp and took the club and its musicians to a larger audience.

Each year, after keeping back the very best for himself, and stashing these recordings in a safety deposit box in a vault under his bank, Braamfontein Savings and Loan, diagonally opposite Lorelei's entrance, Tubby released a vinyl long-playing 'Live at Ntylo's' of individual musicians improvising versions of one jazz standard or another. It sold out each year well in advance of its release and would become a collector's item but never came close to covering the costs of production. Ntylo's bled money. Even though their firm of artists' lawyers and agents on the second floor thrived, Tubby and Smoky accumulated debt. It didn't help that they did business with good faith and a handshake, and not much accounting. They were as diffuse about their own interests as they were vigilant about the wellbeing of their darling artistes. That's how they were, and largely why they were loved and respected by so many.

Tubby and Smoky's firstborn, Uriah Rajbansi - Sigcawu, grew up at Lorelei Terrace. From around sixteen he started working as an office cleaner, tea server then messenger at Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Associates in their second floor offices at Lorelei during his school holidays. He studied the law, joined the firm and got married, living

there at Lorelei with his new wife until they had their first child, a son, also named Uriah but referred to as Junior to avoid confusion. Junior was wild. Uriah and the missus felt he needed a large garden and a swimming pool, friends and domestic pets, activities and lessons to keep them both from going crazy. They moved to the suburbs. Junior grew up to follow the same path as the father, but dropped out of law school under a cloud from which fell his firstborn, a son, named Uriah but called Urie, to avoid further confusion. Junior rose no further than clerk in the firm.

At seventy - seven years Smoky died. Tubby, at eighty-seven, didn't know quite what to do with him - self and mourned into a catatonic depression. He lived at Number Three as they always had, as if Smoky was about to emerge from the bathroom. Number Three became a shrine with everything exactly as it was when Smoky died. Tubby no longer went out or answered the door. Uriah took up the slack at the firm but Ntylo's slid into anarchy. It became a techno club and den of vice and drugs, and was raided and closed, much to Uriah's relief. He restored the space into the three shops it had been before the Khan's knocked through and made one large restaurant. St. Luke's Hospice rented one of these shops where they installed a thrift store, managed by a volunteer, Matilda; the other became a salon, Plumage, leaving the shop in the middle unoccupied as yet.

This then was the string of three shops under Lorelei at street level along Juta Street, with the Weitzman surgery and the general dealer along De Beer street, and the entrance to Lorelei on the corner between them, diagonally across from Braamfontein Savings and Loan. The panel of buzzers now read:

Ground Floor

Concierge Blank

Number One Ntylo's Musicians

Number Two Wietzman

First Floor

Number Three Rajbansi - Sigcawu

Number Four Zenani

Number Five To Let

Second Floor

Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Associates

*

Tubby's depression lifted after a year and he began putting a deal together for the sale of Ntylo's substantial archive of live performances and winter sessions to a Japanese recording company. He had these wily 'Nips', as he called them, well in hand and when he realized that they'd pay anything he declined each incremental offer with exaggerated disinterest. They came back in with an even higher offers. Tubby's health declined. In a zany dotage he was coaxed down to Number One at Lorelei from Number Three. Junior moved into the firm's guest suite (where he lived still) on the second floor to supervise Tubby's care. Number Three was cleared and repainted and let to an acquaintance of Matilda de Bruyn, who managed the hospice thrift shop and had become a characterful feature of Lorelei Terrace. In the present, 2018, at Number One Lorelei Terrace, Uriah Rajbansi - Sigcawu, firstborn and heir, flung open long-shut curtains and windows. Three months had passed since the death of the father, Tubby. Uriah was overcome by sadness. On the other hand, he felt, and was consoled, that his parents had led long and eventful lives unconstrained by convention and often unencumbered with the burden of common sense. Smoky and Tubby had lived very much for and in the moment.

Uriah was startled by fireworks over Fordsburg, and Junior who bounded in with a: "Hello Papa, I'm going to want to want move in here when you're done, aren't I? Phew, it's going to need a good clean."

"Let me think about this," replied Uriah with a look of fond loathing directed at Junior.

Uriah and Junior communicated with a rude lawyer's wit. Uriah felt thoroughly defeated each time he saw this son, who, it must be aired, might have tried harder, at everything. While living in the guest suite to the office upstairs on the second floor Junior had been through some of the archive, and learnt all about Ntylo's. He felt that it was the coolest thang, and wanted to do exactly the same. He took the smoke with Phala and The Twins, Gubu, or Xigubu, meaning 'drum' in Tswana; and Haya, or 'to compose a song' in Ndebele, sons of the eldest son of the first resident pianist at Ntylo's. They shared Number Two at Lorelei with a friend and fellow musician, Phala, or 'key note' in Venda, a slightly older pianist/composer, known as Angel, on account of being blind in one eye, gone to the angels. These 'chilled' younger people might have passed for Lorelei's youth culture, but they had nothing much to rebel against. Going with the flow was more their style. Gubu was a beat/hip-hop poet who composed as he expressed and Haya played the drums. Phala was pitch-perfect and played the piano like a leopard on speed with huge, soft furry paws, not unlike Errol Garner, the American legend.

After the smoke took them they could no longer deny a fervent desire to re-open Ntylo's as Angel Eye's, in honor of the eye. Junior approached Uriah, who was appalled, ever mindful of where club-owning led Tubby and Smoky, even if merrily so. Yet, if this is what it took to get Junior to take on responsibility, well, maybe. He was aware that The Twins and Phala were brilliant at what they did (even though he sometimes didn't know exactly what it was), and were professionals who worked all the time. He'd seen and heard them and felt they were astoundingly original, whether shredding a standard or interpreting an own composition, or mixing it up, which they frequently did. Mmmmmm, he thought. It wouldn't be a bad idea to record them live before they became famous and too busy, or too branded. Perhaps, he felt, perhaps he might consider it.

To Junior he proposed: "You may live here at Number One at the usual rental if you go through the offices and safe upstairs with care and order things. If you find any correspondence between Tubby and the Japanese, please bring it to me."

Junior got right to it and found water and fireproof trunks in the safe, each dated and filled with sound, film and video recordings on master vinyl, reels, cassette, Betamax, VHS, micro-sound and video cassettes, 'stiffies' and a few discs, a record of technology in the time of Tubby and Smoky. There were indeed many folders of correspondence between Tubby and the Japanese. Uriah went through Junior's rather good summaries of this correspondence and learnt that the deal making was in an advanced stage. Their offers were staggering. Uriah asked Junior whether Tubby had mentioned anything about this.

"Now that you ask," Junior replied vaguely: "He was full of it. In fact his last words on the subject were: 'Dickens the Japanese, make those Nips pay and sweat while they do...hold back what they really want to the last, sell 'em all the crap first.' What do you think he was on about?" inquired Junior: "Why did he call the Japanese Nips?"

Uriah quite enjoyed these rare moments that required short, sharp indelible parenting; moments of a line having to be chiseled. It was one of the few real pleasures of fatherhood; he felt like a sculptor serving humanity rather than a service provider.

He cleared his throat and said: "Junior, look at me."

The son looked at the father and blinked slowly. He had his mother's lavish lashes. 'Here it comes,' thought the son: 'I had to ask. Let's see what the salt and peppery one throws at it.'

"Tell me," the father began: "How would you like to be called a 'coolie', 'kaffir', 'coconut', 'slut', 'idiot' or 'squatter', all could apply."

Junior reacted like he'd stubbed a toe.

"Haai Papa!" he demurred with mock horror: "Wash that nigga mouth out with soap!"

Uriah clutched his side dramatically and exclaimed: "Ouch!"

"Consider my racism nipped in the bud Papa, thanks to you. But know this: I am not a coconut!" he quipped.

Junior seemed to Uriah to be switching on. He even sounded clever. It appeared that he had a sense of humor, and a grip on irony. Could there be intelligence within? Uriah agreed that Ntylo's might be re-opened on a smaller scale in the vacant shop at street level as Angel - Eye's, against his better judgment, BUT, he was putting nothing into it, and after three months of setting up he'd want rent and a piece of the door and bar. He advised Junior that once they were up and running he'd be open to helping them install recording facilities and soundproofing, for a cut of any recordings and, of course, a share of the archive.

*

Uriah's understanding of Tubby's estate was that the Rajbansi - Sigcawu's of 2018 were broke and barely servicing the interest on inherited debt from the revenues from Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Ass. Tubby and Smoky had lived way above the means, and were too generous for too many years without any reckoning. He had to replenish their ointment pot. Lorelei Terrace had become a liability. The tenants paid rent whimsically, yet Lorelei was home to people he cared about deeply, and the office. He applied his mind.

Meanwhile, propelled by independent initiative, Junior had made contact with an American recording monolith, sending them a tempting and impressive sample disc of what might be expected from what he'd found in the safe, which, he informed them, might be on the market. The Americans came in with a respectable first offer that Junior dismissed immediately as an outrageous affront to the life's work of his dear grandparents, South African musicians in particular, and South African culture and its people, more generally. This put the Americans on the back foot. All of this, he kept to himself for the time being.

"You arrange a meeting with the Japanese," said Uriah to Junior with the fingers crossed: "Who knows, something may come of it."

During this uncertain time a team of specialists worked, as always, to maintain the old mining tunnels under Braamfontein and were perplexed to find a cache of old unused explosives. The specialists engaged consultants, who summoned experts. Uriah was dismayed when they informed him that there were explosives right under Lorelei. They were quite certain that they'd remove them without too much fuss, but Uriah had to ask himself: was he appropriately insured were things to go boom-boom? He let it be known to certain of the dealers in Joburg urban property that Lorelei Terrace might soon be on the market.

Chapter 3

To The Death

"Travel," she'd say to her children and then grandchildren and great-grandchildren: "Travel, broaden your mind, understand who other people are and how they live. It helps you to understand yourself in more interesting ways."

She'd worked for South African Airlines since its inception in 1960 until retiring and had in the company of her dearly beloved husband, deceased, travelled widely in her lifetime and travelled still. Her family was everything to her. The clan rendezvous at her home on a Sunday was sacred and had through time assumed a particular form. After lunch she'd engage the grandchildren and great-grandchildren while the adults hovered and interjected. She could, in her cups, be induced to relate a particular story. The story was always the same. It was how she told it, in 'suiwer' or 'pure' Afrikaans, that her family found riveting. Her voice changed and sounded young and lilting. Her features relaxed into an expression of innocent girlishness. It was quite amazing.

"Not too long ago," she'd begin: "There was a young man with a talent. He was unafraid of his fellow human being. His name was Fikile Mankazana and I met him once. He was an inspiration..."

It was just before six. Clouds streaked and curdled the late afternoon's bluster into a gray early evening, a universally low time of nowhere in the day that encourages drinks and consolation, both absent in the unlit and deserted, cavernous departures hall at Jan Smuts International, Joburg in November 1965. At the entrance to the airport restaurant, above and overlooking departures, a fair young lady in a tight ground crew uniform stood mesmerized in front of a glossy rack of the latest magazines, many imported. Persephone Van Der Spuy, Boarding Controller in Training, was blessed with an inquiring mind. In the long intervals between departures she'd slip upstairs to the rack of endless possibilities. She reached for what was for her a new title, *Tom - Tom*, drawn in by the richly tonal portrait on the cover. He looked like a kind, clever young man, she thought; who was he, she wondered and reached for the magazine. With a lick of a thumb she turned the pages to an article about the cover image.

Downstairs in departures Fikile Mankazana felt invisible in the gloom of the departures lounge. He was being observed by an Indian-looking fellow who struck a dashing figure in a smart size forty-two, long 'Man-About-Town', Prussian blue, pure

new wool and mohair suit, who stood back to back with Persephone Van der Spuy engrossed in Tom-Tom. His suit dangled askew from his angular frame like he'd dressed in a hurry and forgotten to remove the hanger. He smiled at his view of Fick below, swaddled in a heavy traditional wool blanket, a generous beanie pulled low over the ears and brows. He contemplated The Life of Fick, his most dear friend and valued first client, whose story he knew well and had written up into a tribute that appeared as the cover story in the magazine Persephone was in the process of consuming.

Fick was the youngest born to the son of Lazarus and Josephine Mankazana, Henry, eldest of seven. The Mankazanas lived and farmed then with Josephine's people in rural Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, in a fertile and abundant valley in the sub-tropical southeast, near Mvutshini, Port Shepstone. The Mankazana's were resourceful and enterprising. Their success inspired admiration, but also envy and devious competition from extended kin and neighbors, who had outgrown their own lands. The borders within the district changed constantly due to death and inheritance, birth and marriage, in turn shifting political loyalties. From time to time there were misunderstandings and encroachments; contestation would be resolved peacefully, or more often lead to conflict and, sometimes, violence.

In 1912 Lazarus, Fick's grandfather, fell suspiciously to his death from a remote cliff whilst grazing his cattle, which were stolen, leaving Henry, Fick's father, in charge of precious little. In 1913 the Natives Land Act (Number 27) robbed all in the valley of much of their land, leaving them with smaller holdings not quite big enough to live off. Many of these sub-divisions failed, and were abandoned or sold on for a pittance. In 1917 the district's first railway station opened; Henry sold their land and took the family to Durban, where they settled. Henry found work as a kitchen *toto* at a hotel in the city center by day, and security guard at night. His mother took on domestic work and laundry. The six younger siblings were fed, clothed, schooled and kept strictly in line. In his mid thirties Henry married and fathered one child, Fikile, who sprung forth from the womb with large, soft hazel eyes that didn't miss a thing and words almost fully formed.

The hanger in the Indian-looking fellow's wool and mohair jacket trembled whilst he observed Fick from the balcony to the airport restaurant overlooking the departure lounge and he smiled weakly. He wrung the hands, dropped and shook the head low and sadly, took a clean handkerchief from a pocket and went to the bathroom. Furtively, Persephone Van Der Spuy looked at her watch and sat down with a black coffee and her nose closer in to Fick's riveting biography in *Tom - Tom.*

*

Fikile Mankazana left high school in Durban at sixteen and came to Joburg where he worked in a boilermaker's and lived with a cousin near the Western Native Townships. He was young, good-looking, intelligent, articulate and sociable. He learnt how to drive, and worked as a messenger for a newspaper for as long as it took to accumulate a deposit on a good second hand car. At twenty-one Fick became an independent owner taxi. By the end of his first year he'd paid off the car, and become popular: he understood the client's mood immediately, with a sense of where it wanted to go, and possessed excellent instinctual communication skills: when to speak, what to say and for how long, and, crucially, when not to speak. He quickly established a loyal base of regular inner city fares, which included the influential editor of the very newspaper he'd messengered for, Joe Lilly, originally from Ohio.

They developed an easy, ongoing conversation. Over around four months of initial acquaintance they shared their stories so far in fare-long episodes as they drove hither and thither. A lasting, mutually challenging friendship developed. Lilly made him an offer: drive for me personally, and I'll figure you in as a cub writer; we'll work in the car on our way to and from. Fick bought a good used typewriter. He learnt quickly, and could soon research and write features for a popular audience. He displayed a talent for writing vividly about only what he observed, with little point of view. It was refreshing for the reader. He had come to appeal to a broad cross-section of people, Black and White, conservative and radical, here and abroad. He formed public opinion. His many readers trusted that it was so because he'd written it, which placed him in the crosshairs of the Apartheid State, or Fourth Reich, who'd already sent out a recce to track him down and observe his movements. Seniority and status protected him for a while longer when he became editor of a popular Africanist magazine, Tom-Tom, and the very beat of it. Tom-Tom's owners discovered that there was money to be made selling Fikile's articles on to Africanist American newspapers, and Beatty Tomtom, his mischievous *nom de plume*, was read in Chicago, Atlanta and Pittsburg, where he developed a following.

Fick had become politically dangerous. He was reliably informed that the Reich would soon close in on him, and that a crack Gestapo assassination squad had been dispatched. Time to au go-go, he was reliably advised. It wasn't an easy decision. He dithered, decided, and was then smuggled into a friendly neighboring country, where he joined a cadre in militant exile for about six unforgettable, formative months, displaying in the first few weeks of basic revolutionary training an aptitude for the quick assembly

of Molotov Cocktails. He was however hopeless at aiming and threw like a girl. His comrades felt safer when he settled into a propaganda committee, where he wrote sonnets and researched and compiled interviews and testimonies for an article about the spirit of the South African Revolution, 'To The Death', which would explain armed struggle as the only remaining path to liberation in the words and experience of the mostly poor, young comrades he lived and conspired with in the bush. At this time he was married briefly to a wicked young woman from a local small town that supplied the camp with domestic necessities. Fick's spell in the trenches ended with a sub-contraction of his fate to inept bumblers by the Reich, he was reliably informed, and he slipped back into South Africa, the last place they'd look for him, to regroup and take advice.

*

After a few days in a seedy old Braamfontein hotel where he was briefed and de-briefed, he went into hiding on the third floor of Lorelei Terrace in Braamfontein, enchanted home and office of his agents, and dear friends, Tubby and Smoky Rajbansi - Sigcawu, then a Bohemian oasis of relaxed freedom. Unbeknown to Fick, his contacts, or the Reich, the bumblers had simply burnt a pauper's corpse and deceived themselves, and the Reich that it was Fick. At Lorelei, he began and developed a deep friendship with a pregnant tenant on the second floor. Up front she broached and closed the subject of her being with child: conception was not immaculate, in any sense; the soldier genes were pretty, bright and talented. She confessed to being curious and to quite looking forward to the challenges ahead. Fick thought it a refreshing positioning. Never again did they refer to the father, a Great Unspoken between them. They became close. If you ever do need a father for the kid, I'm your man, he volunteered earnestly, forgiving the nasal scoff that was her reply.

Her name was Nhlohloteloswa (or 'inspiration' in Tsonga) Mabasa. Briefly, she was Fick's lover. 'Twas awkward: unknown to her, he'd yet to recover from an earlier, flash-in-the-pan first marriage in the trenches of resistance. It ended notoriously before it began, when, deep into the night after their wedding reception, as he slept with a manly grin over the teeth, the new missus fled with most of his portable property, and a sonnet he'd written for and read out loud to her, at their wedding reception. This aside, he felt elevated since meeting Nhlohlotelo; she understood the creative temperament, accepting that he was and had to be a poet. She was not without narrative talents of her own, which she underplayed in order not to be misunderstood to be too ambitious, for a dame.

But, Nhlohlotelo didn't do 'in love' unless she was, which, this time, she was not: beguiled, yes; did she admire him? Yes. Did she find him sexy? Not more than once. Would she follow him to the ends of the earth? Not a Dickens. To him, she would forever after be a great love and his one and only muse; everything he desired and then some. For much of the time of Nhlohlotelo's pregnancy, a difficult one that kept her on the edge of bat-dropping crazy, she didn't go out much, and Fick was grounded. Together in this bubble they read, conversed, listened to music, navigated huge puzzles, played cards, wrote and collated sonnets. Fick refined his armed struggle article into a series of compelling stories published abroad to the blushing shame of the Reich.

Their Gestapo, which had by then improved with practice, figured out that Fick was alive somewhere inside the country. He was forewarned, and made plans. Through back channels the Reich agreed that if he went away on a one-way ticket within three days, never to return, they'd call off the hounds. Fick left Lorelei and moved into the same hotel he'd cooled off at on the way in, the Imperial. Nhlohlotelo was sanguine: if he had to go he had to go. Better liberty than death, surely; and, if he took it on cheerfully, well, a whole new life beckoned, she felt. He felt unsure whether this let him blithely off the hook, or the painful opposite. Whatever, his time at Lorelei Terrace was the happiest of his life, and he would yearn each moment that he was away.

*

The Editor, Joe Lilly, played taxi this once and drove Fick to the airport, arriving much too early for the one-way flight. Yes, back then in 1965 Black people could fly from here, especially one way out. Fick and Lilly spent a long while in the car, in the deserted windswept parking acreages of the airport, where they sipped at a whiskey flask, smoked cigars and strategized the way forward. Fick felt that he might be of more use to the liberation project from afar. Joe Lilly then left, pale and stony-faced, disbelieving that it had come to this. There goes, he felt, the best of us all. He thought he might leave too, perhaps to find work in New York. Fick sat glumly by himself in the unlit, empty departure lounge in his beanie and blanket, from within which he fished out a roll of toilet paper and curled quite a lot of it around one hand.

Light flickered in departures. Persephone looked at her watch and bought the magazine. She rushed down the stairs and screeched to a halt a distance in front of a figure in a blanket and beanie with one hand in what appeared to be a thick bandage. She threw up her hands in alarm. What was it all doing there? She took in the cheerless tableau before her. Fick clutched a suitcase, staring down over it with drooping shoulders

at a one-way ticket to London, New York, Atlanta, Chicago and Pittsburg in his hand. He was then twenty-three years old, and yes, he was black, slight and under medium height. Tears bubbled hotly over his cheeks and drip, drip dripped onto the ticket. He wiped the eyes with, and discharged conflicted thoughts into his wad of lavatory paper. The click-clack of authority on the move approached and stopped right in front of him.

"Goodness, didn't see you there, are you *sure* you're in the right place?" she inquired.

He looked up at her tiredly as if to say, you tell me, noting her name engraved into a shiny brass lapel pin: Persephone Van Der Spuy, with 'Boarding Controller in Training' in smaller font underneath. Her friends and family called her 'Poppie', which she loathed. She narrowed an eye at his ticket and moved it over the damp letter and sorrow-moistened eyes. She softened. He looked up at her. They both heard her stomach rumble. She was on a diet and feeling ratty. She smiled widely and adjusted her uniform.

"May I please see your ticket Sir," she asked sweetly.

The smells of toasted sandwiches coming from above were driving her nuts. She could've sworn that she'd seen him somewhere before, that face. Fick went up to the restaurant. At the entrance, he found current newspapers and recent magazines, including *Tom - Tom*. He settled down with his back to the restaurant, a coffee and leafed through *Tom - Tom*. A smart, red-eyed, Indian-looking man in a Mohair suit was suddenly behind him.

"I couldn't help hearing you think," he whispered, leaning down and forwards, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper: "*Where to from here?*"

"Tubby," replied Fick warmly to his South African agent: "I hope you brought my exit visa."

"Absolutely. It was tight." he replied, shifting into the opposite chair. He gave Fick a critical once over.

"You're not getting on the plane dressed like that, are you?" he asked.

"At least I've taken the hangar out of my blanket," Fick replied with a grin.

*

With a heart of lead Fick left South Africa that day not knowing if or when he would return. It is not possible to describe what he felt, although his sonnets, especially those he set to music, come prettily close. But, this tilting into the unknown of exile didn't alarm him as much as feeling that he didn't, in the moment, really care. What was home, he felt, if it wasn't the ground under his feet, and who ever knew where that was going to

be? The thought lifted his spirits; he knew that he would not have put it to himself it in quite that way were it not for the inspiration of his one and only muse, Nhlohlotelo, who he'd last seen looking the worse for wear at Lorelei Terrace, cradling a new born baby: Pindile Elizabeth.

He felt his lips part warmly in prelude to a smile when he thought of Pindile, new yet wrinkled, who'd looked him straight in the eye with a gaze of ancient wisdom. She's her mother's daughter, he felt, and I'll have their backs for the rest of time. Immediately mindful of what Nhlohlotelo's response might well have been, sure, he thought, I'll disappoint, but, imagine the surprise when I do, on occasion, get it together! Fick thought he heard Nhlohlotelo's distinctive laugh, as he often would in their time apart, but of course it wasn't so. His flight was called and he was about to take his place in the queue when he felt a firm hand propel him gently to the front.

"Follow me please Sir," whispered Persephone Van Der Spuy: "Loved the article about you in Tom Tom. Bought a copy."

Then, trilling loudly, she announced: "Please make way, thank you, famous writer coming though."

She escorted him to his seat on the plane. He looked out of place and time, like he'd been plucked from the Basuto hills and brought to the airport on a donkey. Persephone helped him settle in. In parting, he signed her copy of *Tom - Tom*: 'From Fick Mankazana to Persephone, to the future, XXX'.

Part 2

Chapter 4

Long and Dusty Road

'Long and Dusty Road' opens with a dusty boy, fresh from the farm, who leaps off the back of a truck at a deserted urban intersection. It is still dark. He is bewildered and dusts himself off with elegant flutters of the fingers as the sun rises. He has arrived at his destination, Joburg. The movie then goes back in time to describe the boy's journey to the intersection as a quest for personal freedom and self-respect. It is the story of how Matthias Zondi comes to Joburg and he has over his lifetime paced the telling of it at one installment each year to his first male child, Joseph. Each year, Mathias chisels an episode into Joseph's imagination: at nineteen, Matthias stows away from rural Durban to Joburg in 1915, the beginning of a 'Long and Dusty Road' into an uncertain future, in his own words. Joseph tells the story to his son, Thelonius Matthias Leroy Zondi (known as Leroy) as a bedtime story but Leroy is a curious boy and kept awake rather than put to sleep by the story.

He was named Thelonius Matthias Leroy by his parents Monica and Joseph after the composer of the most recorded jazz standard ever, 'Around Midnight', Thelonius Monk (words by Bernie Hanighan). He was conceived one night before the wedding. All three couldn't wait any longer. The Zondi's, then in their twenties, were Kofifi crazed with stories about Sophiatown in the nineteen-fifties passed down to them from their parents, who had social and family dealings there. Joseph visited Sophiatown with his father, Matthias as a boy.

Leroy had talent. His character and values were influenced significantly by Matthias's story. He left school at nineteen, joined a good film school and involved himself in the Joburg film industry. Always at the ready to help out, he made many friends. He collected and repaired lights, cameras, editing and sound equipment that were thrown out as more vivacious technologies replaced them, which he hired out cheaply to aspirant film makers from his cluttered bedroom in the family home. His enterprise grew to include the garage, which became a clubhouse hub of filmic activity. At twenty-one he finished film school with a script inspired by a nineteen - fifties Joburg gangster and took a day job at a supermarket in Newtown. Here he worked in their home entertainment department where he prospered and learnt much about what people were viewing, and why. The steady income enabled him to move into a tiny bachelor in Newtown. At

twenty-three he completed his very first original film on a minimal budget with the goodwill of friends and colleagues.

Leroy's narrative style was then influenced by Fikile, or Fick, Mankazana, probably deceased, a forgotten nineteen sixties into seventies African sorcerer of the word who had become Leroy's writing hero of all time. For inspiration Leroy often turned to magazine articles about and interviews with Mankazana in which he confesses readily and with self-defeated humility that women are his weakness; Fick goes on record to regret the loss of his first and only love and muse, in Africa, long ago; he evades a question about an affair with Sophia Loren. Leroy was captivated by and wished they could have met, that he might have *been* him, this Fikile Mankazana. A florid American 1969 review of Fick's first big screenplay hit there describes him as: '...an intuitive alchemist of beguiling and enigmatic poetry...a perceptive magician of seductive prose, finely turned phrasing, thoroughly believable characters and snappy dialogue...Mankazana writes about a culturally diverse future from a place many predict will be the one of very few growth markets worth talking about, Africa. Perhaps we should pay attention.'

*

It was 2014, early evening, high summer and Venice was aflutter like a tubercular courtesan about to receive. A huge blood-red sun lowered itself against the salmon-flecked turquoise of a Turner sky. Leroy Zondi, African prodigy of contemporary film, swayed on a nippy *vaporetto*, or water taxi frothing through The Grand Canal, in which shimmered Venice's blinding illusion of itself. He held on tightly and though giddy enjoyed the refreshing spray against his cheek, even though the rest of him was getting soaked. He'd read as much as he could on the long flight from Joburg via Abu Dhabi about the history of Venice, and the film festival there, and felt over-awed. He staggered off the water taxi and felt nauseous. He waved both hands at two young Venetians, attendants from the film festival with his name writ large on a board. They'd been waiting for him and took him to the venue at speed. There, he composed himself in the bathroom.

The opera house, La Fenice was hosting the 2014 Venice Film Festival since the usual venue was then under restoration. There was much electricity, on account of the chandeliers and the crystalline presenter of the main award: Soxy Thornton, a great South African born, international Hollywood actress who'd dropped from sight mysteriously twelve years ago with a Spanish bullfighter. She'd recently re-surfaced at the

age of sixty-nine, and was definitely working again, having created a cash-cow franchise around a shape shifting 'granny-avenger', Lucy Lavender. She looked fabulous.

In the wings Soxy turned to Vera Gomez, her thirty-two-year-old Mexican personal assistant, as always at The Elbow Divine and within earshot: "Righto, I'm ready. Where am I exactly?"

"La Fenice, Venice, awards, you appear to read out the name on the card in the envelope while you hear the name through your earpiece; then a late dinner with the South African contender for most promising new whatever, sleep, brekkie, back home, did I miss anything?" was Gomez's brisk reply.

Festival awards transitioned the winner into the mainstream. Soxy took a personal, and a producer's interest. She'd seen all the contending films and felt that the South African entry was quite brilliant, but she didn't think it would win. Soxy straightened herself, threw back the shoulders, and glided elegantly from wing to center-upstage. After a protracted ovation, she introduced the contenders from the teleprompter, paused dramatically and opened the all-important envelope: "And the winner is … omigosh! Thelonius Matthias L*eroy* Zondi for 'Long and Dusty Road'!"

Leroy Zondi, damp and lagged, had just about settled into his seat and was relieved to be sitting down in the dark. At the mention of his name so loudly he looked up sharply, and squinted.

"And the winner *is*, Thelonius Matthias L*eroy* Zondi for 'Long and Dusty Road'!" repeated Soxy with an edge to the tone. The audience held their breath.

Leroy stood up unsteadily into the glare of a spotlight. The audience exhaled. Nervously, he dusted at his cuffs with delicate twirls of the hands and finger-flicks. He made his way to the stage in amazement. Like many others there, vaingloriously, he wasn't wearing his spectacles. He was about to mount the few steps to the stage when one foot brushed lightly against the base of a tall, slim, unstable marble pedestal upon which stood an operatic, top-heavy arrangement of camellias in a heavy Rococo urn with a tiny base. Leroy stumbled, and instinctively reached out to the pedestal for support. The vase wobbled and rained camellias upon him as it fell to the ground. The audience fell silent. Soxy froze.

Leroy emerged from under the camellias to take a bow gracefully with a shrug of the shoulders and expression that said, "Could've happened to anyone, why oh why does it always happen to me?"

This brought the house down. He stepped onto the stage with determination, bowing this way and that. Soxy giggled and clapped. "We'll certainly remember *you*, L*eroy*," she quipped. He could never quite remember everything that followed, no matter how hard he tried.

Thornton and Gomez were but two of many producers from across the world on the lookout for the new and fresh bowled over by the 'mature and deeply human poignancy', to quote the award intro, of Leroy's expression. It didn't hurt that he was young, gifted and blasé. All were seduced by his memorable stumble to recognition. Pandemonium reigned around him at the winners' press conference and reception afterwards. He was too hot to trot and enjoying it immensely. After about two hours the trot flagged to a lame walk. He felt and started to look ragged.

"A bit too much isn't it Leroy, dahling bokkie," Soxy empathized: "There'll be so many more of these evenings in your life."

"He's wilting. Let's get out of here," she whispered loudly to Gomez.

Soxy, Gomez and Leroy went out into a warm Venice evening of infinite possibility, not that they got far. They headed for a smart restaurant right opposite the opera house, famed for its truffle pasta, where they were expected and taken up to a private balcony with a view of the Grand Canal. Candles flickered on a table set for a late dinner for three. Gomez was alert but silent. Boyo, could Soxy chat, although she was too a very good listener once you got her attention. She was particularly curious about 'Long and Dusty Road'.

Over the *dolce* Thornton offered to float his new work amongst people she knew, who might have an interest in producing. She was clear that she could promise nothing. She'd certainly open every door she could, but he'd have to walk through them himself, such was life and showbiz. Then they dashed in and out of an endless series of parties and after parties. As the sun came up Soxy instructed Leroy, in parting: "As you know these things take time. Keep in close contact with Gomez."

For Leroy, the entire experience, except the layover in Abu Dhabi, was an all time starry zenith, and the only way up, was face-first into a sticky nadir. He got back home to Newtown, Joburg, South Africa, where he lived at the time and tilted into a depression. Time went by. He and Gomez kept in contact but Leroy had nothing new to show her quite yet even though his imagination was percolating fresh possibilities. All it would take was a jolt of inspiration to get him going, but there was little of that to be had at the time. Leroy was in a rut.

Over the three years since it's making and award it had taken a while for the money to flow, such was the long and dusty turn-around time of the movie business. There was, recently, news of a trickle, with which he could perhaps afford to move from Newtown. He had already started looking at possibilities, but not one had yet spoken to him.

*

For now, and for not much longer, he lived close to work in Newtown. The supermarket that employed him, Buy-Well, was in a newly built shopping center in Newtown, a hop and skip over the Nelson Mandela Bridge from Braamfontein. Absolutely everybody was talking about it. Buy-Well's post-modern super duper very latest Pan-African flagship store was, truly, a marvel: brilliantly lit aisle after aisle of everything you might need or desire from a supermarket anywhere in the world, and booths for specialized consumer and financial services, like paying the electricity, renewing a dog license, or booking a flight. The alert staff glowed with wellbeing and sharp grooming from meticulously coiffed top to shiny-shod toe: quite the supermarket Dorothy might well have found on a gentle curve further up the Yellow Brick Road, where the black people, lepers, albinos, imps, Armenians, gays and lesbians lived in Disney Extension.

Leroy transformed himself in the senior staff bathroom into the indefatigable Lancelot of Home Entertainment. His jacket, once fragrant with the perfumery of the Venice Film Festival, smelled now only of the bars it had visited since, and he gave it a good shake, as if giving himself a good airing, before putting it on. He languished a critical though forgiving eye over the look and import of himself in a mirror. Quoting Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly in his all-time favorite movie, 'Breakfast at Tiffany's': 'How do I look?' he asked the mirror, and cantered back to the turret, a cubicle that was his, and his alone, where he paused with his hands on his hips to savor his honors for Best Salesman, Home Entertainment, his Venice award, copies of interviews with and features about him, and other carefully arranged images and texts on the wall opposite his desk, which included Soxy Thornton and a bullfighter, and a fond doodle of Gomez on a small, square, passionately scarlet 'post-it'. He sniffed the air, wrinkled the nose, took off the jacket, smelt it closely, then shook it out with vigor; a crispy camellia fell out of its top pocket, and fell zigzag to the floor; he retrieved it and it disintegrated when he tried to pin it on Gomez.

Cheek to cheek with Gomez on the turret wall was a full-page newspaper ad for a newly rolled-out special offer: with the purchase of a very good Korean film recorder

(with excellent sound, and a guarantee, cash or terms) you got three lessons in how to make your own movie, Leroy's 'bringing creative expression to the people' pitch that he'd sold to the Koreans and Buy-Well. He was under no illusions. The film classes were experimental, a brief moment of illumination that came with the purchase of a low-end camera, like a plastic whatnot at the bottom of the cornflake box of life. The class would be keen to point and shoot, then have fun editing, and he would have to encourage that. It was, however, about selling cheap cameras. He was having difficulty finding a central, appropriate venue for these classes, and festival of the finished short movies. While he'd seen many viable possibilities for the classes, no venue could as yet accommodate both classes and festival. Dora Khumalo, his second in command at Buy-Well, came in with a recommendation for the Alexander Theatre in Stieman's Street, Braamfontein.

Chapter 5

The Lure of Lorelei Terrace

Spread over more than four square kilometers Braamfontein is today a young, trendy, African urban enclave with no children or domestic pets. The Nelson Mandela Bridge affords safe passage across a train-yard of carriages, sheds and such, from Braamfontein into Newtown, home to the vaults of The South African Reserve Bank. Braamfontein is home to many students, The University of the Witwatersrand (and it's unique collection and museum of African art), various private colleges, and municipal and corporate offices. At street level are rats, pushers, tarts, pimps, a vigorous criminal element and many bars with cheap beer, hearty meals, sports cable and excellent live music, and beneath, a warren of old mining tunnels. Leroy shivered at Dora's mention of Braamfontein. He'd once had an albatross of a student loan from his bank there, Braamfontein Savings and Loan, and hadn't been back for quite a while since they foreclosed and he had to repay. Braamfontein had a sordid reputation as a vulgar place. Newtown, Sandton, New York, Portofino, Hollywood and Maboneng were more to Leroy's taste.

"Nobody in their right mind goes there," he said to Dora, but Buy-Well and the Koreans were pressing him for a venue.

Leroy received excellent news from his bank in Braamfontein: they had closed his account, such was their perplexity at an anomalous deposit, unusually large for that account, mighty dollars to puny ZA *ronḍs*, could he please come in, at his earliest convenience. It was a payment from his first sale of Long and Dusty that he'd been waiting for. He grit the teeth and crossed the Nelson Mandela Bridge, in accusatory disrepair, passing a matching pair of pubescent urban Goths with safety pins in the bottom lips; a lone Shembe levitator, or was it a Masai on one slender leg, hard to be sure, warming up here, a wedding group posing there, and a very interesting looking young woman playing the violin. She dipped toward him gallantly, flashing a brilliant smile as he passed by slowly, much taken in. He didn't know the tune, 'The Lorelei', but tarried and enjoyed it nonetheless. When she concluded with a Grappelli flourish, he put money into the open violin case.

*

When Leroy got there, Braamfontein was a revelation: it seemed to him that she had found a funky urban groove. He wandered about and explored with an award-winning filmic eye, discovering a rooftop cinema, the Alpine Bakery, and many bars, cafes and restaurants; it appeared to him to be a cheerful urban African hamlet with expressive, stylish bright young things decorating the sidewalks, making articulate conversation. Along the main road and immediate environs were conveniences like the supermarket, bottle stores, 'Clicks', branded clothing concept stores and so on. I could live here, he thought as he observed young people in bubbles of urban narcissism, posing here and there, Tweeting, Facebooking and Instagramming from planet selfie.

He re-established good relations with his bank, and withdrew quite a bit in cash, because he could. He was verily an award-winning, young African filmmaker with excellent critical reviews; he was real. Leroy arrived at the Alexander Theatre to find it locked. He admired the building and read a modest plaque that acknowledged the generous contribution of one Cora Hazel Weitzman to the availability of the theatre as a community space. He followed up on an all enquiries contact taped to the inside of the heavy glass doors, one Nhlohlotelo, with no surname. With a most desultory manner she referred him to a box office number, which didn't work. He called her again, and she tut-tutted about what a nuisance it all was 'when the albino left the box', which he took to be an aphorism, like Elvis leaving the building. She called the security guard, who let Leroy into the theatre with a dramatic flourish: "Hark, who goes there, friend or foe, please do let me know, forsooth."

Leroy didn't know quite what to make of it, and replied haltingly: "Friend? Forsooth? Leroy, here to..."

"Yes," said the guard in a different register: "I know, come and be quick, I have to learn my lines. Let yourself out and don't steal anything."

The theatre was perfect for classes and festival. Leroy called Nhlohlotelo to book. She confirmed his booking like she was doing him a huge favor, and furnished banking details for online payment. Leroy hoped he'd never have to meet or deal with her ever again.

He whistled 'The Lorelei' to him-self contentedly whilst making his way out of Braamfontein, and crossed at the intersection of Juta and De Beer to the pavement outside the corner entrance to a flaky old Art Deco block of apartments, more Miami than Braamfontein, with a huge palm tree sticking out the top of it, Lorelei Terrace, known originally as Khan's Corner, built by one Rabia Khan in 1939. The building of

Lorelei Terrace had been an accursed nightmare, more so for Rabia than anybody else. From the outset, the site was bedeviled by calamity. Falling tools and collapsing scaffolding were the least of it. Rabia micromanaged and transacted mainly in cash; she bullied and short-changed the builders, whose lives dipped in quality, and became miserable due to their oppressive conditions of work. They feared Rabia's rare good moods, for she then flirted outrageously, which terrified and depressed them.

They particularly resented Rabia's halting work to have them move in one or another over-sized piece of furniture before the doors and window-frames were put in, like the huge, long sofa. It had travelled over land and sea, hill and vale, by road, ship and rail from India to Rabia's mother in Durban, a wedding gift from her grandmother, who came from a family of carpenters and upholsterers. It arrived in a crate with a fine inlaid enamel gramophone in the shape of a peacock, and a collection of Caruso recordings on thick long playing records, all padded with fine linen, and embroidered textiles. At Lorelei a system of pulleys had to be installed to hoist the sofa up to the first floor corner apartment: it dangled with equivocation, twisting precariously as it was pulled up and through a gaping hole in the wall to Number Three, yet to be fitted with the heavy teak double doors that would open out onto the balcony.

"To the left," Rabia instructed: "A bit to the right, up now, be careful you morons!" she admonished: "It's swinging too much! Be careful! It belonged to my mother! To the right, *your* left, you imbecile peasant bastards! There, see, it's already torn!"

It was precisely this kind of expression and turn of phrase that didn't endear people to Rabia generally.

*

On the corner of Juta and De Beer, opposite Braamfontein Savings and Loan, outside the entrance to Lorelei Terrace, Leroy thought he heard a loud splat and crack right in front of him; he stopped in his tracks; it felt like he'd hit a wall with the forehead. He looked down, saw nothing of any note, then looked up and was immediately rained upon by clothes and underwear, which included French maid outfits, schoolgirl clobber, riding crops and such. Under his feet, unnoticed, a large red spotlight appeared to form and disappear. A livid gum-chewing youngish blonde, acquaintance of Matilda of the thrift shop, leaned over the second floor balcony. All Leroy saw from below were tits and hair. He dodged shaving kit and men's cosmetics, leaping here, shimmying there, nearly bumping into a male figure in a sailor's hat, askance, a large Disney cartoon Band-Aid on

his neck, who dashed out of the building furtively, stopped suddenly and looked up; Leroy moved well to one side; words were then loudly and coarsely exchanged between the male figure and the balcony; sharp, salty words in bitter torrents, followed by a battery of eggs from above, which saw the male figure ooze off like cheese from inside an omelet sliding gently toward a plate from a Teflon spatula, held at quite an angle. Leroy double-stepped quickly out of the way of a final incoming egg, and looked up.

"Oi!" he yelled.

Omigod and bugger! replied the balcony: *I'm so sorry down there, so very sorry. Men. I shoulda known...what's a sailor past his prime called Vinny doing here in Joburg anyways? What a creep! Gotta say, he made a damn fine French maid of a certain age, still had the legs for it. Anyways, I gotta leave this place, too many bad memories. And I've only been here for a month. It needs new ones, maybe happier ones? Anyways, sorry about the egg, do you know anybody who wants the lease on this flat. It's really cheap, and a lovely block. No parking though. It leans to the left a bit, so you hafta prop things up, but, hey, it's a good place to put books.*

To the sound of a laugh like marbles gurgling through the external plumbing coming from above, Leroy thought he might have seen a red circle below his feet, what the ffff, looked down, saw nothing there, not even egg splatter, how odd; he looked up again, blinked, dusted his cuffs, and heard himself say, in a firm and gallant lower register that he didn't recognize as his own:

"Look no further, I'll take it Miss. Should I come up?"

No need, she replied.

Leroy squinted up and into the sun, and could see nothing, blinded by the glare. *I'll throw down the key, gimme a day to move out, move in tomorrow and pay the rent to Number Five, Nhlohlotelo's her name. Easy peasy. Don't let her put you off; she's an angel really. I'd step lightly around Mona in Number Four, be nice to her mother, and don't be fooled, Nhlohlotelo and Mona are tight chums, never waltz with Matilda, she'll insist on leading, gotta go!*

The key twirled down in a milky way of silver-foil stars glinting this way and that in the sun. He caught it, bedazzled at its touch, and dusted a star off a sleeve absent-mindedly. Leroy ran his eye over the panel of buzzers, which read:

Ground Floor

Concierge	Blank
Number One	Blank
Number Two	The Twins/Phala

First Floor

Number Three Buffy

Number Four Zenani

Number Five Mabasa

Second Floor

Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Associates

Leroy noticed a single button with the initials F.M. upon it, by itself below the panel. He rang the buzzer to Number Five. 'Com'n up' lilted a young female voice, without enquiring who it was.

*

Leroy walked up three marble steps gingerly, opened the thick glass front door to the lobby of Lorelei Terrace, and went through, leaving the stench of Braamfontein behind as the door swung smoothly to a close behind him. He admired the deco lobby, which smelled of a smoky sort of mimosa. He breathed in and wrinkled the nose. The cool air touched his skin lightly, and the follicles on his forearms rose to attention. He felt creatively alive for the first time in a long while. He admired the elevator with its gleaming old brass knobs and levers, and the wrought lift cage, then got in and went up for what seemed like a long time, with little recollection of the ride afterwards. He got out of the lift at the second floor. In a glare reflected from gold-tinted glass of the windows of a nearby building, there she was, the violinist on the bridge, standing outside the open door to Number Five Lorelei Terrace. They greeted with disbelief. She was Hlawulani (or 'choose the right path' in Tsonga) Mabasa, surname of her mother, and her mother's mother. She preferred to be called 'Holly' and lived with her gran, Nhlohlotelo Mabasa in Apartment Five. Holly was in her early twenties with a mutinous weave partly dyed with magenta; bead and ribbon woven therein and about; a heart shaped face, and rose bud mouth aquiver with attitude, proudly upon the neck of a swan, which sloped into delicate, Watteau shoulders.

Leroy was transfixed. She welcomed him to Lorelei and was a font of detail about those who dwelled here, having lived there all her life. She couldn't imagine living anywhere else. She crammed a great deal of information into a moment. Her granny, Nhlohlotelo arrived in her role as grim-faced leasing agent for the owners, the family Rajbansi - Sigcawu. Holly went off to the shower, and Leroy transacted with

Nhlohlotelo, who, resplendent in freshly steamed dreadlocks piled high upon her head, discouraged his curiosity about the owners and other tenants. We keep to ourselves here at Lorelei, she said with surly finality, reminding him that Braamfontein had become dangerous, and that they no longer had a doorman or concierge in the lobby; best he be vigilante, she advised, before going off on a chatty tangent about how Masai warriors from Kenya made the best security guards, but were hard to find here in Joburg. I'll take cash, she concluded, there's a bank right opposite. Once he'd produced his I.D and promised to send on proof of salaried employment, he signed a detailed lease that went on for pages, paid the deposit in cash, almost exactly the amount he had with him.

He hurried back to Buy-Well, Africa's Bread Basket, Newtown flagship branch, across the Mandela bridge and not too far away, wondering if and hoping that Nhlohlotelo was not the one and same Nhlohlotelo he'd hoped never to meet. How odd. At Buy-Well he asked his deputy, Dora, to promptly send Nhlohlotelo his employment record.

*

Leroy felt that Dora was 'awesome and the best', one of his mercifully few catchphrases, all of which improved not with all too frequent usage. He had already, unbeknown to her, recently set the scene for her advancement by talking her up to his superiors, who were many and elusive. He'd made the Koreans and Buy-Well aware that moving the expensive, glittering, revolving display of video cams from the shop floor to the Alexander for the festival, and the point of sale, was all Dora's idea, and no, really, nothing would happen to the display and stock at the Alexander; it wouldn't need to be insured, really. Leroy was left with a feeling of munificent generosity that he quite liked. He felt also that Dora might owe him one. Leroy, who didn't drive, arranged with Dora, who did, a SUV the size of a tank (all his portable property would surely fit), to help him move into Lorelei on the subsequent Friday, after work, which duly rolled around. After the move he took Dora to a *bistrot* in the Braamfontein main road for a snack, not that she was in the mood to extend the encounter further into the evening, but her advancement at Buy-Well depended significantly on Leroy's recommendations in an upcoming, year-end performance report, from him to those above.

They caught up. Dora smiled, tilting her neck forwards into the future optimistically, as was her habit. Leroy and Dora had over three years or so developed a history of helping each other into the light, and then moving on and never referring to any of it again. She fell upon him with a hug of therapeutic length and asked him how he

really was. He brightened considerably, and was fulsome in his blow-by-blow response, from waking up that morning, as she knew he would.

They settled down over a huge meal. After coffee and pastries he said to her, after she'd filled him in about the morning's retail, under gossip and matters arising: "I have to tell you..."

"Oh do," beseeched Dora, while thinking to herself: 'Here it comes.'

"Please, go on," pressed Dora gently.

"Milk and sugar dear?" she inquired.

"Oh yes please Dora, milk and one, thank you Dora," he replied, and on he went, with many an 'I-I' and 'Me-Me' as Dora enjoyed the end of her meal, filtering his voice through her thoughts.

She heard him say, "It went like this..." and paid attention, swallowing a yawn with an audible gulp.

After the meal, they strolled back to Lorelei, arm in arm. Dora enjoyed the day to the far-off echo of Leroy's interminable narration: "Go on dear, you're telling it very nicely," she soothed.

A clipped yawn slipped out behind one hand. Leroy bent the knees, dropping into his dramatic cinema *voce*, gesticulating expressively, and continued. "It's hilarious!" he exclaimed in triumphant conclusion.

"I suppose you had to be there," was Dora's tepid response through yawns that were coming on thick and fast, unrepentantly.

"You should have had more coffee," advised Leroy, with a bit of a peck and a tone.

Leroy sulked on the way back to Lorelei, where they bumped into Holly suspended lethargically between one thing and another. She met Dora. They hit it off instantly, and moved the last of Leroy's boxes from Dora's tank to his new home, Apartment Three. Holly nipped out to get her violin, a gift from an old friend of Nhlohlotelo's, sent from America for her sixth birthday, while Dora settled into a long, heavy sofa that had been there since Lorelei was first built. A spring popped under her energetically, and she leapt from the sofa, thinking that she heard it say: *Let's face it Dora, you, me, the brick wall, we're all shallow; get some depth girl!*

"Jesus!" She yelled, leaping to her feet.

"What's the matter," enquired Leroy.

"Nothing, nothing at all," Dora replied, sitting down carefully on the edge of a chair.

Holly returned with her violin, which she tuned.

"Leroy," enquired Dora tentatively: "How would you tell if a person was really shallow?"

"Y'know," replied Leroy with a long blink, "That was said to me once, and really, me? Shallow? Pffft."

Holly 'got into it' and played a lengthily discursive version of 'The Lorelei', Leroy's moving in gift. Dora felt trapped. She hated the violin, but didn't see it coming.

"Tell me Holly," said Dora after her second: "Do. In your view, what would you say would be a shallow person?

"Well," interjected Leroy: "Somebody once..."

"Shut up Leroy," retorted Dora and Holly in unison: "Get dressed, we're going out!"

"Dress *up*, Leroy," Holly instructed.

Leroy donned a bright shirt, and shook out a jacket that would pass, once worn in Venice. Holly and Dora swanned in, resplendent in jet-black paged wigs, and sequined jigger sheaths, quite transformed, and they all tilted into the balmy Friday to get trolleyed, on the way meting out kindness and cash to a recycler in the process of bedding down in a doorway.

"Did you see his eyes?" exclaimed Dora to nobody in particular, Leroy and Holly being well ahead of her: "What color *is* that?"

They met up with Holly's current beau: a very smooth, not too annoyingly self-entitled son of some senior civil servant or such, with his own new car, good teeth, hair and skin, who went by the name Thulani Hunyi, a commerce student at The University of Johannesburg, or UJ, who appeared to be lit from within. He came to Braamfontein to box on a Tuesday, and for general fitness classes later on in the week, usually Friday, where he met Holly at her first and only class. As far as he was concerned she was fit enough to get to know better. The Hunye's were from Limpopo originally, and his surname, as yet unbeknown to Holly, meant 'wood' in Tsonga/Shangaan.

During warming up exercises they glanced at each other and averted the eyes quickly to avoid detection when looked at whilst glancing through a moving lattice of intersecting figures in heaving and nimble exertion. Holly moved swiftly from being not at all interested to vaguely so, proceeding at a gallop to 'very'. When he asked her out

after the exercises Holly felt like she would die, mainly because of the exercises, but was in like a shot and became aloof and standoffish, saying 'yes' in the end. She appreciated that he allowed her to play hard to get and jumped through all of her flaming hoops of first enquiry in a romantic moment elegantly. They stepped out for a drink and meal in the neighborhood, at a restaurant proposed by Hunye, whose dazzlingly posh car happened to be parking right there, in front of the restaurant. After a long and happy, if reserved evening of favorite music this, and best tweet ever that, Hunye was very happy to pay the bill, tipped the waiter generously and drove Holly around the corner to her home. After an easy hug of exactly the right length and intensity, fleeting and light, Holly was on the cusp of feeling that Hunye was perfect in every way, whereupon he kicked the wheel of his posh little car affectionately, and revved to a deafening pitch before screeching off, leaving acrid clouds of smoke behind. It was annoying, and not in a sexy way. Holly coughed as the fumes got up her nose and didn't respond to Hunye's subsequent attempts to re-connect. He persisted with much charm and good grace. She gave in.

Leroy eventually got back to Lorelei after what became a pub-crawl with Dora, Holly, Thulani and others, during which Holly realized that she'd fallen for Hunye, and that she relished every moment of the descent. While she and Hunye necked and petted lightly against his car, at Lorelei Terrace Leroy fell promptly into a drooling nap on the long corduroy sofa with a tuft of dark green velvet showing through where it had been torn during its precarious move into Lorelei, so many years ago. He tossed and turned, finding it difficult to settle his form's curves and angles into the sofa's lumpy topography. His body relaxed into old indentations left in the sofa by Rabia Khan's mother who was perfect in every way but one: a tending to self-doubt. She would recline on this same sofa, in pretty much the same position as Leroy slumbered now, with the back of her hand to her forehead doubting herself loudly to increasingly scratchy Caruso interpretations: was she a good enough mother? Wife? Daughter? She took to Buddhism and explored further the emptiness of worldly existence, which didn't help. In her thirties, these introspections took her to a place where she doubted that she was or should be alive at all, the end of her, on the sofa, with an expression of beatific certainty.

The same could not be said about Leroy Zondi, who slept there now, snoring from deep within with quivering lips, the River Spittle running sluggishly through the corduroy under the corner of his mouth.

*

Loud thunder woke Leroy and lightening cracked across the window to his new apartment casting distorted shadows over his disrobing to socks and boxers. He returned to the sofa with a blanket, and slept deeply for a short while. He got up in the middle of the night, prepared and consumed a healthy meal, and salad, then went back to sleep, on the sofa. He dreamt of many things in fast motion. Disjointed sounds and images from his unconscious flung them-selves at him in rapid disorder, and stuck to his mind like *pasta* on a ceiling: a woman second-guessing herself loudly to distorted sound of scratchy opera vocals; the recycler, Holly, Dora, and then, his parents.

"Ah, Monica," he heard his father boom in his sleep.

"I'll tell you how I met Monica…I was in my early-twenties and saw her feet first: she was taking a nap on the back seat of her taxi, a nice old Mercedes, very classy, with her feet sticking our through an open door on the pavement side. There they were, these huge size elevens dangling from slim, fragile-looking ankles. There was an element of suspense to it: would they drop off?

"Quite suddenly she woke up. You don't really want to deal with Monica when she's just woken up. She wanted to know what I thought I was doing staring at her feet? It wasn't a good start. Never before had I encountered such a fierce woman. It was love at first bark and bite, and a very thrilling feeling for me because it was tinged with fear, fear, fear," boomed the voice.

A vivid close up of Monica's teeth about to bite into what looked like a throbbing heart woke him bolt upright, to lingering echoes of 'fear, fear, fear, fear…' like a manic DJ spinning vinyl back and forth in his brain.

"Are you a good son?" his mother's voice enquired, "Are you really? Will you ever make another movie, or are you a one hit wonder?"

He leapt from the couch as if bitten, with corduroy lines indented into his cheek, and stumbled to the shower, where he stayed for quite a while to emerge refreshed and unlined. Giving the sofa a wide berth, he climbed into his bed, where he slept through his first morning at Lorelei Terrace.

A high African noon blazed over Braamfontein warming up the plumbing, mustard carpet, sneakers and upholstery in the apartment to the smell of a Vegas off-strip motel room. Windows would have to open themselves lest the panes do gag. Leroy jack-knifed a sweaty self from deep sleep directly into the slobbering fangs of a vicious hangover. He shivered to the bathroom to discover that there was no water. He got coffee together with the water left in the kettle with much dropping and spilling to find

that the milk was off. He was crushed and heard to whimper. Fatalistically, he donned a black velveteen dressing gown with fake leopard skin detail on the collar, cuffs and pockets over his underwear, climbed into his boots, and shuffled morosely into the bonny morn, in his lively imagination, to find and milk a cow.

Might as well, he thought, replace a dead battery at the general dealer below Lorelei, called 'General Dealer', on that particular day minded for and behalf of an extended Pakistani family by a polite young relative, Mumtaz, fresh out of high school and recently arrived in Joburg from Karachi to seek his fortune. He did not have much English yet. Best to take the battery along as an example, thought Leroy: how clever of me to think of that. Mumtaz perched on a high chair behind a huge old till with a wood and brass handle. It made a loud 'ching' when the cash drawer rolled shut. He looked up at Leroy from under his eyelashes. Holding up and waving the dead battery demonstratively, Leroy explained what he needed. Mumtaz responded torridly, took up a broom and shook it at him with menace. Leroy fled and bought milk elsewhere, unaware that Mumtaz had misinterpreted that he wanted to *exchange* or *return* a used battery, which would have been preposterous.

Cradling a milk carton protectively in the bend of an arm Leroy found an agitated, oddly dressed old woman muttering to herself in the lobby at Lorelei. When she got into the lift, Leroy went up the stairs. He wiggled the key into the lock to the door to his apartment. He turned the key, and nudged the door open with one knee. A clatter of wheels, trolley-trolley, over the stone floors to Lorelei's entrance two floors below cut into his head. Leaving the key on the floor behind the recently opened door, stoppered by the milk, he went over to the balustrade and peered down into the stairwell, glimpsing what appeared to him in first impression to be a noisy beggar in a gray coat and beanie, with a blanket over the shoulders, leaving the building behind a large brown trunk on wheels. Who *is* he, or she, wondered Leroy; was it the oddly dressed old lady? He felt uneasy that this person might be wandering about inside the building. He turned to see the door nudge the milk smoothly to the fore, closing itself with a 'click', that seemed to say, 'Welcome to Lorelei, do you have a spare in a pocket?'

With trepidation, he knocked at Nhlohlotelo's door at Number Five and quite forgot to ask her about the imposter so fiery was her response to being interrupted, and, of course, the key. Turning down a Jimi Hendrix LP that'd been playing rather loudly, she heaped scorn upon his carelessness with such heat that forever after he would be certain to keep a spare with him, at all times. At the end of their exchange, with

Nhlohlotelo certain that he'd 'got' it, she reprised her cautions about security. He asked her whether a street hobo ever entered the building, to which she replied, 'never', 'as long as you people, your guests, staff and service providers remember to lock the front door on the street. She explained that the old lady was a much-loved Lorelei resident of many years, Isobel Zenani, who was losing her mind; she lived at Number Four with her daughter, Mona.

Isobel Zenani was not always so, continued Nhohlotelo. Once she was the mistress of a philandering Khan (or was it the owner of the bakery, or both, who could tell; Zenani had a devious side to her, did she not, wondered Nhlohlotelo out loud), and a sizzling hot singer of torch songs. Her lover set her up in with a trio in a smart restaurant under Lorelei on Juta Street, and installed her in Number Four. The lover came to a sticky end, and the restaurant was set fire to in a failed attempt at insurance fraud. Zenani started work at a bakery nearby. Then she had Vinny, rotten to his core. He lurked around Lorelei and was always up to no good. Mona followed.

Nhlohlotelo then softened quite suddenly. "Oh the memories," she sighed, whipping a sandal wood needle from her locks, then shaking them out vigorously, much to Leroy's surprise. She commanded him to respect Isobel Zenani always, and gently steer her back to Number Four if he came across her wandering about.

"Did I mention her son Vinny? What a waste of a human being," she concluded.

Chapter 6

Breakfast at Lorelei's

Sunday morning in Braamfontein dawned with promise of new beginnings. After the Friday of his undoing, and the Saturday of his recovery, Leroy, much refreshed, jogged strongly across the Mandela Bridge to work dressed in bright purple and black spandex, his work clobber neatly pressed and folded in his backpack. One foot slapped resonantly before the other. He worked in a flexible half-day on Sunday's, a busy time in Home Entertainment. Leroy teetered, hands on hips, almost entirely obscured by staggered tiers of television screens on the plains of retail. He leaned lightly against a tower of television sets and leapt back when it wobbled precariously. He ran a critical eye over the shop floor, raising the self discreetly on tippy toe from time to time, in order to view beyond the screens. Re-assured that all was well, he cantered back to his turret with a dispenser coffee and a donut from the Alpine Bakery. No sooner had he settled over an in tray bristling with malevolent admin, when Dora sped into the cubicle as if on a two-wheeled scooter, for this was how she moved. Dora was originally from the Eastern Cape: a feisty, streetwise, ex-domestic worker in her late forties who had raised herself up over time to Deputy Manager. The effort was great: to get there, stay there and to move up from there.

Dora was driven: "Leroy, darling, the Korean special's going well. Sold one to a Muslim girlie before you arrived.

"There's another," she continued: "Name's Roger, young posh boy, can't make up his mind, I don't think he knows how. But he should buy one. Go on."

Lancelot cantered to the barricade of retail, where he found a pale and stringy nineteen-year-old princeling from the upper slopes equivocating over the special offer.

Leroy greeted with a gallant: "Good morning, Leroy Zondi at your service," and took the measure of the noble buyer, dressed in tight 'skinnies', an artfully torn tee and white canvass shoes, or Plimsolls.

"How are *you* today?" inquired Leroy.

The young man sobbed inconsolably in response with the head down for a moment, then recovered swiftly and replied to an astounded Leroy, "Pretty well thanks, and you?"

"Better than some," reflected Leroy sympathetically.

"Roger, " volunteered the troubled youth, holding out his hand for a shake and a how-do-you-do.

Leroy continued sensitively, "Should I tell you about the free course about how to make your own movie that comes with the special offer, or should I get you some water and a tissue?"

Wiping his nose on his sleeve, Roger replied through a snotty muffle that he'd like both: "They can't be scented tissues," Roger continued, "I'm allergic."

"Oh," replied Leroy with growing doubt as to whether the sale was going to be worth the effort.

How much more of this can I take? He wondered. Not much more, was the swift reply from deep within.

He came out of his reverie to the sound of Roger's: "...and I can't do sparkling water, or anything in plastic, it has to be still Evian in a glass bottle. Oh, for the record, I can't do egg whites in any shape or form either, which rules out Pavlova."

"I see," replied Leroy.

"Not a moment longer!" echoed the unconscious loudly: "Follow your passion!"

Leroy answered Roger's many questions wearily as he reminded himself that it was about sales. The kid was clearly not entirely on the level with himself, and this would be an interesting dynamic in the group. Leroy went in for the kill; Roger bought the camera and signed up for the class, in Braamfontein of all places. His parents, Wicus and Donay, would throw a fit.

The rather snooty Joburg suburbs persisted is misperceiving Braamfontein as a suburb of Hillbrow, a part of Joburg much more African than Continental. Roger was having such fun he almost felt normal. Marvelous! It was all so exciting that he would have to have a line and a joint when he got back home, even though he was clean. As far as he was concerned 'clean' meant no needles, which was fine by him. It wasn't to his taste. For once in a very long time Roger looked forward to going home and sharing his excitement with his family. Maybe it would take them out of and away from themselves for a moment. Maybe not. New purchase firmly under the arm, he settled into the back of a cab from the supermarket back home to Atholl in the Joburg suburbs. En route, he wondered whether all women were like his mother.

"Oh my god," he heard himself say loudly at this thought, "Oh fuck!"

This got a sideways look from the surly driver, who enquired, "Forgotten something?"

"May I ask you something?" ventured Roger tentatively.

The driver glared at him unsympathetically through the rear view.

"No," he replied with finality, turning up the volume on the radio to discourage further enquiry.

Roger felt hurt and rejected, and flattened out into the bog of his residual depression; for a moment, he didn't quite know where he was, or what he was doing, but, this could change in a tick. As his mood played peek-a-boo with itself, the late morning sun shone brightly upon indifference personified in the driver's seat. Catching a glimpse of a very dejected passenger, fatally, the driver felt guilty, and engaged.

"Why are you not at school," he asked Roger gruffly, to his regret, since Roger answered promptly and fully so, beginning with, "A good question. I'm in rehab..." and on he went.

By the time they got to Atholl the driver had lightened considerably: thank god, he was thinking, thank god I don't have his life. He overcharged Roger with no remorse, and bought his wife flowers.

Through all of his own *kak* (pronounced as in 'cuck-hold', a popular South African linguistic catch-all for life's complexities; a much expanded take on what in English would have read, 'Through all of his own considerable shit'), Roger had learnt so far that, well, complexities happened, and sometimes they happened to you. He'd been unable to find the words to tell his parents, Chardonnay, or Donay, and Wicus or Wick, Waterstone, Wick and Donay, Dutch/English, about the film class, mainly because it was in Braamfontein (or Hillbrow as it was misperceived). Nobody, but nobody they knew had ever been to Hillbrow or Braamfontein.

There was between Wick and Donay a long time culture of episodic binge drinking. Didn't happen often, but when it did, precious things between them were broken, and the pieces hard to find for quite a long while thereafter. These often-long phases of relative conformity, shame and regret, put great pressure upon them and inevitably led to regression. They were trapped in a most unfortunate cycle. Quite recently, considerable regression there was at a fortieth birthday party. Wicus and Donay crawled home thereafter in guilty silence. They woke up feeling deeply unnerved, realizing that they were quite out of control. Roger approached the kitchen where the parents were deeply into an atypically existential conversation which explored themes of self-respect and fidelity over hairs of the dog: stiff *regmaker* brandies, his with coke and

hers with ginger ale, in dainty china tea cups. Roger ducked out of sight before they saw or heard him, fetched his camera and filmed them on the QT.

He nearly dropped the camera at hearing his mother say: "Maybe we should join that self-improvement thing that Laurie and Vivienne go to, they've been keeping it together for a while now, since they joined. And they were out of control, do you remember, jeeez, way over. And they've both lost weight!"

"Mmmm," he heard his father reply, "Or we could get fit, cycle maybe, join a club, it'll be self-improving, same thing really, like giving your life to Jesus."

"We could try that," mused Donay thoughtfully.

She thought she heard something drop to the floor close by.

Who are these people? Where are my parents? Roger thought to himself in a paranoid cadenza, and ran to his room, bolting the door behind him noiselessly. He concluded that his family had been abducted and replaced. Moving forwards, he would have to be very, very careful. Best be sharp, straight, sober, polite and co-operative until he learnt more about these imposters, he felt. He'd have to get along with these people to find his real family, he thought, tilting into yet another parallel galaxy.

*

Leroy fell log-like into bed at around five-thirty pm, taking his Venice award for 'Long and Dusty' to bed with him, as he sometimes did. To sleep he went as soon as cheek touched pillow. All too soon he was woken rudely by thunder and lightning and flung off the covers. As Leroy got out of bed the award fell to the floor quietly and cracked in two, unnoticed. He closed a window and went to the bathroom. In his absence, a smooth gray, spotted backed yellow masked weaver chick, or *Ploceus cucullatus spilonotus,* lost and confused, dropped onto the sill lightly, and, most atypically, hopped into the dark apartment, where it tripped across the floor delicately, lifted a leg, then leapt upon and, most uncharacteristically, wriggled into a warm fold to the covers on Leroy's bed.

Upon his return, Leroy scooped it up, cradled the bird in his hands, and coo-ed, "Gomez," he crowed gently, "You have come, Gomez, you are here, everything will be alright."

After liberating the *cucullatus*, back to sleep he went, nearly so, when he was woken up by the theme tune to the movie *Casablanca*, 'As Time Goes By', his cell ringtone, playing from the pocket of trousers hanging over a chair on the opposite side of the apartment.

He slid to the phone on a *cucullatus* dropping, and answered crossly: "Do you know what time it is?"

It was Vera Gomez from America: "Perfectly aware, don't care, always sunny in California, Leroy. Do you trust me?"

The new script got your one foot through a huge door, informed Gomez: now you had to give them most of what they wanted in order for Sesame to swing open fully. She reminded him that while he was very good, so were a great many others, as good and better, implying perhaps that he should turn to the stage if he wanted to continue as prima donna. Leroy felt discouraged, and betrayed by Gomez and Thornton. He flounced into a tantrum, and decided to leave dreams of cinema behind him. Stability and predictability was best, he felt: it was time to embrace a safe career in retail. Not only would he draw closer to Human Resources, where Dora had a connection, he'd also crosscheck his value in the broader market through a flesh trader.

"The deal is off," he informed Gomez: "I'm going to finish 'Lorelei Terrace' as I planned, and will then be happy to submit it to you for consideration, if you'd like."

This did not go down well in Hollywood, where the assertion of creative independence was perceived as foolhardiness or stage fright. Smart move Leroy, thought Gomez in response.

"What the hell does he think he's doing!" yelled Soxy: "I've already spoken to people!"

In the brief though deafening silence between Joburg and L. A. that followed Leroy did come to accept that Gomez was right. Buttercup Zondi had to suck it all up and then deliver smartly, or 'twas a life in retail with endless Rogers for him. The choice seemed simple: a life of rewrites, or a life of Rogers. It was humbling. In further, more positive and often sensitive communications with Gomez, she came to understand that he felt vulnerable and anxious. She spoke to Soxy. They agreed that an inspiration for Leroy had to be found to move things forward.

Part 3

Chapter 7

Film Classes

Leroy focused on his first film class, scheduled for the approaching Saturday. Lorelei was very quiet. There were no surprises. Holly was in love with Thulani Hunye, and wasn't seen, or heard of. Leroy had a great deal to ask her when next their paths crossed. Cora Wietzman sent him a note introducing her-self. She congratulated him on his service to the community, and asked to join his first class, not any of the others, with her own new camera of German manufacture, with Swiss lenses, since her and Sonny were soon to retire and travel and she wanted to film it all. She was happy to pay a full fee for the one class.

Sonny and Cora Weitzman were a legendary and beloved old 'Dr. and Missus' Braamfontein couple who had once lived at Lorelei and were now in the process of moving the last bits and pieces out of Sonny's practice. Young Cora Naussenbaum was a wild, Bohemian, fiercely independent Joburg Lithuanian Jew, who's father came from *nuthing*, the mother a vague and distracted Armenian Joburg socialite with her own fortune mostly in oil wells in Baku. In her final year of study, Cora met Sonny Weitzman, a young Joburg Jewish medical student in his final year, and a communist of Trotskyist hue. Cora was always on the move, mostly upwards. She was then and is a radical Zionist in the Golda Meier idiom, polite but unyielding. Sonny and Cora courted and married once they'd both qualified, and moved to Hillbrow, where Sonny worked at a busy urban general practice as a newly qualified medic for around eighteen months. He then took over his father's Braamfontein practice under Lorelei on De Beer. Cora, passionate about education, and with some experience from a first post as a substitute teacher, started a job at Braamfontein Primary, then next to Lorelei Terrace. They moved into Number Two on the first floor at Lorelei and cared for Sonny's father until his death.

Cora's note to Leroy included a telephone number. He called her, mindful of the plaque at the Alexander: Please, he said, join us whenever you like, absolutely no charge. The class was shaping up nicely, and together with Cora and Roger, would include: Kobus Botha, a strapping twenty-three year old, originally from the Orange Free State, Prairie of the African south. Then there was Zarina Ismael, in her later twenties, an accountant for the good doctors at a large suburban Joburg practice. Having learnt the truth from Janis Ian at seventeen, at twenty-six she had no interest in men, or women,

loved her job, family and friends, travelling and being at home in Killarney with her immediate family, Mummy, or Anahita; Daddy or Zulfikar and, of course, her brother Tahir, married with a home and family of his own, Citronella Marais, who defies description, and Jamar, Holly's friend and owner of Plumage, the salon at street level below Lorelei Terrace.

Kobus Botha

Kobus had come to Joburg around three years ago, after the sudden death of his father. After four generations on the same Free State farm, the bank had evicted him, the widowed mother, an older sister, and a pair of paternal grandparents, under a procedural cloud. The grandparents moved into a small, comfortable old-age home in Clarence; the widow went off to an older sister's farm in Zambia, and the sister took her chances in Cape Town, where she started out as a waitress.

Kobus's purpose in life was to earn enough money to hire a lawyer to get the farm back. He understood that he would be taking on Goliath and needed a stealthy lawyer who could sling a fatal shot. At present it was not foremost in his mind. First, he would have to get himself together. At nineteen he'd taken his chances with a one-way third-class train ticket to Park Station in the middle of Joburg, then found his way with much difficulty to the Imperial Residential Hotel on the Braamfontein side of Harrison Street, into which he booked himself for a month, even though he had only the deposit, the last of his cash. After night two he heard from the barman that the hotel's cleaner had been caught thieving, and fired. Kobus begged for the job, pitifully, and was put on trial with brooms, mops and buckets. He moved into dingy windowless staff quarters at the back of the hotel. Under the hitherto undisturbed grime on the Imperial bar floor were large solid red flagstones that he cleaned and polished up to a warm gleam on day one of his probation. It transformed the space and inspired respect: no longer did the drunks put butts out in the floor or pass out thereupon with pee and vomit to follow: ashtrays were used and the bar flies made heroic efforts to wing the way to the lavatory in good time, however staggered the flight path. This amazed the shareholders, who were many and eccentric, and they kept him on as cleaner and a beacon of good energy, for they believed in such things. He turned his hand to the filthy old wood bar itself, covered with layers of chipped enamel paint, and restored it to the original old solid Burmese teak. The shareholders decided to keep him, and asked him if he'd like to learn how to cook.

Kobus was growing, learning, losing and finding himself in Joburg, and life itself. He'd not been happier or more confused. Whatever happened in the future, he felt that he did want a record of these years, and to show his family how he lived. He saved up a deposit, and went to Newtown to check out a special offer at Buy-Well, Africa's Breadbasket, that he'd seen in the weekend newspaper. He bought a camera, and would pay it off over 48 months. Leroy drew his attention to the course, explaining that the three classes were relaxed and experimental, during which time they'd finish 12-minute (a long time in these matters) movies. Kobus hesitated. Leroy reminded him that it came with the camera at no extra charge. Kobus was in like a shot, and signed on with a hand that quivered with excitement.

Soon after, Kobus's Grandmother drew her last breath and passed on in a comfortable white chair of painted wicker in the garden to the old-age home into which she'd booked herself and her since deceased husband upon leaving the farm. Her funeral was dismal: they were all there, an extended family and community together yet flung apart, in one place, yet all over the place. It didn't ring true. Kobus found it distressing: it reminded him only of what he'd lost or had taken from him. He had his new camera with him and had taken some footage, but didn't want to draw attention to himself. In her will, it would be revealed, she left the bulk of her considerable life insurance (that only she had known about hitherto), to Kobus with specific instructions to get the farm back, and, in a handwritten note, specific details as to go about it. Alas, Ouma's hand was most unsteady at the time of writing, and much of the spidery scrawl was undecipherable to Kobus upon his first reading of it.

Kobus left Parys soon after Ouma glided through the hatch, into the inferno. He got a lift back to Joburg from Tony, an unsmiling, deaf mute second cousin of more or less the same age who was much impressed with the camera. They stopped at a roadside café and looked at the letter together. At a glance it appeared legible, and beautifully so, but could not actually be read. The only phrase they could make out was 'stop at nothing'. What could she mean? Onwards they travelled, serenely, stopping once more about forty minutes outside Joburg at a garage plaza. Tony nonchalantly put plastic supermarket bags over each foot before venturing into the public lavatory. It made such sense to Kobus (who knew what germs lurked there underfoot?), that he did the same thing. Tony then urgently required water, ice cream, yoghurt and milk. That's a lot of dairy, all at once, thought Kobus as Tony chucked it all back. Thank fuck he didn't have to chew, thought Kobus. They returned to the car. Tony offered Kobus what appeared

to him to be a tiny scrap of blotting paper, with a persuasive smile. How different he looked when he smiled, thought Kobus, who duly slipped the LSD under his tongue, as Tony instructed, thinking that whatever it might be, what harm could it do, this ridiculous habit of chewing on bits of paper. Kobus wriggled a sleeping foot to the sound of a faint, synthetic rustle. They got back to the Imperial and Kobus invited Tony in to see his digs. Tony was a bit surprised at the lowliness of Tony's circumstances since not too long ago he was a proud heir, and was now living with people he'd formerly have employed. Thence for a drink at the bar, some cousin bonding, and a more thorough look at the letter. Kobus had to concentrate when communicating with Tony, and wasn't too distracted by the flagstones on the bar floor appearing to twist and curl as he boasted about his restoring it, nor the bar melting as if made of wax, as he went on about what it would look like when finished.

"Cuz," said Kobus, "I haven't been this zizzed in a long time," to which Tony smiled almost too widely: "You betcha," he mouthed.

When they re-examined the letter it appeared to make perfect sense to them for the briefest moment, the gist of it being that Ouma had left money to Kobus to get a lawyer to get the farm back, at all costs, and if Kobus even thought of spending the money on anything else she would haunt him and make his life a living hell, be good, all my love, Ouma. Tony and Kobus looked each other in the eye as the bar dripped around them: they would never think of diddling Ouma, would they? To Kobus's ears, the rustling from his feet sounded much louder than ever before each time he breathed.

Zarina Ishmael

Growing up, Zarina Ishmael and her older, married brother, Tahir, referred to home as the Imamate; the formal lounge became Baghdad, the lavatory Tripoli, and so on. There was some freedom even though there were many constrictions, and they'd grown up carefree and happy in their way, developing, of psychic necessity, a wicked sense of humor. They got it: it was all about respect for God, self and other, and each culture and religion had it's own path, each strewn with its own spiked hurdles and sulfuric geysers. You grew up breaking many rules you didn't know existed, and even as you atoned, broke even more unwittingly, it never ended. They were a small family of Muslim secular Shia Ismaelis of Nizari ilk, for whom the present Aga Khan was a point of discreet reference. The Nizari Ismaili originated with Hasan-i Sabbah after he took control of Alamut Castle in 1090 AD, around which he built a concentric network of

strategic strongholds throughout Persia (Iran) and Syria, in endless swathes of hostile territory.

On Sundays surviving grandparents, old aunts and uncles installed themselves in Bagdad on state visits and told everybody else where they came from and who they were, endlessly: they were not savage Bedouins from the Arab desert, but Persians from the north, were they not? They were civilized and had a culture, did they not? Zarina's being unmarried was then a topic of tortured speculation. In desperation her mother enlisted the expert support of a worldly, wise old aunt, Jamila, and Tahir with a view to getting Zarina to meet suitable men.

"She needs experience," opined her mother: "How can she know the horse if she hasn't been anywhere near the saddle?"

Zarina was content with her work, family, friends and interior world; more spiritually than physically inclined, and not at all curious about coupling, assuming that it would inevitably come to pass, and that she'd keep her eyes shut throughout. It was all too much and too close in, and she felt that she needed desperately to do something that took her out of herself. Pamphlets for a special offer on a movie camera, with classes, at a new Newtown supermarket, caught her attention on the desk of the video hire store in the Killarney Mall. Directly to Newtown she hastened, where Dora sold her camera and class membership.

God and the sixties were indeed great, thought Zarina Ismael while standing in front of The Alexander Theatre in Stieman's Street, Braamfontein, Joburg, architecturally a sixties Georgie gal, swinging in, or half-out of, mini-skirt and patent leather boots. It was very much to her taste. The sun dipped into a lethargic descent over the Nelson Mandela Bridge. Beside her in the warm late afternoon posed her older brother Tahir. Her parents, with whom she lived, were horrified at the entire prospect of film classes and Hillbrow, and had instructed Tahir to take her there and check it all out thoroughly.

Zarina, Zara, or Za Za, people did it, it didn't matter, had explained to them that since she was to be married off sooner rather than later, she wanted a record of these last years with them. And, she wanted to be honest with them: it would be nice to get out and enjoy a bit of freedom before the scimitar of marriage fell upon her neck. She had already bought a camera and got a good deal, with a course on how to use it.

"I am not comfortable about this one eyed monster, not at all," said her mother, waving a cautionary finger: "It will bring a fatwa upon this house, to capture the human

image in such a small thing, surely it must be unnatural, surely. Perhaps if the camera was bigger..."

Her father weighed in with a hearty chuckle, "It's alright Ma, it's alright, let's be flexible. When they were born we said we should be flexible. So, let's be flexible."

"You're quite right Pa, we have been flexible, with good results. Look at them. They have not turned out too badly. It is a modern world. I agree. Let's be flexible. OK, this is how it will go or no camera or classes. Where did you say it was?"

This provoked a new crisis, "Hillbrow!" exclaimed her mother: "Never, never will a daughter of mine go anywhere near there, never!"

"Braamfontein, Mummy Ma, Braamfontein," corrected Zarina tiredly.

In the end the deal was this: they were not saying yes, they were saying maybe, depending entirely upon Tahir's report back. Only then would they confirm. Tahir would take her there and collect her, ifff they said yes. She would have to introduce him to the class. First, he would have to check out where this place was and report back in great detail, the reason they were there, outside the Alexander, about to leave, having seen what they had come for, whereupon the light fell across a modest plaque set into the wall, which caught Zarina's eye.

The Weitzman's tooled past the theatre behind her in their buff Toyota. Within, Cora fiddled clumsily with her very fine movie camera, the manual open on her lap. She was quite looking forward to this film class.

Sonny encouraged her to persevere: "It's all about the menu with these things, " he said, trying not to sound like he was making a suggestion, or god forbid, venturing into instruction: "Stay with the page about the menu."

Cora threw the manual in the air in exasperation.

Citronella Marais

At thirty-nine annual rings to the hardy pith, a vulnerable place to be for a boy-band or courtesan, Citronella knew well that life could change like that: snap! She knew enough about it to be alert to any open door, any way out of, up and away from the current position. She'd run away before. Bel Canto was the name of the house of her birth and growing up: you walked through a sturdy gate set in a 'Vibracrete' or modular, precast concrete wall of intersecting treble-cleft motifs in low relief, and proceeded with caution along a wriggly path of crazy paving, polished to a manic gleam: on either side, stiffly curled, thick, waxy-skinned, yellow-flecked tongues of mother-in–law, erect in

terra cotta pots on chipped saucers and side plates, led to the *stoep,* or porch, of red *politoer*, or floor-polish. Wiping the shoes on a mat that bristled with hospitality, you'd step then onto a Persian-looking carpet in the lounge to drink from *faux* crystal goblets. A department store Tretchikoff print of *that* weeping orchid dripped sentiment over the fireplace. Under the lounge window, and in view, three garden gnomes fished for Dickens-all in a pond of spinach punch.

Many years had gone by, yet she could not forget the devious, 'touchey-gropey', 'beg your pardon as the hand brushed up and against a breast or bottom' new school librarian, Deon Haasbroek. She was then at the end of her final year of high school, where she was an excellent all-round student, destined to succeed. Life was good, normal and filled with healthy activities, friends, and the warmth of extended family life in a small town. Across this sunny tableau fell the shadow of Deon Haasbroek to fuck up their lives completely, and/or to mislead further what was already indelibly fucked. The adults and elders loved the new high school librarian, a breath of fresh air from the same nicotine lungs as theirs, and doted, seduced by his boyish good looks and ostensibly respectful manner; oh how he ridiculed and mocked them before their very eyes, at every turn. Soon after arriving there he had them around his finger. While he mesmerized the adults with attentive understanding with one hand, the other slipped right up the skirts and down the fronts of their adolescent and pubescent little ones, windfall to a sordid reaper. There was too little, if any awareness amongst the adults of how traumatic and constraining these unwelcome advances could be to burgeoning sexuality, and self-confidence.

He did one day over-power Citronella in the little-visited 'Non-Fiction' corner, but she got away. Not so lucky were two other village youths, a boy and girl of her fond and loyal acquaintance, and classmates, Tossie, or Tosca Van Breda and Riaan Schoeman, a delicate, cultured boy. How could she forget their trying to tell their parents that they were scared, and the parents' response that they were themselves, wicked horny youths, to blame for probably leading him on? And, even if it was true, could the dear man be blamed for not having any defense against such evil? Could they be trusted, these parents who would much sooner believe the worst of their own youth than second-guess the librarian? It was, Citronella realized, all about comfort, privilege and appearances for *these* people, about feeling 'special' at any cost; they were no longer *her* people. She didn't like them anymore, and grew to dislike them even more with each passing day. The three

youths conspired to realize that they had no future in the village, but would suffer the short space between then and finishing school.

They fled to Joburg immediately after their final school examinations, leaving the village sobered: What indeed would become of the future of the village without any young people left? Who would care for them, elderly of the future? Too late, Haasbroek was re-deployed to a mobile library in low-end suburban Joburg. Here he busied himself taking the measure of the possibilities for a return to his bad old ways, and gosh, what opportunities there were. To sum up what was a much more textured experience, much of it hell, in Joburg, Citronella, Tosca and Riaan had only one-another. Temporarily, and in desperation, they took to renting and whoring. It stuck. From this low place in their estimation of themselves, they felt, consequent to the violence done to them, that since they'd been made into sex *objets*, well, that would be what they would become. They rented a home in Bertrams and set it up as a knock-shop, with a bar, stage, pole and blue movies on a loop in the garage. Mondays were new talent days and Citronella auditioned anybody who wanted to have a go at the pole, lap dancing and anything else not too vulgar. She had an open mind, and didn't judge, how could she?

She'd heard about a new Buy-Well on her grapevine. Evidently, it was the cheapest place for booking local flights. Never one to waste money, she went there dressed in pants, twin-set, pearls and blonde wig, to book a return Fly Mango ticket to a regular John in another province. Once at the supermarket she was much distracted by an extravagant display island that turned round and round, under a tower of Korean movie cameras, tilted at various angles thereupon with fishing gut and piano wire so as to appear to be floating.

'On Special Offer' glittered a huge sign under spots: 'round and 'round it turned. Mesmerized, she forgot why she was there, and approached the salesman milling thereabouts.

He saw her coming: "Leroy Zondi at your service Ma'm, are you having a good day?"

"Lovely, thank you," she replied sweetly, "I'll take one, and where do I register for the course?"

Citronella careened now along a treacherous learning curve with her new Korean movie camera. She filmed the aspirants on new talent days, and pointed out the errors of their ways upon viewing afterwards. The new camera was absorbing and thrilling. This journey of creative expression she'd begun put her back in touch with an inner innocence

lost soon after her first trick, many years ago. Indeed, her very features were starting to soften and for the first time in a long while she appeared as she truly was.

Her manner had yet to adjust. "Next!" she yelled ferociously into the pitch darkness upon a Monday as various staff quietly went about their chores, as if in Braille.

She held the tripod firmly between her thighs. She felt very hot, and had the fans turned up. Though dressed only in flimsy panties and a loose top of light sequins, more typical clobber than self-deceiving twin-sets and pearls, she felt so, so hot. A blinding spot went up on the pole, and a hip-grinding rhythm started to work itself up through the speakers. Yet, nobody appeared. Citronella refined her shot on the pole.

"Next!" she yelled.

Nobody appeared. She wanted a moody, low sort of light, and fiddled with the camera to that result. She sipped at warm beer from the bottle and took a puff from a dubious cheroot in the full ashtray.

"Next, fuckin' hell, gents, who's next?" she yelled, at which point, and to her speechless amazement, the size and shape of a Papal Swiss Guard scuttled from the dressing rooms in a froth of bright yellow feathers on a boa, and flung herself at the pole, missing it completely.

Undeterred, she tried again with more explicit aim and even less success. Heavily, she made her way up and then fell off the pole into a heap below. Smiling brightly, she hurled herself at the pole once more, to similar effect, then again, repeatedly. Finally, she lost control mid-ascent, swiveling there precariously before being flung by momentum conspiring with gravity to the ground at Citronella's feet. The dancer got up, smiled at Citronella and bowed gallantly, then dashed back to the dressing room, or garage lav. She appeared to be pleased with herself. There was absolute silence as the house lights went up.

"Break!" yelled Citronella: "Sausages, rolls, nuts and fresh drinks! Get that huge biatch in here pronto. She's got a lot of something. Fuck knows what, but she has a lot of it. Let's watch that in slow motion."

Jamar Musa

At nine-years-old, back home in Douala, Cameroon, Jamar, meaning 'beautiful', had displayed a precocious control over his hand/eye rhythms. He cut hair, quickly and expertly. It was as if he transferred his own beauty onto his clientele. He sang well, and played the drum, any drum, with lyrical adaptably, and subtly so. Like most of

Cameroon, he was soccer *bevok* (Dutch/Afrikaans patois, meaning 'crazy', pronounced buh-fock, as in 'sock', refer to 'Beserker', blood-thirsty, crazy warriors of yore), or soccer mad. For as long as he could remember, Jamar had burnt white hot with dreams of a future in world soccer, which he loved more than his grandmother. Jamar had come to Joburg from Douala on a wave of deception about three years ago, duped by a shifty-eyed Mozambican con man, or *feyman*, Helio, who'd posed as a Pan African soccer talent scout needing cash to get back to South Africa, since, he claimed, his wallet was lifted from the hotel. How else, he reasoned loudly, was he to get Jamar into the South African national team, where he so rightfully belonged? What a talent!

Jamar borrowed heavily and gave the money to Helio, on the understanding that they would rendezvous in Joburg two weeks hence. Helio left Jamar with a one-way third-class train ticket to Johannesburg. Jamar got to Joburg, but there was nobody there to meet him at the rendezvous, outside the YMCA in Braamfontein, where he waited for much of a day. It dawned upon him that he'd been had. After a short while at the Braamfontein YMCA, Jamar made contact with an old friend from Douala, Abdul, who'd already settled into a residential squat, Medina Court, which accommodated Muslim domestic habits and sensibilities.

The kitchen was communal and Halaal, or *kosher*. Abdul and Jamar shared a corner of a large room with two single bunks along the walls. Versions of themselves populated the rest of the building thickly, in sub - divided, and then sub - sub - divided cubicles, singles, doubles and fetal, each priced and prized accordingly. He didn't often see Abdul, who lived out of a backpack, and whose bed was mostly not slept in. Abdul would sometimes get in late, go to sleep and be off again before Jamar woke up. Abdul disappeared for long periods. Medina Court was very pretty in its idiom: the partitioning of elegantly draped, hand-woven and dyed African cloth and artfully constructed screens of heavy corrugated cardboard with animated signage brightly thereupon. Jamar worked then at one of a chain of Charma Salons, or Salons of Charm, in Braamfontein. It was hard going. He'd felt and seen 'Medina Terrace' change into what seemed to him to be too much of a Jihadist lair, with cloak and dagger cómings and goings, not his thing at all, originating as he did, on his father's side, in an old, open-minded Timbuktu family. For him, 'Jihad' referred more to the constant struggle between light and dark, mostly within. Abdul took an extreme opposite view.

At this time he met Holly. They soon became close friends and she got him in at Lorelei when a small shop along Juta in which he could live and work became available.

They became part of each other's lives. He pined for home and tried unsuccessfully to hide it. Holly respected this but felt that it was no time for him to display any sort of weakness. These were basic rules of the jungle, bare necessities if you will. She strong-armed Leroy into lending Jamar a second hand camera and a free pass to the upcoming film course, feeling that the exercise might bring Jamar out of himself.

"For you," Holly purred when she gave Jamar a warm hug and the invoice to his gift from her, well Leroy actually, as she explained to him.

He received the gift as an overwhelming kindness, and was reduced to tears, even though he understood that the camera would have to be returned.

*

On the Saturday morning of the first film class, Leroy arrived at The Alexander Theatre in Stiemans Street. He opened the first of many locks to its large, heavy glass doors, breathing in the mustiness of the foyer. How he wished he was there in 1997 when, after a good run from it's inception in 1951, by one Muriel Alexander of the Johannesburg Repertory Players, the Alexander closed with a brilliant performance of 'Ipi 'Tombi'.

Kobus Botha was there already, waiting, throbbing with expectation. Leroy noted his arms in particular, which were like two pythons. Kobus's enthusiasm went down well with Leroy. He greeted Kobus warmly, and showed him in through the door with a theatrical flourish. They went in, and Leroy threw the house-light switch up. Kobus took in the lit theatre with an expression of wonder; he'd never felt as thrilled as he did then; everything about the theatre took his breath away and promised experience that he'd only dreamt about until now. The spaces in his life had for too long a while been defined by necessity and duress. He felt that he'd chosen to be exactly where he was right now, and it was hugely liberating. His thoughts were interrupted noisily by the arrival of a pioneering intra-disciplinary group of clever though perhaps too intellectually self-conscious post-graduate drama, art and linguistics students from Wits University, led by a mirthful Chinese sociologist, May-Ling Wu-Masimela.

They'd rented The Alexander for a theatre-in-education project that would involve the core staff of the theatre, all of whom took to the idea of it with enthusiasm. They would improvise a cross-cultural, colloquial interpretation, set in the present, of Romeo and Juliet, entitled Romeo and Julietta; the setting was 'Fair Verona', the name on the gate of a Tuscan-styled gated community in peri-urban Joburg. Kobus watched May-Ling pin a notice for auditions onto the foyer notice board, and grew thoughtful.

The rest of Leroy's first film class arrived, introduced and greeted, and swept Kobus along with them into the theatre, where they arranged themselves in a semi-circle on the stage, lit low to save on the electricity. Leroy stood up to address them, flicking away at his cuffs while clearing his throat. He welcomed, introduced and then got right into it.

To Roger, Zarina, Kobus, Citronella, Jamar and Cora he said: "Righto, let's begin: I know you all have footage on your camera already. Surprise! Now is when you show it. The first six minutes. Com'n, who's first?"

There were mutters of discontent, and rumblings of mutiny. They were all well aware of what their respective first six minutes reflected, and some might have felt more uncomfortable than others.

"What a bunch of pussies," exclaimed Citronella loudly, much to everybody's surprise and amusement, "I'll have a go!"

Nobody was more surprised than Leroy, who on first meeting had been misled to form quite a different impression of Ms. Marais. Everybody fell silent, and didn't know quite how to respond. Cora looked shocked. Citronella plugged her camera, and its memory, into Leroy's larger monitor, which flickered to life, revealing a low-lit interior at the center of which was a gleaming pole, shot from below.

Suddenly, a huge mass of tangled bright yellow feathers rolled out of the darkness towards the pole, to Citronella's smoky voice in the dusk of the bar, lone yellow feathers marooned here and there in the frame: "The pole's a fucking penis, not a piece of string. It's all fake foreplay, the men have to imagine that they feel you slide up and down theirs and then book 'emselves in for a lap dance or more. You have to get them thirsty with lust and desire so that they buy drinks from the bar, for fuck's sake, it's all very simple! That's how we make our money, so, for fuck sake, connect with the pole, relate to the fucking pole, you're not going up there to rescue a little old lady's cat, no, no, no!"

Leroy guffawed; Roger blushed hot and ruddy to the tips of his pimples which tingled and glowed, and snickered into a sleeve; Jamar quietly slid his chair a bit further away from Citronella, who was sitting nowhere near him; Kobus was transfixed and stared at Citronella agape and wide-eyed: she was everything he'd been warned against at Sunday school back in the village. He shifted in his seat and hid his lap under the table; Zarina giggled recklessly and felt emboldened. She heard herself volunteer to go next.

Cora was moved to thinly concealed mirth and looked forward to bringing the moment to life for Sonny.

Chapter 8

The Muse of Lorelei Terrace

Cora Weitzman started teaching at what was then Braamfontein Primary, which has since become a pub and grill, when she and Sonny settled in Braamfontein. She did well and was soon on the permanent teaching staff. She had at this time taken into her charge a promising young student teacher in early training, Nhlohlotelo Mabasa, a born teacher with a lively imagination and melodic turn of phrase. Nhlohlotela had an intuitive rapport with the pupils, and an excellent blackboard technique: she wrote legibly, quickly, and could turn her head towards the class while doing so, necessary for her survival out in the front. She had a brilliant future ahead of her, Cora felt. Not too far into Nhlohlotela's time at Braamfontein Primary Cora found her crying by herself in a deserted corridor.

Cora approached hesitantly, and with one question, "Oh dear, what *is* the matter?" their lives became intertwined forever after.

It emerged through Nhlohlotelo's heaving sobs that she was pregnant, and quite happily so, but would have to leave the college and find work. In fact, she'd been into the college one last time but yesterday to end that. She cried also for a valued friendship she would leave behind: she had since enrolling at the college been befriended by a mysterious young Zimbabwean, Ravai Tagara Chipo, or in Shona, Ravai, the Naturally Gifted. Leaving college would mean less time with Ravai before they went their separate ways. As it turned out she didn't get to see Ravai again, ever; she'd already left when Nhlohlotelo went back one last time, just yesterday. Nhlohlotelo was left with the clearest memory of their last moment together, not too long ago: not for the first time, they'd promised that they would care for each other, wherever they were, in this life, lives been and gone, and those yet to come.

Cora didn't see Nhlohlotelo for a while after their exchange, but Nhlohlotelo played on her mind. Cora was realizing that she'd require help keeping things together at Number Two, as would Sonny at the surgery. Number Five at Lorelei became available. Nhlohlotelo was self-composed and sanguine when she came to the school to say thank you and goodbye. This Cora admired. She took her on as housekeeper/P.A, presiding over a revolving team of service providers and cleaners, for both home and surgery. Nhlohlotelo moved into Number Five, across the hall from Number Four where Isobel

Zenani lived with her nine year old son Vinny and the baby Mona. Nhlohlotelo gave birth to Holly's mother, Pindile Elizabeth. After Pindile's birth, together with her duties for the Wietzmans, Nhlohlotelo also came to run things at Lorelei as a sort of warden; and to manage Ntylo's when Smoky and Tubby were away or distracted. She was involved increasingly in the running of Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Ass's office on the second floor at Lorelei.

At Ntylo's she grew dreadlocks. Cora loved the new look, and did the same to a startlingly different effect. Nhlohlotelo renewed a torrid intimacy with Pindile's father, Johnny Silver Raposa, a lithe, peripatetic Angolan session musician who wore distinctive snakeskin leather trousers that seemed spray-painted directly onto his skin. Cora was ever grateful for Nhlohlotelo's skills in managing front of house for her very busy life, including her appointments and catering. Amongst her circle Nhlohlotelo developed a fearsome reputation for protecting Cora's privacy: when Cora didn't want to take a call, it was Nhlohlotelo who let them down gently, and, when they were dropped, Nhlohlotelo blocked their numbers in all the phones, including the surgery.

Rajbansi - Sigcawu was then doing very well, and Ntylo's had taken off. Lorelei was very busy, day and night. Cora and Sonny needed a full night's sleep to function, and wanted to start a family. They moved on from Lorelei continuing to spend their working days there, he at the surgery, she at the school next door. Sonny remained Lorelei's GP of choice. Pindile had been in Sonny Weitzman's expert care for all her life and he knew her circumstances well. He'd intimated, quite early on in Pindile's pregnancy, being up to date with the medical journals, to Nhlohlotelo, Cora and Mona, that Pindile would be most vulnerable to the post-partums; that it was a very serious condition, and that they would all do well to keep a keen eye on her.

Pindile dropped out of school to continue her studies at home, went off the rails, cleaned up the act, and birthed Holly. Vinny, the suspected father and brother to Mona, made a brief appearance, and was attentive, sponging Pindile's brow with one hand as she went to sleep, while rocking Holly's cradle gently with one nattily-shod foot, as she slept, leaving one hand free. Nhlohlotelo and Mona observed this touching vignette, since they were indeed keeping the eye on him.

"You know," said Nhlohlotelo: "Maybe he's not all bad, after all."

"Don't kid yourself," replied Mona.

"Let's give them some privacy," said Nhlohlotelo.

"I wouldn't risk it, but if you say so, I promise not to say 'I told you so' afterwards," was Mona's caustic reply.

They'd no sooner turned: with the one free hand Vinny surreptitiously liberated a stack of envelopes under Nhlohlotelo's mattress, envelopes with money in them, given to Pindile to start a Post Office savings account for Holly's upbringing and education.

Vinny called them back in: "Ssshhh, don't wake them," he said: "Have to go."

Nhlohlotelo hugged him. Mona went straight to the mattress, and Vinny bolted.

*

At the dawn of this millennium, the year two-thousand, a time of unreasonable expectations, Pindile was nineteen, alone and afflicted by the post-partum's, that post-natal depression with the horns and teeth that tossed and chewed on the psychology of one-in-eight new mothers.

After Holly's birth Pindile put on a convincingly brave and joyous face; there were hopes that the birth had 'straightened her out' and that she'd be all right. Not so: it laid her out low and flat like a shadow of a former self peeled off her person. She fled Lorelei into a bender, spiraling further downward into a vortex of drugs, alcohol and denial, washing up under Ponte Bridge with Vinny in tow, 'under the bridge' being the most modest positioning in Joburg where to be certain, the only way was down. From this dark place Pindile made contact with Mona on a cellphone that Vinnie had stolen, threatening to come back home to ruin all their lives if Mona didn't bring money, right then.

"She's a sucker," said Vinny: "She'll fall for it."

Mona brought money. Vinny couldn't face her for shame, and she handed the money to Pindile when they met briefly. Mona tried to reason with Pindile but felt that she was relating to another person, somewhere else. It broke her heart and she left Pindile before her tears could be seen. Pindile got back to the bridge to find Vinny passed out in a festering heap of shame and remorse. She cleaned out his pockets and found the contact details, on a playing card, the Joker, of his contact at the Maputo Circus in Mozambique, Quasimodo Palliaci, the circus imp and Vinny's 'big-break'. Palliaci was Godfather to five other circus imps. Once there were six. After dark, Palliaci and associates ruled over a multi-ringed den of vice, iniquity, good, cheap food and beer, and excellent live local music, all disappearing miraculously by seven-thirty in the morning, whereupon, once again, the circus became a wholesome family and tourist destination.

With the one-way ticket in third class extorted from Mona, Pindile embarked on a thirteen hours-long journey to Maputo from Joburg. She felt hopeless, with energy enough to find her seat, to which she tied her possessions, and fell into a deep and troubled sleep. She looked like a huge person/parcel, and as she slept became a source of amusement to those around her, in particular an ancient though youthful-looking Zimbabwean woman dressed in a large, carelessly twirled turban over thick, matted dreadlocks, and luminous, tailored pink, orange and purple Shweshwe: a printed African cloth with a Rococo intensity of curlicues and patterning. About her neck and from her ears were draped and dangled intricate, shimmering statements in fine silver wire from Ibo Island, in the Qirimbas Archipelago to the North - East of Mozambique. Observe her compassionate expression and sharply sculptured features; her skin of glowing burnt umber and all seeing eyes.

She is Ravai, *tagana chipo*, or 'naturally gifted' in Shona, the same Ravai of Nhlohlotelo's acquaintance during her brief time at the teacher training college. Ravai was now a travelling healer and herbalist, on her way to Maputo, then Pomene in the north of Mozambique. She'd been on an assignment in South Africa, where she'd saved a life, and healed a soul many others had given up on.

Ravai scrutinized Pindile rocking to and fro with the lulling click-clack of train wheels in deep sleep, and read as much as she could about that life. As she absorbed the worst of Pindile's pain she enshrouded herself in a shawl so as not to be seen, since the exercise momentarily drained her of any life, a sight that could not be seen by her or anybody else, for fear. Ravai shivered out of her throw as they pulled into Komatipoort, the final South African stop. She got up and stood over Pindile to wake her. She touched Pindile's shoulder lightly, whereupon Nhlohlotelo appeared to Ravai in a pithy vision, and begged her to help Pindile, who stirred child-like from her slumber. Ravai accepted that she had one more soul to save before Maputo: she did after all make a promise to a friend. Pindile woke up and collected herself. She leaned on Ravai as they navigated the short distance from Komatiport to Ressano Garcia, a sub-tropical little Mozambican border town, where they checked in with the Mozambican authorities after a substantial meal of baguette and peri-peri chicken on an open fire, and a Portuguese salad. Pindile felt much, much better on the ongoing Mozambican train from Ressano Garcia to Maputo, a four-hour journey, in the company of Ravai, who had initiated a conversation. The carriage was packed, and festive. In a private huddle, Ravai and Pindile spoke with intensity for about two hours non-stop. Ravai advised Pindile to get on the very next

train back to South Africa and deal with her life there, but could understand why it might not happen. She was appalled at Pindile's determination to seek out Vinny's contact at the Maputo Circus, but could see how that might not come to pass.

There was one, brief last stop about two hours before Maputo, where all hell broke loose and the train became a moving village in the Indian idiom, festooned with humanity hanging there from, and packed with people and their 'stuff' including live stock; fresh produce and boxes of technology. The train heaved into Maputo Central Station, at the Praça dos Trabalhadores, where Ravai and Pindile parted ways. Ravai registered her grave doubts about Pindile's chosen path, but nonetheless gave her a card with the name of a friend and associate, the fortune-teller at the Maputo Circus. By the time she got to the Maputo Circus in downtown Maputo, Pindile felt that these lively, sensual Mozambicans were a people amongst whose warmth and vivacious spontaneity she could find a place.

She checked in first with Emerald Marindo, Ravai's connection. Do not go anywhere near the horny dwarves, Emerald instructed, all they're ever looking for is a Snow-White to make porn videos with, they do it all the time, its disgusting, said Emerald, not to mention the strip shows in the big top each night. Butch, my son, she said: he's the circus knife thrower/strongman/magician; its busy work and he always needs assistance, do that for a while. The conditions of employment that followed soon after included domestic chores and that Pindile would be sent away immediately if she ever drank, drugged or fell in with Palliaci and his crew. Here, over much of Holly's lifetime, Pindile repaired and healed under Ravai's spiritual guidance and firm hand, and in Butch's understanding embrace. The more whole and together Pindile felt, the more keenly she missed Holly and home.

In Maputo, Mozambique, in late September 2018, outside a huge caravan with pink and gray marbled Formica-paneling and tasseled curtains within, at the circus in Maputo, Holly's long absent mother, Pindile Elizabeth, assistant to and lover of the circus strong-man/magician/knife-thrower, Butch Marindo, warmed up for the evening's performance. She faced a target with her back to a large soft toy polar bear sitting on a camping chair, expressionless, a gift for Holly bought eighteen years ago, but never sent. It didn't look well. Neither did she. She took aim at the target with one of six exotic, curved daggers, then turned around and let fly. As the knives crowded into the bear she tasted bitter regret, shame, guilt and remorse. Wiping away a tear, she could no longer deny that she'd been away from home for a long time now, too long. She missed

her child, Holly, every moment, like a limb being torn from her body. With repeated throwing of the knives she shredded the bear and with it any reserve in needing desperately to get back to Braamfontein, to Holly, Nhlohlotelo and her best friend from school, Mona, or Miff Mona, on account of her being nothing much to look at and her desultory manner. Pindile faced the bear, closed one eye, aimed and flung one more knife at it.

Chapter 9

Unlucky Luke's

Holly the motherless child grew up in the warm embrace of community life at Lorelei Terrace and was a well adjusted even if distracted young woman. At twenty going on twenty-one (once, long ago, the time of official adulthood), and having left rather than graduated from school at seventeen, Holly's subsequent and self-proclaimed 'gap' year, or two, who could be sure, felt to her to be coming to an end. There were omens that the gap, or interregnum of intellectual repose, *schnucked* in under the radar of the way too many adults crowding her life, all of them caring a bit too much, had closed. The Adults now raised stilted conversations about the future: and what, perhaps, if they might ask, might she possibly be thinking of doing with the rest of her life? She had one more high school credit to earn, and then she'd be legit and could work or study on. Best she started reading books, she felt, appearing studious might put them, and her off the scent of purpose for a while longer.

These thoughts occurred to Holly in the bath. Books she would find in abundance at the St. Luke's Hospice thrift shop under Lorelei, known to her as Unlucky Luke's on account of it being stocked by mostly the burnt out ends of deceased estates. She looked forward to seeing Waltzing Matilda, who managed the shop. They'd become fast friends. Matilda was in the process of teaching her about fortune–telling, and felt that Holly might be better suited to the crystal ball, not hard to find in New York. Matilda in fact had a large one somewhere, in a box.

Matilda de Bruyn, a Joburg colored originally from the Cape, was of fascination to Holly as a strange and exotic phenomenon. Matilda had a passion for ballroom dancing, particularly the waltz, and for other people's wives and girlfriends. She was a lipstick lesbian, a contrasting Sapphic idiom to Alice B. Toklas and Gertie Stein; and much more like Violet Trefusis, Natalie Barnie and Jane Bowles, unrepentant, Lesbian hell-raisers all. Matilda was in her mid-thirties, and came from *nuthing.* She'd run away from home after high school, and what was for her the *schtetl* of their narrow, unglamorous minds. She travelled, then settled into an eventful life in New York, where she saved dollars working like a dog in fashion and led a life of unrepentant sin, which went awry. She repented, found The Lord and She led Matilda back home to South Africa at the turn of this century. With her dollars born again into ZAR she returned to

live in Joburg, and bought an apartment over an intimate and characterful saloon in Greenside, which she renamed Waltzing Matilda's. She turned again to sin and dropped the lord. Matilda reset and managed the saloon, from which she practiced astrology and read palms and such, discreetly and by appointment, in a low-lit, velvet-curtained booth. The bar soon ran itself. Matilda volunteered to support various hospices and safe places for abused women and joined Rape-Crisis.

Matilda knew she had a glass ball somewhere. While she instituted a thorough search, not too far away, inside The Alpine Bakery, Mona was at work counting rolls. Her often cantankerous, ninety-two year old mother, Isobel Zenani was prone to episodic public displays. Mona's bad penny, horny, once sizzling-hot older half-brother, Vincent, or Vinny, suspected father to Pindile's daughter, Holly, dropped in from time to time, amused them hugely, robbed them blind and disappeared. Even though Vinny sometimes hung about Lorelei, he was very careful not to bump into Nhohlotelo or Holly.

When Isobel Zenani escaped the keen eye of her caregiver, a young poor relation, or the daughter, Mona, and went walk-about, she'd go back in time and drop by Unlucky Luke's, once a swanky restaurant where she sizzled as a singer of smoldering after dinner torch songs. Her then lover, a Khan, owned the restaurant and had set her up with a trio. He installed her in Number Four at what was then Khan's Corner, and came to a sticky end. The restaurant was set fire to in a failed attempt at insurance fraud, and was boarded up until it became Ntylo's. Isobel had Vinny (Khan) and started work at a bakery nearby, On a Roll, under conditions of slavery. The owner of On a Roll, a randy Frenchman with a pencil moustache baked his books, mostly on account of his many mistresses and the little baguettes that issued forth crisply from their ovens. Isobel had Mona, who grew up around the bakery, and started working there from time to time, over weekends and holidays, while at school. Mona dropped out of school and replaced Isobel, who retired with a nervous condition. On a Roll was bought by a briskly professional Austrian, who transformed it into the Alpine Bakery. He kept Mona on and employed a master baker called Sibusiso to man the ovens under his strict supervision.

There had been one or two dates between Mona and Sibusiso. He then met and married a good friend of Mona's, Lerato. Being Lerato's bridesmaid helped Mona get over it quickly since in her book, the duties of friendship superseded the 'could've' been. They remained the best of friends. Around three months ago, Sibusiso had informed her dolefully that Lerato had been underplaying a serious illness heroically and did not have

long to live. If Mona wanted to see her before she turned her face to the wall, she'd best do it soon. Mona went to see Lerato and was taken aback by the state of her friend, who hung on by the slender thread. Yet she was strong as ever in spirit and made Mona promise that she would look after Sibusiso for whatever that meant to them, whatever, please look after each other, you're both really hopeless by yourselves, was her view. Mona protested. Lerato persisted. Mona promised, and was made to confirm her resolve on subsequent visits. Mona and Sibusiso grew closer when Lerato slid into a coma. Lerato took a turn for the worse. By the time Mona fought through rush hour public transport, and arrived at the bedside, Lerato had already breathed her last.

After the burial, but three days ago, Mona busied herself serving cakes and biscuits to an array mourners at Sibusiso and Lerato's home. As they damned the confectionary for not being lamb, yet took a few, certain of Lerato's older relatives shot Mona a knowing look, as of to say, 'your move Jezebel'. Lerato's mother didn't look pleased to see her, while Subisiso's ancient parents were delighted. Sibusiso, the recently widowed, and Jezebel moved around each other pretending not to be intimate, so as not to inspire gossip. They need not have bothered.

After a full day at the Alpine towards the end of this day, Mona caught a glimpse of herself in the flour-dusty mirror in the changing room for women; she looked far older than her years; head at an angle cast down, shoulders hunched in defeat.

"You've let yourself go Mona, you have girl," she said to her self quietly.

Sibusiso's voice boomed from the changing room for gents on the other side of a partitioning screen: "Or life's kicked the crap out of you," and laughed warmly.

He explained that he'd much rather be working through the nights, by way of distraction from his grief, fresh and new. It was then that Mona went off to the bathroom and bawled at the passing of her dear friend; she cried also for her self, Sibusiso, and the entire human race. Fuckit, she thought, time for a makeover, time to get a grip and live.

After a warm conversation with Sibusiso she went home with a resolve to transform herself. She retrieved a large suitcase of makeups, waxes, scissors, tweezers, shavers, and outfits waiting to happen from under her bed. She improvised a 'look' after quite a while in the bathroom while Isobel and the caregiver watched nature television at full volume. The caregiver had often to repeat sequences of gruesome kills, which had Isobel leaning far forward in her chair, clapping the hands with glee. Holly dropped by on a donut run.

For as long as Holly could remember, Mona had been part of her life and upbringing in Braamfontein. There was between them a fond ritual. Mona kept behind good day-old donuts and they'd eat them together, at some point each day, as they did on this particular evening. Mona was uncharacteristically unmiff and surprisingly chatty. It was a splendid evening and they sat outside on the balcony. Holly observed in silence that Mona looked different, better, yes, definitely better. Gone was the hardy Afro-bouffant, replaced by a more natural kink, and shaped and softened with styling mousse; her 'Frida Khalo' eyebrows were plucked and separated, opening up the face generally; and she had, praises be, gone into battle triumphantly with a fuzzy, often bushy top-lip, now smooth and hairless. She'd done her nails. She'd also shed her 'mother-of-the-bride' look for something more chic and figure hugging. All in all, usually 'Miff' Mona was looking unusually svelte. What was going *on*, thought Holly to herself, observing that Mona had a *lyf,* pronounced 'lafe', meaning a very nicely shaped and proportioned body in Afrikaans.

Not for the first time Mona bent her ear with cautionary tales: frightening stories of girls wandering off from the village and being devoured by wicked men, crocodiles and such. Please Mona, begged Holly, no more, no more harrowing tales of innocence misled. It mattered not, Mona continued and the morning's narrative became even more dreadful; with relish, Mona luridly described a little girl lost being eaten by a huge crocodile: every crunchy bloody bite, every little torn limb, brought to life vividly. As she spoke, Mona thought heavily about a rumor she'd recently picked up about Pindile which rang horribly true: Pindile was on her last legs in the Congo with a savage, terminal combination of malaria, HIV, and residual TB. Apparently, she wanted to come home to die.

She turned to Holly with a rueful grin: "Now, have I taught you how to kick a man in the nuts if he bothers you, sometimes even when he doesn't, but smells like he's thinking about it? First, 'no' means *no.*"

*

At first Matilda was petrified by the wraith-like Isobel who would suddenly appear from above, either over or under dressed, in dishevelment or composed, depending on her state of mind. The old bat scared her witless, mainly because she reminded Matilda of perhaps one day losing her own mind. Matilda softened over time and responded to Isobel, and her condition, with respect and kindness. Because Isobel would ask for a smoke, and get agitated when it was not forthcoming; and had declined a substitute

pencil with a haughty 'I'm not smoking a pencil, do you think I'm crazy?' Matilda had found, with some difficulty, a pack of old candy cigarettes.

While Mona put Holly through the moves upstairs, inside Unlucky Luke's Matilda put aside a few things that had come in for various loyal customers. She was about to close. Holly left Mona's, and Isobel was put to bed where she appeared to have fallen asleep instantly. Not so. Mona and the caregiver watched television. Behind the closed door to her room Isobel got up and silently invented a look of her own from what was at hand and went downstairs unobserved.

Matilda removed the orchestras playing waltzes from the multi-disc player and replaced them with Marilyn Monroe as she counted the long day's takings again. Isobel Zenani strolled in to 'A kiss on the hand...' bang on cue. She'd was dressed eclectically in a lime green nightie; bright orange candle-wick gown; fur stole, gold dancing shoes that were now too big for her shriven feet, and bright green plastic curlers in her hair.

"Busy night," quipped Isobel as she swaggered in.

"Yes," Matilda replied, on her guard: "Full house Madam, you're on in five."

Matilda turned up Marilyn Monroe singing 'Diamonds are a Gal's Best Friend'. Zenani danced a jig and started to disrobe, as if by instinct.

"No, no, no," protested Matilda: "If you take your gown off, I'll have to do the same."

Zenani thought about this, chuckled and drew her fur stole about her. "Go ahead. Gimme a smoke." she said.

Matilda gave her a candied cigarette.

"You know," Zenani said between deep puffs and languid exhalations: "Those bastards upstairs put me in the washing machine. So sad."

Matilda corrected her while Zenani formed and blew smoke circles: "No they didn't, it was a brain scan. Mona told me. Not a moment too soon I reckon."

"The washing machine, can you believe it," continued Zenani: "No respect!"

She peered closely at the end of the cigarette, and said: "It's not lit, dammit!"

She threw the cigarette out through the door over-hand but not with much force. It landed silently in the weave of an obliviously fashionable passer-by of under-average height.

"Okey-dokey," said Matilda with a sigh of the ages: "Time to go back up and rest, unless," and here she leant down to look Zenani in the eye: "Unless, you'd like to rest between sets in the tumble dryer inside, nice and big, I'll warm it up, shall I?"

Isobel Zenani took a sun hat with a wide brim from a shelf, put it on her head and sashayed out. A sturdy middle-aged woman in a thick overcoat, a good friend of Matilda's who did resemble Gertrude Stein in a certain, unkind light, swept in to accuse Matilda crossly of having an affair with her partner, Buffy, once a tenant at Number Three. It was true, Matilda confessed, and promised contritely never to ever again. She spoke loosely and insensitively of other mutual friends who had explored Buffy, when and how.

"You've always been an Alpha male bitch Tilda!" yelled Gertie in parting.

"Easy there tigger," responded Matilda with some menace: "In the future the majority here will be colored lesbians. Whose side do you want to be on?"

Gertie swung around sharply: "Whatever could you mean?" she asked, and left in a huff.

Matilda called Buffy while Gertie brushed past Holly peering into the window to Plumage to see if Jamar was there, which he was. In she popped. She loved what Jamar had overdone to the place: a large chipped mirror, scalloped and beveled, reflected soft pinks and canary yellows from a chandelier of wigs and hair-extensions; blondes, redheads and brunettes, straight and kinked, rotating lazily whilst waiting for a head to call home. The Stool of Vanities, a sturdy drummer's perch in black patent that swiveled, raised and lowered, faced the mirror with a shelf between. The remaining wall, ceiling and floor were collaged with hairstyle profiles, pick one, all slightly out of focus, stuck down forever with lashings of wallpaper glue, and sealed in perpetuity with layers of clear floor varnish. In Rococo cursive the name, Plumage, pronounced 'Ploomarj', was painted onto the window in copper-gold nail enamel.

Jamar was at the end of a 'sesh' with an uptown regular. Holly retreated into Unlucky Luke's terminal climate of mothball camphor, where there were clothes, hats, shoes, handbags, gloves, furs etc.; books, vinyl records, VHS cassettes, bric-a-brac and many other things too obscure to categorize. She fell upon Matilda with hugs and kisses. They caught up. Matilda showed Holly a rare beige pure wool pashmina that had come in with, amongst many other things, a great many books, and they decided that Matilda would suggest to Jamar that he buy it for Holly as a gift, when the time was right, since the salon was doing very well.

The books were from the library of one of Joburg's many radical, leftist intellectuals, recently shot and killed by a brother-in-law from a previous marriage, whilst en flagrante with his wife. His heirs leaned more to the right and threw out a magnificent

collection of socialist thought to protect the minds of their darling children. Many of the books were in hard cover, dust jackets glowing with good health, as if never read. Some of them were signed first editions. These inflammatory texts, with bounders like Bertie Russell leading the charge, now lurked in crooked towers on the shop floor, in ambush of the next unsuspecting victim to enlightenment. Oh, how they conspired. Holly fell upon *Sins of the Fathers* by James Pope-Hennessy, by the cover mistaking it to be a raging bodice-ripper over more than one generation set on an exotic island, with ships and pirates, and a second hand copy of a recent new fiction by a young Ethiopian/Italian African writer, Haillie Gambino, who lived and worked in Joburg, about the mafia in Africa in modern times titled 'Mafiuso', the word for women *mafioso.* She found a cheap good copy of a nineteen-fifties movie magazine, 'Revue' that she bought for Leroy, by way of thank you for his kindness to Jamar. Matilda hauled a sturdy square box from under the counter.

"Oi, Holly," she yelled in her best Bronx accent: "Wanna loin how to read a Noo Yoik crystal ball?"

Holly didn't hear her. She was looking out the door at Junior Rajbansi - Sigcawu hosing down the broad sidewalk around Lorelei Terrace with great care. She was amazed. After many years of neighborly acquaintance it was the first time she'd seen him *do* anything. She was aware that he, the twins and Angel-Eye had been working on opening their new club but didn't think they'd get any of it together, even though she had seen a truck delivered umbrellas, chairs, tables and pot plants a bit earlier, all of which now huddled uncertainly on the corner of Juta and De Beer. Junior finished hosing down the sidewalk and was joined by the twins and Angel-Eye. They fell upon the garden furniture and proceeded to arrange it badly. From Plumage Jamar observed their clumsy attempts at turning the corner and pavement around Lorelei into a sort of French sidewalk cafe. He could bear their ineptness no longer and volunteered to help.

Since Junior was a lord and Jamar merely a tenant, he and Jamar did not know each other too well beyond civil greetings in passing. Jamar congratulated Junior and the minstrels on a fine idea, and told them about the Street of Joy back home in Douala, a most convivial locale. This inspired all. They went into Angel - Eye's where they agreed that The Corner of Joy was a fantastic idea, and should sell sandwiches, beer and cakes. They need never have to hunt or gather again! Jamar took charge and managed the arrangement of furniture on the sidewalk. He added touches of his own that elevated the look and feel. Holly and Matilda emerged to add touches of their own which lowered the

tone splendidly. It is there to this very day, a most popular meeting point, as in 'see you at The Corner of Joy', famed now for cheap beer, great music, lousy food and indifferent service. Matilda found the crystal ball from her days in New York. She and Holly would spend a great deal of time circling its powers, to no avail. No matter how they blew and rubbed, and peered into the ball from this angle and that, the future did not reveal any of itself to them. Instead, they took to the cards and reading tealeaves.

Part Four

Chapter 10

First Treatment

The first film class invigorated Leroy with optimism and took the class to the edge of madness. Each participant became somewhat too attached, perhaps demonically so, to this third eye they'd so recently acquired, and were learning how to manipulate and control. There was too a general feeling amongst them that events in their lives appeared to be moving very much faster than before, and accelerating, or so it seemed. Was it because they were taking in and processing substantially more on account of all the pointing and shooting?

Since moving into Lorelei Terrace Leroy felt a rekindling of his passion for film and storytelling. For the first time in a long while he felt like the artist he was and had been confirmed to be by the market and critics, and a prestigious international award, not that any of this mattered much to those around him. On an evening not too long after he'd moved into Lorelei Terrace Leroy was fed, bathed, brushed and in bed with a copy of an early draft for a new script that was going nowhere. By nine-thirty he was defeated and asleep, to be rudely woken at four by the 'doof-doof-doof' of a raucous car boot party under his balcony that shook the walls and rattled the windows. He got up and threw an egg or two down at them from a low, crouching position behind and close-up against the balcony wall. Assuming that the egging was from within the ranks, they turned in on themselves and dispersed. When Leroy peered over the edge of the balcony wall, to his dismay, he saw a recycler trying desperately to remove streaks of yolk and albumen from his threadbare blankie. Leroy groaned: he'd mistakenly egged one less fortunate than himself. He felt dreadful.

With urgency, he gathered a fresh blanket and matching beanie, and made his way to the lobby where he checked that he had the key with him before closing the door. He turned around and nearly jumped out of his skin at the sight of Nhlohlotelo standing at her door with a mug of hot tea, sweet and black, and a plate of biscuits. Wordlessly, he tucked the soft goods under one arm and received the mug and plate from Nhlohlotelo; she called the lift up for him; he got in; she smiled at him approvingly as the doors to the lift trundled shut. With thoughts of 'eish, gogo, what big teeth you got' Leroy and the lift descended. He handed over the goods to the recycler on the sidewalk, and they spoke while he bolted it down. Leroy learnt that his name was Paul, and didn't have the heart to

ask him whether he ever went into Lorelei, and if so, why? Paul's unusual, violet eyes met his and seemed to dare him to ask.

That evening, Leroy worked through the night in a blaze of violet inspiration; over three days between his first and second film classes he completed a dazzling first treatment of a new script, working title, 'Lorelei Terrace', and sent it on to Soxy and Gomez. Things moved fast thereafter. Soxy showed the treatment to certain pivotal investors who responded immediately. This was a good sign. They also shared their particular interests and expectations with Soxy, which they expressed as their 'ideas' about the project, 'ideas' which would translate into major changes to the treatment. Soxy had the pulse of these investors and her response to Leroy about the new treatment through Gomez was swift and pithy: she and the investors felt that the new treatment was an excellent new beginning. She was prepared to find the money to development into a new original script in an urban African setting, with modern 'New African' characters covering a full race/sex/generational range. A positive Asian/Oriental character would be nice, she said in as many words. Leroy blew his top, having considered the development of Lorelei Terrace to the end, as it had been begun, to be the deal.

*

Leroy's second film class grappled with editing creatively on the camera. The Koreans had insisted that each lesson focus on one or another aspect of the use of the camera, and its bells and whistles. Leroy had spent an afternoon with their technicians. The camera turned out to be quite complex, with many devices and effects, and a rather sophisticated editing capacity. Leroy introduced the class to the methods and techniques of Fick Mankazana's scripting; how he made the journey from idea, and intention, through words to moving image with sound and color, which got them fired up. Leroy had to concentrate to move things along and was relieved and exhausted when the class ended, and ended well: the matter of creative intent had been broached, and surely, a receptiveness to form would follow.

He was enjoying himself immensely, and in spiffing humor and excellent form. To his great surprise he encountered a precocious Indian/Afro-Indian eight-year-old boy, dressed as an elf, complete with pointy hat, at the entrance to Lorelei on his way in. The elf, abuzz with too much early intelligence, sat on the front step to Lorelei's heavy glass doors cradling a Labrador puppy. The early evening summer light was 'just so' and

Leroy enjoyed the image, until, as he neared the door, the elf seemed to grow horns and a forked tongue; the puppy growled softly.

The little devil lifted two bright eyes up to Leroy and said loudly, in the deep voice of a large adult: "Oi, motherfucker, where do you think you're going?"

"Urie! Really, please don't. You know you shouldn't," admonished Nhlohlotelo from the lobby.

"Sorry, sir," apologized the boy: "I should say 'what the Dickens', says Ma Nhlohlotelo. It sounds better and doesn't piss, sorry, tick people off."

Nhlohlotelo came out: "Do not put that finger up your nose," stopping Urie's forefinger in mid-air.

Urie wrung his hands. He was not born that way. He and his father, Junior, had picked up the habit from Uriah, who was painfully shy and anxious, and when not in these terrible conditions of mind, anxiety deprived and embarrassed about being shy, which didn't help at all. Nhlohlotelo joined Leroy on the sidewalk to explain that Uriah III, or Urie, was Junior's son from a mother he'd not married, and she, meaning herself, often looked after the child. They'd all spoilt the boy; he'd lately taken to swearing, must be the influence of one of his father's racy ladies, but, this cussing would pass, Nhlohlotelo informed Leroy.

"I know," said the boy: "I know that nothing smaller than my elbow should go up my nose or in my ears, but I can't get my elbow there, I really have tried Ma."

Leroy could understand why the boy was doted on.

"You can stay there for a little while longer if you behave," Nhlohlotelo instructed.

"Please bring him up with you, he and Dogma need a bath, they're late for Junior and Grandpa's," she asked Leroy and went back in and up to Number Five, leaving the door open. Dogma? Who are these people, Leroy wondered, and why have I not met them all before.

"So that's who you are," said Leroy: "I'm Leroy, please to meet you."

Leroy held out his hand to no response.

"You can't come in here without the password, sir. What is the password?"

"But I live here," Leroy protested.

"That doesn't matter, one day all this will be mine, password or the fee," led the boy with his chin.

"Fee?" inquired Leroy with a smile, and a frown.

"Ten *ronds*," replied the boy firmly.

For Leroy this was quite enough.

"Mmmmm," said the boy, dropping to a malevolent whisper, one hand raised: "Before you say what you're thinking, remember this: I am Uriah III and Ma Nhlohlotelo's all-time favorite, she told me herself. You would fuck with Ma Nhlohlotelo?"

The kid made a relevant point.

"That's quite enough," concluded Leroy: "Let's go up, please, after you and, well, your dogma."

Later on, Leroy heard the boy being taken out of the building by his father yelling: "The password's 'Constantinople' L*eroy*, what the fucking Dickens! Not the ear Papa, I'll sue, eowwww!"

*

Uriah Rajbansi - Sigcawu, eldest son of Smoky and Tubby, father to Junior, reveled in the summer evening's company of family and friends at home, poolside in the Joburg suburbs. He was overjoyed at the arrival of Urie, and disappointed that Junior couldn't stay, but, pleased that Urie would stay there for the weekend. Senior was, these days, working from home increasingly and spending much less time at the office on the second floor at Lorelei Terrace. Absolutely everything went through him first and directly, and would have done so seamlessly were it not for Nhlohlotelo who refused to ignore the landline when she was in the Lorelei office supervising cleaning and maintenance. Ignore it, please, he'd said too often to remember: the call will come through to me directly, if you do not answer it. No matter. She'd often muddied waters with this years-long habit. But, Nhlohlotelo was a law unto herself. Uriah was philosophical about the future and quite happy to hang around until Junior took the firm somewhere, at which time he'd replace himself with an appropriate foil to Junior. Uriah feared that the grandson would take to crime or the arts rather than the law.

Junior managed a tight network of people central to the smooth running of the firm. They hunted and gathered, and then shared intelligence, at a price, that led directly to the solving of current dilemmas, new work and, in the end, billable hours. With everything in between they ranged from a quietly revolving pool of deaf-mute lip-readers, or 'Lippies', the better to gather evidence non-verbally, to a clutch of roguish hackers, ageing hippies all, who could access anything from a security camera in an alley to sms.

Uriah Junior knew well the many characterful bars of Joburg, including the dive at the old Imperial Hotel, home and workplace to one Kobus Botha.

Junior went there sometimes though not often, since it had become a squalid shadow of a more chic former self. It was a drinking and not a cruising bar. He had a previous association with the hotel, and its bar: for quite a few years in the time of Tubby and Smoky, Rajbansi, Sigcawu and Associates owned a small share of the very same Imperial Hotel. They were one of a number of legal firms that kept 'safe' rooms there. When the need arose they'd lodge fugitives, witnesses and such at the hotel, including a certain writer of sonnets and opinion forming features with an audience both here and abroad.

Junior sat within earshot of Kobus and cousin Tony as they all went through the weekend papers at the bar at The Imperial. Ouma's life insurance money, left to Kobus in her will to help him regain ownership of the family farm from the bank, was in the process of being released. Cousin Tony felt strongly that they should redeploy the money and settle the matter of getting the Botha farm back from the bank by other means. Kobus wasn't that sure. Look, signed Tony, she left you the money and wants you to get the farm back, the one thing doesn't have anything to do with the other if we get the farm back without having to spend anything. The needle to Kobus Botha's moral compass quivered with uncertainty. Gone for now was the moral framework suggested by the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church; the coercive scrutiny of the intimate rural community; the discipline of the sporting team. Kobus felt uncontained and confused. He and Tony discussed these matters animatedly at the newly restored teak bar at the Imperial as they trawled through the property pages of the weekend newspapers. The bar was a great success. The Imperial barflies were intimidated, almost sobered by its indestructibly varnished top. No longer did they wantonly spill drinks or put their cigarettes out directly upon it. There was no point, one wipe and their mark making was gone, as if never there. This pleased the shareholders.

Junior overhead the cousins' dilemma, and joined them. He introduced himself, and in the general conversation that followed disclosed his history with and memories of the hotel. "I say *Kubus,* I couldn't help overhearing, " he began and soon had Kubus telling him about the farm. There was a billing in there somewhere, felt Junior, and he could use Tony's skills: the firm routinely used lip-readers to secretly observe and interpret conversations.

He handed over his card: "Do send me everything you have about the farm and the bank, let's see what may be done."

Turning to Tony he said, "May I have a word?"

In the conversation that followed Junior formed the professional opinion that Tony had sociopathic potentialities, and a psychotically high intelligence. This he could work with. He proposed a deal: he'd get his father to apply his mind to getting the farm back if Tony agreed to some paid lip-reading. They shook on it. There and then, much to Kobus's fascination, Junior had Tony interpret each table to him: what were they saying? Who would probably be paying? Who was shagging whom? But, Tony was short sighted and much was lost in translation, which wouldn't do. Notwithstanding, when Kubus mailed the farm documents to Junior, he passed it on to the father, who lodged the file with a talented junior lawyer at Rajbansi - Sigcawu.

*

In the Joburg suburbs, Roger appeared to be the most cheerful and contented, if wary, dude crammed into the Waterstone brekkie nook. He was smoking more pot than ever before, and washed that down with liquid ephedrine, a bracing red, manic high. The family Waterstone had returned, serenely, from their introductory church service, as the guests of dear, thin friends, to check it out. There were forms to be filled in for a cycling club for the whole family on the table.

"Mummy," he asked sweetly, "Could you please pass me the Evian, thank you very much...and how are we all on this lovely Sunday?"

The water was passed in an intrigued silence. Normally he would lean over clumsily and take it. Normally he was a complete bastard at breakfast, noisy, intrusive, offensive, as if he'd been awake for hours already, which was usually the case. Wick looked up at him suspiciously. Donay looked tearful, this was it, this was the angel she'd always known was in there, oh praises be! Her eyes shone at him.

"Thank you Mummy," he oozed in floridly appreciative tones: "My, how pretty you look. That really is so your color."

Donay fell over him with hugs and kisses, "Thank you my boy, welcome back! Oh I've missed my angel so much."

"But Mummy, I haven't come back from anywhere, I'll never leave you Mummy, never," he mooed.

Wick interjected with a brisk, "Stop taking the piss Roger, stop it. Your mother doesn't realize you're being an arse."

"Sorry Daddy," was Roger's extravagantly remorseful reply: "Truly, can you forgive me? Am I being an arse Mummy? Am I?"

He stretched: "I think I'll go for a run."

"Alleluia!" exclaimed Donay as she threw her hands to the heavens.

Wick was heard to reply through clenched jaws, out of Donay's hearing, in a hiss, "Fine, you go for your run, you devious little fuck, make it a long run, run to fucking Cairo, walk back...and please, take your time. I'm off to wash the car, don't you dare disturb me."

Wick stomped from the room thinking: "Fuckit, the kid's dangerous. Boarding school it is, and soon."

Roger was too much trouble these days: time to put it in the kennels. Who knows, it might even be educated there, Wicus thought to himself quietly, as he poured himself a stiff one in the garage, and toked at a reefer he'd swiped from Roger's stash of homegrown. The boy was not without skills. To 'Deep Purple' playing loudly over the car stereo, perhaps, speculated Wick, as any father might, it could be a good idea to encourage Roger's taking responsibility for the garden, with a gardener of course, someone he could relate to. That's exactly what he needs, thought Wicus, as he chucked back another drink from a large glass, with ice, vodka and cola therein: Fuck, I'm an amazing father, he concluded, toked and took a therapeutic swig straight from the voddie bottle. Wicus sipped at his drink and carefully hung tools on their shapes, which never quite corresponded: Roger had yet again turned the board upside down.

Wicus played back a meeting with Roger's psychiatrist in his mind: one eye on the watch, the psychiatrist explains briskly that Roger's condition is such that while most others hear birdsong, or the ring of a cell phone, Roger hears and feels excruciating fingernails scraping down the blackboard of his aural mind. Car and home alarms drive him nuts, and to dagga and the opiates, all due to hypersensitivity deep within the inner left ear. With a deft double-click he calls up images from the ear specialist on a monitor that he swivels towards Wicus with too much of a flourish, delivers an optimistic prognosis, and concludes with imaginings of treatment.

Upon reflection, and damn, why won't these tools fit into their shapes, Wicus didn't buy any of it and resolved to find a second opinion from a seasoned GP as he turned the pin-board the right way up. He no longer felt pity for The Childless, as he once did when the children were younger and delightful, unaware that Roger had followed him and had the lens to his camera firmly wedged in a crack in the garage door.

The next day Wicus tracked down an old Jewish GP with an excellent rep for fixing troubled young people in the process of retiring from his practice of many years in Braamfontein. He made contact and arranged a house visit at great expense. The GP arrived and immediately inspired confidence by simply being there. He asked a few pointed questions and examined all three Waterstones. Then, he took a break and had a think over a cup of tea. In parting, he gave Roger a withering talking to about frying his young brain, filled with so much possibility, and suggested earplugs. He put Wicus on a mild anti-depressant, and warned him about the state of his liver. Both Roger and father felt much better after this visit. Filial balance was restored. Donay was amazed at the chumminess between them and threw her arms and eyes to the heavens hoping that it would last. She made another appointment with the same GP who saw her in his study at his home. He explained that her household needed to get off the sauce or face certain dysfunction: "It starts and ends with you and Wicus, the child will follow."

He concluded sternly with a hardy chestnut that never failed to stick in the parental craw: "Roger didn't ask to be born, did he?"

*

On a family Sunday in Bagdad, Killarney, Jamila arrived early with the newspapers and tribute of excellent mangoes from poorer relations in Durban.

While reading the Sunday papers, she took a while to choose a mango, glared at it, threw her eyes to the heavens and said, in what could well have been Farsi: "Please God, not from this tree."

She peeled, cut deftly, tasted, then sighed with relief, and was about to enjoy the rest of it, when Zarina interjected with: "What for Auntie, why did you say that?"

Annoyed at the interruption, Jamila adjusted her *doek,* or scarf, and replied with a glare over the top of her reading spectacles: "As you know Zarina, amongst the more traditional Muslims your husband is chosen for you, as you well know. However, it happens that you might be in love with somebody else. It does. Here you may feel that you have a choice, to run off with your true love or get on with marrying your intended, as per arrangement. But you don't really have that choice, as we all know and understand. So, in Durban, where I am from, as you know, it happens, it does, that true lovers might hang themselves from the nearest mango tree rather than go through with the pre-arrangement. That is what for, you never know which tree a mango might fall from."

It was a lot for Zarina to take in, and in the pause Jamila aimed her fruit knife at the controversial mango, stopping in mid-air at another interruption from Zarena: "How would you know?"

Jamila replied, impatiently, with a wave of the knife, "You have to ask? Bitter, Za Za, the mango it is bitter to the taste if it comes from a tree of death and true love denied, bitter, that's how you know, silly child, and, in-sha'Allah, may you never know."

Zarina's parents, Anahita, her name since marriage, and Zulfi Ishmael, were then no longer in the mood for grown-up children hanging about. They'd taken it into their heads that there was life after children, and put it about between themselves that it would be like it was before the little darlings first saw the light of day.

Even though her brother Tahir was married with a life, home and family of his own, he was, too often, found lurking there in Killarney, especially at meal times. He'd never really moved from home, or outgrown his mother's cooking. Were his view to be sought, as in 'Dear Sigmund', Freud might have opined that Tahir's wife was really a mistress figure stashed away in what was a second home, in order that he might not have to face growing up, emotionally. It would have explained much, but the Ishmael's from Killarney trusted more in God than Freud. Zarina felt that there might be an expectation that she should marry, and soon.

*

Cora Weitzman was a quick study, or, as Nhlohlotelo often put it to her, there were no flies on Madam. Her movie camera with the Swiss lenses was a gift from the grandchildren for her most recent birthday. Thus far, she could switch the camera on and off; point and shoot with some steadiness, and zoom in and out smoothly. Currently, the fly clinging to Madam was how to edit on the camera as she went. She didn't enjoy the untidiness of the thought of bits and pieces of useless footage in the camera's memory. It was very much her style to edit and delete as she shot and reviewed.

She and Sonny pulled up at the imposing entrance to the Four Seasons Hotel in Westcliff (quite the best part of Joburg), diagonally across from the Joburg Zoo, where a recent storm had leveled much of a boundary wall. Cora Wietzman's blinding luminescence in a dressing gown of embossed hot pink on pink velvet, with matching slippers and turban, was impossible to ignore.

Just George, front gate security guard was a fixture of the hotel since its inception as The Westcliff, a lifetime ago. Ignoring Cora's filming him through the window, tilting up, he boomed effusive greetings at them as their familiar chariot hauled

itself tiredly up the hill. George lived in Braamfontein and was well known to them as both patient of the doctor, and parent of two young adult children who'd been taught by Missus, and were both at university. There were fees. George drank a bit, though, in mostly his own mind, maintained at such an even keel that nobody, he thought, realized just how much of a buzz he was always on. Not so Georgie, not so, this drinking behind your own back. Everybody knows, they always do.

"Lovely outfit Mrs. Weitzman, no water?" he inquired with a hiccup into belch, en route presumably to the drinker's wet fart, followed by an apologetic: "Beg your pardon ma'am."

"Not a drop," replied Cora from behind the camera: "Only whiskey George, single malts gushing out of the shower mixer in a blend. You should have been there."

She paused. George knew how this went, and remained silent. There would be more, always more. She was warming up.

"Quite dry in Braamfontein, George, not that you'd know," she continued, resting the camera in her lap.

Not for nothing was she the Missus to Sonny's Dr. As he turned away from his accuser, the better for her not see the disdain on his face, George thought he saw a lion step lightly over the fallen wall, and cross the road from zoo to hotel. Not again, he thought to himself, biting and sucking on the hard plastic nipple to his more amber than orange energy drink. He winced, and burped discreetly behind one hand.

As Cora opened her mouth, an emboldened George interjected: "We never run out of anything here at the Four Seasons, all four, each time, never!"

"We do know this George, we do. And thank you for reminding me. Having said that," Sonny Weitzman purred like a baritone tom after the cream, pussy, and a nap: "Do you think George, that you could wave us through now?"

Weitzman stroked the lapels to his ratty bathrobe as he said this, therewith intimating to George that his circumstances didn't encourage delay. Weitzman's old school bedside manner was superb, a talent more than a skill; it helped to keep him moving toward the light in relations with Cora, whom he loved, worshipped, respected and adored. He'd quite forgotten the yellow shower cap with lurid mauve plastic orchid, more of a fascinator at the winner's enclosure than a mere shower cozy, pressed upon him in haste by his Beloved. He tore it off immediately and quickly so upon glimpsing the noggin' tropicana in the rear-view as he tooled up the slope from boom to suite.

In the matter of their retirement plans they were humorless and conflicted. After to-ing and fro-ing since their mid-sixties, now in their early eighties, they were in a moment of scaling down and moving on intrepidly into the winter of their lives. They were in fact eighty-four years old a piece and going strong. Autumn had clearly passed; this they had touched upon lightly in the weather report of their lives when it came up, obliquely and not too frequently. A chill had set in. It was time, they concurred, without (naturally) using the words. Time to follow the sun to wherever it rose earliest, set latest, and shone most brightly for longest.

Finally, Weitzman was in the final stages of selling on his thriving practice to a young and impressive Dr. and Dentist lesbian/homosexual (hard for him to tell), same-sex, cross-race couple, legally married with two young mismatched children. If there was to be change thought Weitzman, ring it in loudly. The deal was that he had three months to confirm the sale, during which time the buyers would finally decide.

Cora leant quite far through the open window with her camera, and filmed the beautifully landscaped garden around the Four Seasons as Sonny propelled the car smoothly up the hill to their suite. She zoomed in slightly, and thought she saw a lion's tale, and then the head in the bushes, but put it out of her mind. Impossible, she thought, zooming in further.

A bit further up the drive, there it was again, or so it seemed. This time, it appeared, the lion put his head through the oleander, stared at her, yawned and then withdrew, lazily. She dropped the camera.

"What is it Cora?" inquired Dr. Weitzman gently, turning to look at her: "And you look pale, what is it? I never thought I'd ever say this, but speak to me Cora, speak!"

"Lion," she whispered, pointing to the bushes: "Lion, Sonny, large shaggy lion, oh my god, there it is again!"

They were now parked in front of their suite. Sonny looked about. He hadn't seen any of it. He peered at Cora. He gave her a hug.

She breathed in and the color returned to her face: "Sonny, there's a lion in the garden, don't get out of the car quite yet."

"Look, Cora, if you're losing your mind tell me, you have quite a bit of paperwork to sign." he volunteered archly, taking his life in his hands.

"I'm not joking Sonny," she replied, "Call George and tell him to call the zoo. I'll do it:" Tap, slide, tap, ring: "Heloo Georgie darling, thanks for answering so

promptly, yes, it is, its Mrs. Weitzman, could you please call the zoo and ask if they're missing a lion, then call me back, thank you George."

Pause.

"Mmmm. I see. Thank you, I'm sure it helps, I don't quite know how, but I'll let you know."

She giggled at his response and ended the call.

Sonny sat through this not quite knowing what to do, or how to respond, not unusual when intersecting with planet Cora. It was best to remain silent, and sit it out. He sighed and reached across to the cubby for his Sudoku and a pen. Cora touched up her lipstick and informed Sonny nonchalantly that George had said the lion's name was Simba; it had nipped over the broken wall of the zoo; it didn't bite, practically a vegetarian.

She turned to the property section of the newspaper and offered Sonny a small juice and packet of mixed hiking nuts and dried fruits with cranberries from her over-nighter. Coming as she did from a long line of peripatetic Jews, it should not surprise that she then handed him a small pack of floss, toothpicks and a wipe-it from some airline or another, the reasoning being: best to anticipate and fix the prosaic immediately, the better to leave the profound with a fighting chance.

Sonny tuned into a rousing military march on Classic FM, and smiled to himself as cymbals banged noisily. He turned it up a bit. Cora turned up the air conditioning, a bit. Then, he turned it down a jot, whereupon Cora leant over and changed the station to a trippy Rubinstein Chopin prelude, a declaration of war since Sonny liked only the nocturnes. They delivered smartly and put him to sleep. In the order of his mind that was what nocturnes were for. This she knew.

Sonny capitulated, and Cora turned up the air conditioning triumphantly. They gave each other an affectionate peck. They became thoughtful: he was truly buggered if Cora lost her mind before he lost his, oh the Schadenfreude divine! It would lose him a fortune in side bets with the boys at bridge.

"You've gone very quiet Sonny," she said, with an edge to the tone: "Anything the matter?"

She took up her camera and panned through the windscreen, whereupon Simba leapt across the car's bonnet lazily, and headed peacefully towards a posse of incoming zoo staff, not too far away now.

"A lion! Thank God!" yelled Sonny as he turned to Cora and embraced her tightly, "I do love you Cora, I do."

Cora's brows arched and raised themselves to hit the roof in surprise: Sonny wasn't undemonstrative, but neither was he that responsive. She turned her lens on him in a smooth arc, and zoomed in, hoping that he wasn't losing his mind before she did. She didn't like losing bets with the rest of the girls at cards.

With both of them in such good moods, he thought, and getting along so well, he felt, he pushed the envelope gently, into the camera: "About that, " he purred, all Kitty Soft Paw.

"We've been doing this for a while now, years, from when it was The Westcliffe, this dashing through the parting in the red sea, Moses leading the way with his facecloth aloft..."

"You're losing an audience of one in a confined space, in motion," Cora stung from behind the camera, "It's very hard to do, but you're succeeding, excelling in fact."

In a notably different register, Sonny continued, "Fair enough-we've been debunking to the Four Seasons when the lights go out or the taps run dry, yet," as he paused and looked at her to see how it was all going in or passing her by.

"Yet," he proceeded, lingering there for a bit longer than an official pause: "Yet, I've never seen a bill. I do the bills and I've never seen this bill. Never, not once."

Cora switched off the camera, put it down on the back seat, and looked at him brightly: thank god he had The Wits about him. She felt that all was well in the world again and flung open the door to the suite unbillable with glee.

*

Since and due to the film class Citronella became an expert eavesdropper, with a sharper visual memory. She became one with her camera and felt more like a weapon than a courtesan with a camera. While it had always been true that Citronella never missed a beat, she could now anticipate a key-change, so in tune was she with self, environment and camera. She'd adapted a handbag to conceal her beloved camera, with the hole for the lens cleverly placed on the side, to the bottom. She moved the lens; up, or to one side or the other, by the bag's handle, like a puppet master. Or, she filmed from afar and then went in without the camera to speak to the pimps and prostitutes, not the johns, a conflict of interests, wherever she found them, which was all over Joburg: on sidewalks, in malls, nail salons, parks, avenues, public libraries etc. Then she filmed herself telling the camera about it, on Mondays.

Time to change her life for the better, she felt: did she really want to be a courtesan for the rest of her life? Absolutely, she concluded, and she resolved to be the best damn courtie Joburg had ever seen. She'd been fired up by the film class, yet was uncertain about what she wanted to do. She wasn't all that confident about writing things down, and Leroy advised her to shoot and edit later. He left her with useful tips about following her eye. As it turned out, her subject matter came to her: there she was, checking out the lingerie in the window of a posh shop in a mall with a hotel on top of it when she over-heard an exchange between a mall courtesan and admirer. For god's sake, she though to herself in disgust: it's a mall not a sidewalk, upon brief reflection concluding that, for both buyer and seller, it was quite a smart maneuver. She realized then that she'd been working from home for quite a while now, and was out of touch with the broader industry. At first tentatively, growing bolder as she went, Citronella discovered that the industry had grown exponentially. There were johns and tarts all over Joburg. For the first time ever she felt cheap about what she did for a living: it was all so tawdry out there, and the knowledge of it made her own set up seem tawdry too. It was, she felt, time for a big change.

Away from the safety of her boudoir, and malls, the aggression of the post-modern sex trade on the street, close-up through her lens, into eye and mind, affected Citronella profoundly. Yet, she was drawn to it, unbeknownst, because it screamed a truth that would get her out of the business, and redeem her. She was shaken by her footage of pimps dragging girls to idling cars with tinted windows by the hair; and various shots of girls leaving cars after the deed, sometimes with torn clothing and mutilated, often stricken and disheveled, always with a dire look of fear. She became more critically self-aware, and gave some thought to the harm she might already have done to her self-esteem and general mental health. Simply then unable to continue whoring, she had to re-invent sharply, falling back on basic secretarial skills, practicing the old, and teaching herself about the new technologies.

Soon she was well on top of this with an impressive typing and transcribing speed. She started spreading the news: in a moment of intimacy with her most favored regular, Roeland Patensie, a recently widowered principal of a church-run technical school for troubled young men, and a real gent who smelled of correctness and Aqua Velva, she explained. He was inconsolable. Since his wife's death his mistress had started to behave like a wife, defeating her purpose in his life. Citronella was all he had. How could she? How would he go on without her? Did she mean retire completely, or would

she consult with selected clients. Forever and completely confirmed Citronella, make no frigging mistake. How he sulked, yet, as a gent, he was happy for her. Perhaps, he thought aloud, he might call upon her as a legit suitor once she got her new self together. It would be very amusing. But, this delicious imagining of Citronella Patensie, he kept to himself, instead offering words to this effect: Why don't I install you as the new secretary, as a done deal before the appointment of the next principal? With a pension and medical aid. We'd have to move very fast. What a fine idea, replied Citronella; of course it's a cinch, one word, he exclaimed, referring to another of Citronella's clients, an accountant, Pious Venter, who happened to sit on the school board. Her interview with the school board was arranged with all speed for the following Monday morning. Consequently, there were oversights: she hadn't yet seen Patensie's recommendation, handed to the Reverend Domingo, chairman of the board, the night before; Pious Venter had returned from a three month trip overseas, and had not yet been informed of the caper, or his role therein. Yet, and oblivious, there he was, to the immediate right of the Rev.

As Patensie passed Pious on his way to take his seat to the left of the Rev. he whispered into his ear, "Whatever happens, do not look surprised. Go with it."

Ranged on either side were the six inter-denominational, cross-cultural members, each more conservative than the other. The retiring secretary took notes. Waiting to be called in Citronella appeared harmless in twinset, pearls and checked woolen Barbara Woodhouse skirt to below the knee, all anchored with large sensible Alice Toklas brogues. For the pedagogic art school effect she wore clear lenses in a large round bright red frame, with a small yellow sun perched on the left corner. She made a good, if false impression, svitzing inside the constraining kit.

"Please," intoned the Rev. to Roeland Patensie: "Could you be so kind, please call in Ms. Marais."

As he led Citronella in, he whispered, "Whatever happens, go with it. *It'sacinch.*"

In she clogged. She shook the hands of the board, silently, omitting Pious, unawares and eyes-down in the agenda, trying to catch up. Down she sat in front of the row of them. Pious did not raise his eyes.

"Welcome and thank you very much for coming in, and so very highly recommended by no one less than our dear brother Patensie, how hard he labors for the less fortunate amongst us. Please, sit down Ms. Marais. And how are you today?" said the Rev.

She answered, shifted and double-crossed her legs. Pious raised his gaze and froze in tortured surprise. To a sharp glance from Patensie, he grimaced painfully, as if to smile.

"Oh your manners Pious, your manners," admonished the curate kindly: "Do greet Ms. Marais. We're very lucky to have her."

In sincere tonalities The Rev. spake thus to Citronella after stumbling greetings from Pious unstuck: "I have been most gratified by your many years of selfless devotion and celibacy. So very kind of you take in all those waifs and strays. The lot of an orphan is not an easy one, as you well know. You're a saint, my dear woman, nothing less. What a list of your good deeds appear in Roeland's recommendation, such a glowing list..."

So began a festival of cross-purpose and double meaning that, notwithstanding, held together and moved forwards splendidly by the grace of god herself: "I see here," observed the Rev., "That you spent a year of administering to the poor in Calcutta with Mother Theresa, please do tell me more."

She shot Roeland, scribe of unlikely endeavors, looking smugly self-amused, a sharp look; Pious swallowed a guffaw and gagged, and she burst into tears of over-flowing compassion.

"Oh, the poverty," wailed Citronella into her hands.

"I see," sympathized the Rev., "Too soon? Too sad? Oh dear, I am sorry."

Citronella composed her-self and, perhaps too comprehensively, translated the miseries of her recent urban experience as if it were a tale of woe in Calcutta, an easy, almost chatty transposing that went on for a while to end with the Rev. concluding, through tears of his own, that so far she was quite the strongest contender. In fact he was of the view that she ought to be employed as soon as possible, if not there and then.

Citronella rose to the occasion of her dizzying, life changing, hurtle from the shadows of propriety into sunny respectability. On her very first day at work, the Saturday morning extra-mural classes, a soft way in, for which she a got one full weekday off, Citronella settled into her chair behind the school secretary's desk, recently cleared, at an angle to Roeland Patensie's office. Her bag with the pulley strap handles concealing her camera and system for shooting quickly and secretly lay in wait, unobtrusively at her tightly laced up feet. She'd bumped into the outgoing secretary in the car park on her way in, she of the long lashes and short hand, making her way miserably to her car with a small box of possessions. Wobbling precariously on top of this mound of things in the box was a treasured snow dome with a two sided picture in the middle of it, of Roeland

grinning smugly on the one side, and her cat, Gladys, on the reverse, in the snow, wobble-wobble.

"So sorry about not clearing out my stuff earlier," said the secretary sweetly: "I've been a bit off."

She suddenly came unstuck and screeched: "Be careful of that man, Roeland fucking Pretensie, two-faced, forked-tongued, pointy-tailed, cloven fucking hoofed, horny little devil!" she sobbed, clutching the box to her chest with such force that the snow-dome popped out, and fell to the ground to land and shatter at Citronella's sensibly clobbered feet.

"Do you know what he told me? Can you imagine? He said he needed space. Space! Is he a fucking teenager? Oh, yes, I'll bet he thinks of himself as forever nineteen! First he gets me to retire early then he needs space. Space! He said he would marry *me* when she died, and now he obviously has his roving eye on somebody else," she bawled.

Citronella talked her down, and reminded her that he'd lost his wife recently. Clearly, he wasn't thinking. Give him time, she urged soothingly, he will come back to you, of course he will. She got away as fast as she could. What indeed was Roeland up to? At the staff meeting to welcome and introduce her, Patensie announced quite suddenly that he would no longer retire, not yet, but would instead transition in a new principal over about a year, or as long as he felt he needed to secure Citronella's consent to be his wife, and of course to retire with him. The thought, 'Mmmm, I *do* wonder what he's up to' had not yet left her mind when Patensie appeared before her with a huge bunch of red roses, apparently by way of welcome, dismissing their romantic suggestion with: "Red was all they had, action stations Citronella! Incoming, teacher absent, please take the class. They a great bunch of guys, and already mid project. Keep an eye on them while they work, and keep them far away from each other; dot them about the room like little planets. Ignore their shackles if you can, bloody noisy. You'll be fine, *it'sacinch.*"

Citronella adjusted her skirt and dashed to the classroom, into the deep end with her. She was quite up for it, even though she'd not done anything like it before. On the other hand, how difficult could it be? Were men with learning disabilities not exactly the devils she knew so very well? Should she film some of it? Turning on sturdy heels she ran back to the office, got her bag, and camera, and sped to her class. Nothing could have prepared her for nine overgrown adolescents, with huge faces, hands and feet, malfeasance dripping from every over-sized pore, in a knot of light-shackles, boyish head-locking, arm-twisting and such, being disentangled and seated, far from each other,

by two huge, good-natured security guards. They settled. She hung back for a moment while this cohered, and switched on the camera concealed in her handbag.

The guards invited her into the silent classroom, and stood on either side of the open door. She approached them with the courtesan's 'no, no, no you don't have a small one' *sympatico*, and was soon in blithe control. The class, she was informed by their spokesperson, a frightening individual, definitely a godfather in the making, was mid-project. Today was the day they put finishing touches to their mugs made of clay. Then, he informed her further the mugs would dry before being painted on and glazed. After that, he concluded proudly, they would be fired, all of them, in the kiln at a very high tempariture. His eyes lit up, sending a shiver down Citronella's spine. Arsonists. She knew the type. They got right into it, with barely a shake of the chains, and the class hummed along peacefully. Citronella noticed that the handles of their mugs were quite disproportionately larger than the mugs, like a big ear on a thimble. She got poignant footage of this, and close-ups of diligent, large hands working in the delicate detail upon their mugs with care and pride; and pairs of huge feet in light shackles, that would rattle when they shifted in their seats.

Patensie was pleased with the report back from the two guards. She learnt fast. He started to take her seriously, and was thereafter more professional in his manner. He behaved so well that Citronella dropped an instinctual guard and asked him to go with her to the film festival at the Alexander. There's something in this film business, she said, it's a great release. Perhaps they might introduce film to the school's curriculum, she wondered out loud. Patensie was quite open to suggestion, and looked forward to the festival a bit more than he ought to have, professionally speaking.

Chapter 11

The Ruse of Law

After having successfully cleaned and made tea, fetched and carried, Pumeza Dikeni, a new junior lawyer at Rajbansi - Sigcawu, sat by herself in their offices on the third floor at Lorelei Terrace, lit only by the finite spot of a desk-lamp, into which she'd angled documents in the matter of Joburg Savings and Loan vs. Botha and her PC keyboard. She referred occasionally to legal precedent lying in shadowed wait in one tome or another, close at hand. She was hot on the trail of a loophole in the client's favor, and impatient to prove herself.

She'd lost track of time, until finally, the hole on the middle of the loop, a microscopic procedural anomaly in the bank's foreclosure documents that established a missing link in due process that, if challenged, could mean the unconditional return of the farm, possibly with costs. She mailed off a memo summarizing this for Junior to send on to his father, which advised confidently that the way forward was to offer the bank exactly one ZAR for the farm, or sue for the flawed re-possession, which would open the bank to a review of all such past re-possessions, of which there were many. In the current political climate, would the court see the bank as villain or hero? If however the bank settled with them in the matter of the Botha farm, the firm would itself clamp the loophole shut, and the bank would be safe once again. Pumeza concluded by recommending that they leave unsaid that they would proceed with a class action if the Botha farm were not promptly returned.

*

Back in fair Verona, in the intimate rehearsal room at the Alexander Theatre, May-Ling Wu-Masimela, the 'mirthful, scrutible Chinese sociologist', and Director of Romeo & Julietta, was having the cross-disciplinary, interstitial time of her post-modern life. She'd realized that she'd need to built in a simultaneous translation: Julietta, for that was indeed her name, the dazzling Albino who worked in the box office and refreshments kiosk, shone brightly in mostly Tswana; Olive, the foul-mouthed, ill-tempered theatre cleaner, was shaping up brilliantly as Juliet's nurse, in Zulu, as was Cornwell, the Somalian theatre security guard with the one front tooth sticking out at quite an angle, as Benvolio, in Italian. Romeo had not yet been cast, although, and indeed on this very day, there'd been many contenders, all without an edge.

May-Ling pondered funding possibilities for the translation technology and management while recovering from a rotten showing from one of many Romeo's she'd rejected. She was finding that as her cast took more control, so Romeo was more specifically defined, in the sense of not being defined at all. May-Ling was much seduced by the workings of mostly her own mind. She looked at her watch for there was one more, final contender for Romeo. Well ahead of herself, she'd already decided to use a puppet, or robot if no viable Romeo appeared. Again, she looked to the watch: the final contender was not late yet, if he appeared immediately.

Kobus wandered into the room, filled with cast and technical people on a break, and cleared his throat gently. May-Ling welcomed him with a discouraging yawn, while, from under the collective fringe, he felt the untrusting scrutiny of a captive audience waiting to be underwhelmed. People around him waiting to be disappointed could well have already become the story of his life, if he ever let it, even for a moment. There he was, bang on time, observing them looking at him, with corn blonde hair slicked back flatly, a side path and angled fringe; dressed in good cloth trousers, in check, and a tucked-in blue shirt. The sleeves to a pale yellow jersey hung loosely over the torso flanks, jersey itself over the back, like Junior and other Joburg urban gents and caped lambs-wool avengers at the hotel. He felt hot and sweaty, and like his back was against a wall.

First up, he was asked to read a poem of haunting beauty by Ingrid Jonker (1933-65, suicide by drowning), Sylvia Plath of the Afrikaans South. He thought sadly of Ingrid's tragic end, which he'd learnt about from his Ouma, or granny (certainly not at school or church), all of which depressed him. Consequently, he read with moving solemnity and an almost Elizabethan musicality. There was a warming of the room: chilly doubt working up into surprise, on its scorching way to amazement.

Kobus discarded the jersey and rolled up his shirtsleeves: "I can sign, a bit," he said shyly.

This took them by surprise, mostly because they didn't know what he meant, but wanted to very much. They leant forward, some on the edge of the seat.

"What do you mean," inquired the director, lingering an eye over Romeo's arms as she leant forward, as if to ask, what bit of me would you like to sign.

"I have a deaf cousin," explained Kobus: "We spend a lot of time together. I could sign, a bit, and speak, for the deaf people in the audience."

"Fabulous," clappety-clapped May-Ling.

She paused, dramatically, and closed the lids, lifting them heaven ward in divine contemplation.

"Yesss," she continued thoughtfully, lowering the chin and raising the lashes, slowly: "You might *declaim*, certainly, but," she fore-finger-wagged: "Not too much, only when you feel it coming on, only then, it must be real; a declamation can so very easily become, how do you say..."

"Jaaaaaa," interrupted Kobus in a slow exhalation, stretching the arms: "Like I said, just a bit," using his thumb and forefinger to 'sign' exactly how much.

The room was getting very hot. After a flurry of window opening, the audition continued. Benvolio appeared in his black security guard uniform, which worked. We'll keep that, said the director, with or without truncheon? After some discussion about this, May-Ling asked them to read a short piece, and translate their sense of it in their own words, on the hop. Romeo signed, just a bit, as he spoke:

ROMEO

Here, dis vokking vroeg!

BENVOLIO

But new struck nine.

ROMEO

Woe is ek...

Hoe veel langer voel hierdie ure van treur vir my;

Waarheentoe beweeg Pa so blits vinning?

BENVOLIO

It was. What sadness lengthen Romeo's hours?

ROMEO

Hoe veel gouer vlieg ure van geluk, en liefde.

Ja nee...

May-Ling crashed off her chair laughing, and writhed on the floor clutching her stomach to disinhibited guffaws from the rest of the audience. Cornwell looked pleased, and bowed elegantly; Kobus felt good about having cracked-up an audience.

May-Ling recovered, wiped away a tear, and announced with a theatrical gesture to Kobus: "Romeo is cast!"

Kobus soaked up at the hearty applause that followed, and felt that he might cry. He laughed loudly instead. Kobus, it appeared, was a hit!

*

While Kobus took a bow, Cora and Sonny Wietzman left Braamfontein quietly, with only the luggage they would take on this, first of many cruises. The plan, as is known, was that they would circumnavigate always towards the summer, anywhere and everywhere. They had never sailed before, and it was all hugely exciting. They felt light and mobile, ready for anything, and were at this time through with sentiment. There was no looking back. All the worldly goods fixed and portable had been sold on, given away or stored. There were appropriate contingencies in place were one or the other to falter, but until then it would be as long a last hurrah as they could muster.

They flew to Cape Town, and were met by their cruise organizer, who installed them in the understated splendor of a Grill Suite with an outside balcony and personal butler, a considerable upgrade to what they had booked. This was an excellent start. The cruise liner had an eye for a solid long-term pair of travellers with a sterling credit rating: dip 'em into first class once and they'll never go back to steerage was the reasoning. It worked more often than not. Soon they were joined by a happy gaggle of family and friends. With enthusiasm they all explored the ship while the butler unpacked, a thing Cora could have gotten used to. Came the time to depart, their company disembarked, up went the gangplank, toot-toot went the funnels, and off they sailed in a Technicolor storm of confetti, brightly hued streamers and any number of balloons, to a lively brass band. It was all almost too much fun. After a lovely promenade on the deck, Cora in a new pashmina, Sonny in a new cardie; and a perfect sunset, then a memorable meal at a Michelin restaurant, Sonny and Cora returned to their cabin feeling like the luckiest people on earth. When they got back to their suite, it looked much smaller than it appeared at first, and felt lonely and anonymous. It was claustrophobic. They both felt queasy.

The movement of the sea turned from enchanting to menacing. Michelin stars were hurled into the lavatory. They fell silent. There was nothing to do, since the butler had been and gone, and everything was too much in its place. He'd also turned down the bed, so there wasn't even that to do. They slid into bed like bad news into an envelope, and lay there stiffly and wordlessly.

Sonny cracked first: "Did we pay in full upfront?" he inquired into the silence.

"Of course not, certainly the deposit has been paid in full, it was a bit of a wrangle, but they agreed to have me pay in the rest after the first night on board, very unusual, but I did insist," reassured Cora, "In case you change your mind."

He looked at her sharply: "Do you think we need to get dressed, or could we go to the Night Purser in our robes, now."

"There is no such thing as a Night Purser Sonny," she replied.

"There will be," he determined, taking control of the listing HMS Retirement.

They went forth to locate the Night Purser in their robes, taking stock of the position in quiet, urgent conversation as they did. They agreed that it was a great idea on paper, and that they were around ten years out of step with their own plans; that they were behaving recklessly, like a pair of irresponsible, immature seventy-year olds, and should with all speed pin down the dreaded contingency, and then adventure onwards from that more secure positioning. While this happy new direction was all fine and dandy the landlubbers did need urgently to get onto terra firma. As they neared the purser's office, they espied the backs of a pair in robes, very much like themselves, through the window of a themed bar called the Late Night Lido, and in small print, For the Wide-Awake and Young at Heart, at which point their moment turned from 'what were we thinking' to 'why not give it a whirl while we're here?'

They went in and struck up a conversation with their mirror images, a pair of reckless seventy-something Americans, Sheila and Malvern, she a New York WASP who was once an actress on Broadway, he out of American Gothic, the painting. Malvern's family made a fortune in surgical supplies. They too need to get off the ship, pronto. What were they thinking? Sonny and Malvern seemed content to give up on the evening and make a new plan in the morning. Sheila and Cora went to the ladies, where they had a short but intense conversation about their medical cover on the ship, and discovered that they had one emergency helicopter evacuation each, in an extreme emergency.

Cora returned by herself and said to Sonny conspiratorially: "Whatever happens now, go with it and follow my lead, we'll be off this ship in no time."

"Bring it on," he replied with a look of love, and relief, for he could not bear another moment on the ship. Enter Sheila, who collapsed into a spasm, frothing at the mouth; she writhed about dramatically before lying there as if dead.

"Is there a doctor in the house?" Cora enquired helplessly.

A young, inexperienced ship's doctor, recently employed, was summoned urgently. Sonny bullied him: Do you want this dear old lady to die on the ship, do you? Do you need this right at the beginning of your work here? She has lashings of insurance, why don't we get her off the ship and into the caring arms of somebody else?

Three hours later they're in Durban, and booked into the Royal Hotel. The hotel was freshly re-decorated and under new management; they settled in, loving it so much that they called friends who joined them there, to support them in having to think again about their retirement, poolside, with cards and martinis. Sheila and Malvern fitted in well, and regaled their company with various versions of their escape from ship.

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A storm brewed overhead in Braamfontein. Holly settled into bed with her new books, and a rare treat, a tall glass of fresh milk that had not yet gone off. What a lovely name, she thought, Pope-Hennessy, as she put the glass on a table beside her bed, noticing that the table was not exactly level by the tilted meniscus to the milk. Pope-Hennessy's book was no bodice-ripper, but a study of the Atlantic slave trade, from 1441-1807. In this way Holly stumbled upon consciousness, and there would be no turning back. It could not have happened to a nicer or more deserving person. The original owner would have been very pleased. But Holly didn't get around to reading it quite then, instead sliding it under a leg to the bedside table, which thereafter listed no more.

Holly turned instead to the other book she'd bought at 'Unlucky Luke's', a compelling if preposterous pulp fiction. *By 2018,* it began, *the Mafia such as is it generally known had ceased to exist, and had by then evolved into a significant part of the legit global multi-national economy, becoming part of the very establishment they once reviled and looted, and discouraging the very criminal activity that raised them up, as any establishment would and must. 'Our thing' became a very new thing since between the old mafia and the new there were left blowing in the wind many surviving mafioso in old age; and even more widows, or mafiuso, and orphans.*
Haillie Gambino, Mafia Historian

'It will have seemed strange,' read Holly further, 'to a visitor to see the mob of scruffy little boys pin down one of their own, and hold a primitive blowtorch to the sole of his calloused foot,' wrote Gambino: 'Yet, there it was, right in front of her. Sofia despaired and intervened with vigorous sweeps and thrusts of her maple walking stick'. It was the first book she'd read that gripped and drew her in; she felt that she was reading for the very first time. As she read, she imagined a small village in the riverine hills outside Cefalu, near Palermo, in Sicily; only *mafiuso*, or widows, womenfolk; orphans, old men and young boys are left, Cefalu's stock of adult manhood having over generations been decimated by the law, mafia politics, vendettas, infidelity and such. Their boys, including many orphans, are growing up and the elders witness early signs of malfeasance, for example: six year olds hanging up peers by the feet for winning at

marbles; betting and match-fixing at snakes and ladders, punch-ups at bingo and monopoly, bar brawls with fatalities, that sort of thing, and much worse. The local orphanages, attached to the monastery and abbey, one for boys, the other for girls, are completely out of control. The story so far had the most extraordinary effect on Holly's imagination. As she read and imagined the line between blurred:

It is 2018, in the hills of Cefalu, outside Palermo, Sicily, where twice-widowed, cunning old Sofia Gambino considers her past and future. She has lost two husbands, four sons, and many male cousins and uncles; her father and at two grandfathers before him, to mafia shenanigans over time. Sofia manages what's left of the family wine and olive estate, Casa Gambino, where she lives with a sexy great grand daughter in her early teens, Salome, whom she fears for. Sofia is a caregiver/mentor for girl orphans at the abbey. She gives Salome a small pistol for her ninth birthday and says: I'll teach you how to use it; it's a matter of time, shoot if accosted; they won't approach you after. She has already taught the orphan gals how to make small catapults, and how to use scarf, hat and brooch pins as weapons; how to use ringed fingers as a knuckle-buster, and so on.

Look, says Sofia to Salome when she turns sixteen, you have to get out of here. You're like a ripe fruit; these bastards are going to want to pluck you. Sofia and the other elders conspire: we're not going be able to change these boys into men, they agree; they're going make our old age hell. They are all their father's sons, rotten to the core; this we know and see. The few remaining old men, a fragile minority, agree with some persuasion and gaps in meals. Sod this, say the women. We need to look ahead, take charge. So began the post-modern traditions of a global mafia run by its women, who stole from the rich to give mainly to them selves, but also to the poor and vulnerable, read and imagined Holly further.

What we'll do is this, resolve the elder women, in a mode of planning for a serene future: let's deploy the older boys to rob reserves of ill gotten loot; this will keep them busy and exorcise their criminal sides. Let's send them far, far away to rob others before they start practicing on us; who knows, with a little luck they'll all end up in foreign prisons, for life; at best they'll marry in wherever they find themselves and stay there, forever. It all becomes urgent when the local, much adored church is robbed yet again, this time of the all important communion blood of the dude chalice, of solid old Aztec silver, part of a gift from the Vatican, and then Pope, when the church was built. Time to make our move, decide the elder women: today the chalice, tomorrow the cross itself. To begin with, they agree, let's send a recce as far south as possible, where Holly is asleep

cradling the book, dreaming of little old Sicilian widows in black hunched over terminals in the cyber-cafes in and around Cefalu, double-clicking recklessly for information that would help them follow up ill-gotten stashes they were already well aware of.

But they can't hack it, and make a deal with a sensitive twelve-year old cyber genius of the village, Carlo; he works for them, and trains Salome, on condition that he is never sent away. They set him up *pronto* with a smashing computer system, and high speed uncapped inter-net in a barn/cellar where he hacks away at the passage of illicit fortunes ripe for the picking. Salome responds well to the new technologies. They become most accomplished at tracking large sums that appear legitimately in one place, only to disappear suddenly, popping up elsewhere not too long after.

Together, in Holly's dreams, they hone in on a most vulnerable stash, far south in Africa, in Braamfontein, Joburg, Braamfontein Savings and Loan, for many years a depository of the most scandalously ill-gotten gains in currency, shares, title deeds, art, stamps, ingots and gems. They can in fact open all of the safety deposit boxes from Palermo electronically, but, and of course, would have to get into the vaults. After much research, planning and scheming, Salome comes to Joburg, Holly dreams, having read, as she tosses and turns uneasily. Salome moves into Number Two at Lorelei, and is joined there by three tough orphans from the old country; Holly dreams that she sees them drill through the floor to Number Two, into a tunnel leading to Braamfontein Savings and Loan across the road.

Before waking up Holly sees two silhouettes, hand in hand, making their way through a dusty village with people holding up lanterns on either side of their path to light the way. She wakes up with a start at first light when her dreams end with a small rough ruby glowing, throbbing and then beating, the sound of the muscles of a racing heart, in a place and time far beyond place and time.

*

The memo from Pumeza Dikeni about the Botha farm came to Junior's attention, in a folder on his lap, on a bench in the garden of the Joburg Theatre, waiting for an appointment: one Joey Adams, a sometime cat burglar and exploder of safes, to arrive. Junior smiled as he fed birds crumbs from a blueberry muffin. How he loved his work, the father that had made it all possible, and the Gogo's Tubby and Smoky who'd got the ball rolling, upwards. He considered the words to brief Joey, who had grown paranoid over time, probably with good reason, and had taken to disguise. Junior smiled again and looked forward to asking his father to approach the bank in the matter of the Botha

farm. A large, hairy woman in a Laura Ashley ensemble sat down next to him and looked straight ahead.

In a gruff tone, Ms. Ashley said: "Greetings Junior. What can I do for you."

Junior briefed him and handed him an envelope. Joey left. Junior sms'd Kobus Botha who was then at a rehearsal and picked up the message later, in the company of his cousin Tony, looking at apartments to buy in Maboneng. Good news about the farm, read Junior's text, my father is applying his mind. Uriah duly met with Kobus's bank in the matter of the Botha farm. He felt them out without revealing his fine edit of Pumeza's report. The bank was brief and firm. They didn't give a toss or an inch, and he left a copy of Pumeza's report with them upon leaving. She was quite right, he felt, and would go far at Rajbansi and Partners. By the time he got to the foyer they'd called him in a more conciliatory register, being quite certain that they could see the way clear to the unconditional return of the Botha farm, and might they discuss Rajbansi - Sigcawu possibly taking on the closing of the loophole that forced their hand, in this matter. He looked forward to passing on this very good news, especially since he now knew what it felt like to consider the loss of a treasured property.

Chapter 12

The Tramp of Lorelei Terrace

Technically, Smoky and Tubby were Fick's agents and lawyers until the day they each died even though Nhlohlotelo was by then pretty much the purser on the good and leaky ship Rajbansi - Sigcawu, with Uriah shakily at the wheel, blown hither and thither by the mortality of his parents and what it might mean for him in a guilt-storm of Schadenfreude since of course he was relieved that it was them, and not yet him. Tubby and Smoky had arranged and coordinated Fick's one way out, and referred him to places to live and people to meet wherever he went. They'd sometimes intersect abroad when Tubby and Smoky took their winter break from Lorelei, Rajbansi - Sigcawu and Ntylo's.

From South Africa, back then in 1965, Fick went to many countries to sell a particular understanding of the South African political scene and was effective at all kinds of people to people diplomacy, and at raising funds for the democratic movement. For these people it was his civility and deep humility that impressed. And, he was excellent company, who encouraged respect and the unsolicited disclosure of confidences and views in good faith and confidence, with his direct gaze, firm handshake and scintillating opening banter that put people at their ease immediately. He was then one of few persuasive South African artists in exile, including the likes of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, crisscrossing the world to inform people, and win them over to the need for a change, smoothly and peacefully, at first, and by other means if necessary, but change there had to be: absolutely everybody was starting to say so.

He wrote frequently and was often published by international opinion forming publications. He got to New York after around two years of this, then travelled the States and settled in Los Angeles with a strong body of work behind him, credibility and every potential to become a bankable writer of easily consumable Negro schlock for the film industry. This he did, and there he settled. It wasn't difficult work, and it paid well. He was quick and thorough and could do things in one take. He became one of few, and highly prized, under the radar, go-to scriptwriters for onset script changes. He could work cheerfully with anything and anybody, anywhere, to conjure the line or dialogue exactly as required, each time.

After a while he could name his price. He worked and travelled constantly. In LA he made many new mostly Chinese, Mexican, Red Indian and Negro friends, with the

odd gringo thrown in. He tasted a new normal. Here he didn't need to hide, he could simply be and live, in plain sight. There was much drinking, dancing and many women. He had no interest in celebrity, seeing early on and close-up how much it fucked people up. From LA he travelled often for one reason or another, or no reason at all, but mostly to work and/or meet up with comrades and friends scattered across and constantly moving about the world. Throughout, Fick published slim volumes of poetry, his preferred form, which he habitually sent to Nhlohlotelo to sign off before it went to the printer. She'd predictably make one small suggestion that would change everything for the better.

Fick returned to South Africa briefly for the first time in 1990, discreetly, and while staying in his old digs on the second floor at Lorelei for much of that year, reconnected with Nhlohlotelo et al, and got to know Holly, with whom he clicked immediately across differences in age, world view, social habits, taste and style. Shortly after settling in at Lorelei, Fick got the sense that there were, as always, huge holes in the Rajbansi – Sigcawu – Lorelei - Ntylo fisc, and made a careless offer on the roof rights to Lorelei to Smoky and Tubby, which they accepted after some negotiation. Between them, through the years, this was not unusual: it occurred that sometimes they'd have cash, and Fick not, and the reverse. There was never any need to ask, and they allowed themselves the give and take of loan-shark rates of interest, which they found hugely amusing.

After a great deal of internet ting and other research, Fick found and employed an architect/builder with this brief: make an indigenous, sort of Highveld Zen/Noguchi garden with water-wise features to drizzle the dry Joburg winter months with water stored from the rainy season, and a low, simple, open plan inside/outside shed to live and work, be and play in. The architect found a huge palm tree with the potential to cast substantial shadow, at the auction of the effects of a liquidated hotel, which became his only indulgence, and lapse in taste. It was hoisted onto the roof by a crane and team costing more to hire for an hour than the tree itself, and re-planted in an enormous six-foot high concrete drum, with light deco detail. It was not exactly to his taste but more tolerable than an umbrella.

Many years had passed since Fick's monogrammed buzzer to the roof had been set into the wall below the panel of buzzers. The palm tree and its leaves had grown and spread. Fick spent a lot of time in its shade, working at a table. These days, at seventy-eight, Fick enjoyed his roof thoroughly. It had taken a while. Large floor to ceiling

cabinets with sliding glass doors were the walls to his shed, more than enough space for his ever-growing collections of books and records. Everything was on one level, the better to navigate with ease in a motorized wheelchair if and when it came to that. Until that happy day, Fick meanwhile delighted in the Nelson Mandela Bridge when all the lights worked; Thrupps deliveries, Uber, first class on Cathay Pacific; endless summers in Portofino with hilarious, impossible old, and new friends; the thrilling fireworks on Chinese New Year and Diwali, home on the roof, Lorelei Terrace and of course, her muse; the inspirational young people in Braamfontein, including Holly and Leroy, and where they might all find a place for themselves on the parabola of generational shifting: surely, and here he sighed, all things to live for.

Nhlohlotelo had an epiphany during the final months of the time of Tubby and Smoky that revealed, that like many others, the Rajbansi - Sigcawu's thought they would live forever. Her take on mortality tended more to eastern notions of perpetual birth and re-birth; of previous and future lives and she disdained any fear of death, for there was no such thing, only re-birth, and, of course, it was her greatest fear too, death. While, at the time, she mused over what Smoky and Tubby might be reborn as, which cheered her up, the Uriah's were shaken to their core, humorless and hopeless during that time, and for quite a while after. The dreadlocked muse became the glue that held it all together. Fick on the roof was of some distant comfort, but not of much use, when he was there, which was not often. He was inconsolable. He too, it seemed, believed that they, and he, would live forever. Fools, thought Nhlohlotelo as she meted out care and consideration, sympathy and compassion, and did a lot of hard work to keep things from going pear. Fool am I, she thought, and, as she often did, she liberated her dreadlocks and shook them out vigorously to get rid of any oncoming negative thinking. It smelled of sandalwood, on account of a lethally sharpened long wooden pin, the girth and length of a fat knitting needle, that she used to keep the locks up and out of her face.

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Through a window to Leroy's apartment the light played over his Fick Mankazana collection of slim books, features and articles by and about, and interviews with, all in a smart purple box on a small lemon yellow writing table under a window, and a Van Gogh rattan chair in lime green. Leroy reached for the box of Mankazana but froze with the hands in mid-air at the sound of a roll of wheels over the flagstones to the lobby, trolley-trolley. Into the lift it wheeled; up went the lift, past to the third floor, where it stopped. Leroy raced up the stairs to the unlit third floor to find nothing and nobody

there, except for two discreet luggage-wheel skids that went nowhere, and a locked door to the roof, with a mat in front of it. Leroy noticed that the mat was askew. Could it have been used recently? But, work beckoned; there were Korean video cameras to be sold, and he could explore no further.

In his own mind Leroy had already formed an insupportably subjective perception of the figure as peripatetic, a nuisance with boxes on wheels, coming and going, a pejorative 'other' to Leroy's sense of urban self. Without the correctives of any external scrutiny or self-criticism, this view soon congealed into ignorant self-conviction: he was, to Leroy's mind, of a lower caste. Leroy asked himself: Who the fffff was this person? When he ought perhaps to have asked instead: 'Who am *I*?' Am I judging the beggar unfairly, he asked of himself because he looks and acts like one? Yes I am, and he has to go: too old and shabby, lowers the property value, these were his thoughts.

To his everlasting regret, Leroy said to him archly in passing, "I hope those boxes are yours brother."

Exit the imposter, who appeared not to hear him, so loud were the wheels on the uneven stone floors.

The next evening Leroy returned to Lorelei from work to glimpse a figure clambering out of a huge black car with luggage wobbling on a wheeled trolley. 'Aha,' thought Leroy, 'at friggin' last I'll know who this is': Leroy hangs back, unseen, and follows the figure, who takes the lift to the top floor, trolley - trolley, while Leroy snakes up the stairs casting perhaps a shadow in Homburg and trench coat with the collar up. By the time he gets to the top floor the figure has disappeared. Leroy approaches the doorway to the roof off the third floor lobby where the door is ajar; in he goes; there is a gentle, upwardly sloping ramp leading to a heavy industrial door and jamb, with a small, barred viewing square cut into the door at a height that requires Leroy to tippy–toe. He presses his eye to the square, and sees a minimalist eerie of glass, timber and corrugated iron on the roof, almost invisible in an indigenous garden with murmuring water features and bird baths visited by Joburg birds like the *pycnonotis capensis*, or Bush Blackcap, it of the garrulous call and bright yellow bum feathers, and the *ploceus cucullatus spilonotus*, shameless yet beguiling thief of anything worth weaving. Leroy, looking at the backyard to a home of more than twenty years, is gob-smacked and confused: should he stay or run? He turns to go and topples himself on an untied shoelace, falling lightly to graze the forehead against the floor, which changed his mind.

Back to the hole in the door he limps, raises himself by the toes and presses the eye in. It swivels towards the movement of what seemed to be a curtain at the furthest end of the garden. He squints: it is the back of a person in a brocade dressing gown, or, to Leroy's eyes, a robe made out of an old curtain, and velvet slippers; Amy Winehouse declaims movingly from within; it is an oasis out of place and time, as on the east coast of Africa before the Portuguese swung around the horn and lowered the tone. The lights from the Mandela Bridge and various light features in the garden illuminate this figure in the dusk watering a plant here and there. The birds seem to be in communion with him. He turns around, and is talking into a phone.

He lifts his head to yell with waggy finger, "...and not a penny less!"

He pauses and listens.

"No," he replies firmly into the phone: "You'll get it when I send it."

For the first time Leroy realizes that the figure lives on the roof to Lorelei, and what a pad it is. Just then, a woman in a kaftan sashays in from the wings, stage left, and glides upstage with a tray of two large Martini's.

"Come, come, come my dove," she trills and coos in an exotic accent: "Life, it is too short. You should know. Take a break, let's have a swim, it iz a lovely evening, ze pool is warm enough...we'll skinny dip, nobody's watching."

A swim? Where? Is ze pool *warm* enough? In Braamfontein? Surely not, thought Leroy. This then was not the recycler, and clearly no *clochard,* beggar or hobo at all. Leroy got back to his apartment, cleaned him self up and went directly to Number Five to find and quiz Holly. An exotic flamingo-pink sunset over Joburg tinged discreetly the mullioned windows to Lorelei's facade. Nhlohlotelo's features opened the door to Number Five crossly in response to Leroy's rather urgent knocking. Her magnified gaze met his through over-sized reading glasses. He froze, thinking to him self: 'Gogo, what big eyes you have,' and, in a small voice, stammered his request to see Holly.

She removed the glasses with a loud jingle-jangle of a large bunch of keys tied to her waist: "I see you've been up to the roof," she said calmly, waving the reading glasses at a bank of four small, vintage security monitors that flickered with images of four access points to Lorelei over her desk opposite the front door, on the far side: "I thought we spoke about that." And with that, she closed the door.

*

Soxy Thornton loved shooting in Mexico, a hop and a skip from L.A, and, to her, very much like home, Africa. On location in Tulum, on the east coast of the ancient Mayan

paradise of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico for her Lucy Lavender series, on account of the flattering early morning light there, Soxy Thornton worked through a long day of many takes at a grand old hotel where Lucy has a rendezvous with an ally, an Asian character, to find and neutralize a nemesis, all in a day's work for the indefatigable Lucy Lavender, who was enjoying herself immensely, and making a fortune as she did. That evening she was chilling out, having a natter and getting pissed with an old-timer of her long acquaintance outside her caravan under the stars. He was the half-Cherokee on-set writer, who could also draw, very handy in a pinch with the storyboard, known in the industry as 'Chief Rhyming Couplet', or Couplet, who was very good with last-minute dialogue changes, and a superb character actor. They chatted about one thing and another, knocking back good tequila. In increasingly philosophical generality, the conversation meandered to that exalted leveler, raw talent; they swapped gossip about the Venice awards. Soxy regaled him with Leroy's performance, and how she and Gomez kept him to themselves.

"He is a unique talent," she declared: "Comes around as often as a new Dalai Lama.

She inferred in a whisper: "But, he lacks confidence."

"Mmmm, replied Couplet sardonically: "The tragic hero who never quite knows how talented he is," and he wandered off into an incoherent though interesting-sounding monologue.

He sat up sharply: "Hang on," he said, then went on about an under the radar wizard of original film scripting from Africa: "Portofino...long ago...he'll light a fire under your fellow," he said: "No, I don't remember his name, was famous one weekend for being slapped by Sophia Loren, all very playful, but he can't possibly be alive."

Soxy sat up, leant forward and poured two tequila's, banging one down in front of him: "Talk Old Timer," she said: "I'll listen...tell me about this wizard."

The old-timer sat bolt upright suddenly, and belched: "His name is Fff.....Mnnnk..., shit, Shhydney Poitier sent him lines and dialogue to rewrite back in the day, they say. Never met him myself, but, from what I've heard over the years, young, gifted, black: comes here in the early sixties probably, burns white-hot, gets homesick, goes back. I have a dog-eared card for his lawyers. Used it for location shoots there, but I really don't take that on anymore."

Couplet tottered down memory lane. Soxy lost hope that he would remember anything that evening, but was confident that he might recall the name and find the card

in the refreshing light of the new morrow. The as yet nameless wizard sounded like just the thing. The morning after, Chief Rhyming Couplet sheepishly gave an old dog-eared Rajbansi - Sigcawu card to Soxy Thornton over piquant Bloody Mary's, with no recollection of the why. She reminded him, but he still couldn't remember the name of the word wizard from Hillbrow, Joburg, Africa. Soxy called the number on the card in Joburg, South Africa immediately.

She was encouraged when the call was answered promptly: "No," stalled a chilling, uncooperative voice called Nhlohlotelo: "You cannot speak to Tubby or Smoky Rajbansi; you have an old card, very old...you cannot speak to them Madam, because they are both dead. A Uriah, as in one of two, will get back to you, someday."

Soxy pressed on through her professional disbelief at the cheek of the woman, and inquired about Fikile Mankazana: "Yes Madam," the voice brightened: "Mr. Mankazana is very much alive and, yes, he might be working...ah, new work, ahh, quite a different matter...no, he's not taking on any new work until late next year, if he's alive then...no, he's fine, very old...how much did you say? Ahhh, quite a different matter, could you please put that in writing and send it on for Mr. Mankazana's attention...you got this far, you should know where to send it on to...my pleasure. Don't expect a reply any time soon. Mr. Mankazana leaves Joburg when it get's too hot...yes, it is hot today...no Madam, I wouldn't say *too* hot. But, it is getting hotter by the day...my pleasure."

Hollywood, Los Angeles, Soxy Thornton's home: an intimate, Hollywood palace arranged around a huge oval pool. Uniformed Mexican staff moved around the house and garden very quietly. Gomez, queen of the castle in Soxy's absence, worked diligently poolside on an elegant polar white rattan chaise under a huge gray and white striped umbrella. Her face was covered with a bright green Dead-Sea clay mask, and she was having her nails done by two young Chinese women, while she worked.

Up on the roof of Lorelei Terrace in Braamfontein, Joburg, Fick Mankazana put a recent note about new work aside, and grinned. He loved Lucy Lavender, 'Marvel's' response to ageing yet bloodthirsty global mass audiences. Lavender was a wrinkled avenger who with each new episode went into mortal battle against underestimations of the mature citizen.

He looked at his watch and made a call: "Soxy Thornton please, Fick calling from Africa," he said.

"She's in transit," they replied: "We'll put you onto Vera Gomez, her assistant. They've been waiting for this call; Gomez will get back to you immediately."

In LA Gomez is oblivious to the increasingly ridiculous attempts of a strapping pool-boy to attract her attention, and affections, in the process nearly drowning in a tangle with the creepy crawly in the background.

She is approached by a starched and frilly maid: "Ze office, zey phone, iz very unusual, zey never call, Thornton she doesn't like it, must be meurto importante, you are to call this man, they say to call him now, he is still alive, and he is awake."

She holds up a piece of paper upon which she's written the name Fikile Mankazana, because, as she says: "Iz no possible to say in Spanish or English, I try many timez, it ties my tongue into a knot...sounds more like Mayan, but I don't speak Mayan. Who speaks Mayan?"

Gomez makes the call. Fick is smooth-such is the manner, thus the style. What a sexy sounding older man, she feels, how he purrs. She can't wait to meet him. She flusters her way through the call but gets Fick safely onboard as mentor to Leroy and consultant to his film class. Gomez calls Soxy and they decide that Gomez should high-ho to Braamfontein asap.

"Do not," ordered Soxy in a terrifying register: "Do not bother coming back without a new script."

Paying Leroy the ultimate film industry compliment, she continued thoughtfully: "I might even put my own money into it if you and Fick pop a real gem out of Leroy, I might, perhaps you should too. It's not every day that such a talent and energy comes around, you know this well, as do I."

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Gomez was a bird of many Meso-America, or central South America before the Spanish, feathers: she was first the distant consequence of early intermarriage amongst the ancient Mayans; then, the Spanish nipped over from Cuba to the Yucatan, a flat, hard peninsula, after which the Gringo arrived from the north and elsewhere. In more recent times Vera Gomez was born to the son of a mother whose mother, Mamacita, meaning 'gorgeous' married a North America archeologist in Chechen Itza, meaning 'at the mouth of the well of Itza' in a culture where *cenotes*, or ancient underground wells are sacred. Mamacita, Gomez's great-grandmother excavated that the archeologist she'd married in good faith had a family in America, and other families elsewhere where he'd worked. She ran away

to Tulum and remarried, moving then to the United States, where she birthed Vera's own grandmother, on her father's side, to be clear.

She was no stranger to illusion: the priest kings of the ancient Mayans were smarter than most, and worked with natural elements. For example, in the middle of the substantially excavated and restored sacred center of ancient Mayan civilization, Chechen Itza, on the Yucatan Peninsula, there are three open chambers right at the top of a huge 75 feet high pyramid with 91 steps on each side, the Kukulcan Pyramid, surrounded by an expanse of open, flat ground, or plaza. On spring and fall equinoxes, the king priest stood on a very particular spot, thirty meters away from the center of the pyramid's north stairway and clapped the hands once; the sound of the clap drifted up and through the transformative acoustics of the chambers right at the top, and echoed out as two Quetzal (a long-tailed exotic bird) chirps, as if from the heavens; on an equinox sunset, the steps of the pyramid create a serpentine shadow which appears to slither down the structure; best to book well in advance for the equinoxes. Even though Gomez often amazed her-self and those around her, there was little that could surprise her, a mindset that would serve her well in Africa.

O. R Tambo International, Joburg, is Southern Africa's hub, not unlike Abu Dhabi, frantic at this time with departures and transit arrivals from West, North and East streaming through to get to the Kruger National Park, Cape Town, Durban, the Eastern Cape, the Okavango swamps, the Serengeti, Mozambique and so on. It was early November 2018, month of Diwali, early summer in Joburg. Vera Gomez, on her way to Braamfontein, Joburg, South Africa from L.A via New York, settled into her seat on a plane chartered by a close rapper poetess chum, Minnie Washington, who was going that way on tour. They'd met in Greenwich Village, New York as younger gals on the up and up, and shared an apartment there for a year or so. Gomez had been Minnie's first agent, and both had since moved on. Gomez wanted to produce movies, and off to L.A she went, where Soxy, more South African than she ever was anything else, poached her from a loathed peer, a Joan Crawford to her Bette Davis. Minnie became a star, and kept in contact. She'd offered Gomez a seat in exchange for her going over Minnie's Afro-Byzantine tour contracts. The plane took off and once they'd reached altitude, Minnie and Gomez huddled over the tour paperwork. Two hours later, and they were done. Gomez undertook to connect Minnie with a firm of lawyers in Joburg that she had come to trust. Minnie moved off to the front of the plane to rehearse and Gomez then made

calls and worked the computer, fiddling with canapés and cocktail lobster tails whilst sipping champagne, until she fell asleep feeling groovy.

At 4 30 am on the Thursday after the second film class, Gomez woke up in excellent humor, refreshed herself in the bathroom, and began her descent into Joburg, and what would turn out to be a unique experience. Her luggage, in 'Lucy' lavender, included a top of the range, cutting edge video-editing console, the size of a small-town phone book, gift for Leroy's class from Soxy. On South African soil, she nipped down from the plane into a waiting car and was driven to the The Saxonwold Hotel where she freshened up and called Leroy to pop in for a very early breakfast. No longer surprised by being woken by Gomez before the sparrow's fart, Leroy welcomed her effusively; but, no, he said, come to Braamfontein rather, see the 'hood, meet the people.

"Will do," replied Gomez: "After a meeting with your new inspiration in Hillbrow, its a surprise, gotta go."

Inspiration? Leroy reflected, what could she mean?

"No, ma'm, no, no," replied Gomez's driver from the Saxonwold Hotel, with shakes of the head, when he looked closer at the card she gave him with the address for her meeting with Fick at Lorelei Terrace on it, saying: "To Hillbrow please, quick as you can."

"You're going to Braamfontein ma'm, not Hillbrow, says so here, on the card," asserted the driver, tapping the card gently with the forefinger.

"Braamfontein? How convenient, I have a meeting there, well, two," said Gomez thoughtfully.

They made conversation on the way, which included the driver saying: "You probably don't want to go to Hillbrow. No, no, no ma'm!"

Gomez made a mental note to definitely go to Hillbrow before leaving: yes, yes, yes.

"You're in Braamfontein now ma'm," announced the driver, coming to a halt smoothly outside Lorelei.

As previously instructed by Fick, she rang the lone monogrammed buzzer to the roof just once. The door opened. She went through and got into the lift. She went straight up to the roof, where she met with Fick and behaved like an over-awed, blushing schoolgirl. Rajbansi - Sigcawu had prepared the ground well. Fick and Gomez signed and initialed the terms around which they'd work together, easily the most civilized deal, big or small, that she'd ever made. Fick, as mentor consultant, would throw the weight

behind Leroy's developing his film class program, would appear at the next and final class, and festival, and would mentor Leroy to complete the new script before Gomez left.

She was anxious, Fick reassuring: "Your writer is not completely unknown to me, he has it in him, he will deliver."

Barely overcoming an unreasonable impulse to kiss him, she informed him that she was on her way to Leroy, who, she understood he'd meet for the first time at the next class, while texting Leroy that she was on her way.

"You'll find him just downstairs, second floor: Number Three, the corner door," said Fick.

Only then did it dawn on Gomez that she was in exactly the same building as where she'd agreed to meet Leroy. Oh, replied Gomez.

She paused, turned to Fick straight on and with some incredulity asked: "You've never bumped into each other?"

"We have," replied Fick, a smile playing around the mouth: "But he might have me mistaken for somebody else."

*

Leroy had not of late given much thought to the figure on the private roof of Lorelei. It was no longer a security matter for him since he was quite convinced that Nhlohlotelo had more than the one magnified eye on that.

In his most recent correspondence with Gomez, all she'd said was: "Soxy has found a genius. Name to follow. He lives in Hillbrow, where is that? He will help you both with your new story, and your class."

Leroy had not a clue that the figure on the roof was by spectacular co-incidence (not at all unusual in the ether of creative expression, the company of muses and so on), his all-time writing hero, Fikile Mankazana, known to Jamar as the finicky though generous Tramp of Lorelei. Leroy answered Gomez's knock at his apartment door almost immediately after her sms from the roof.

"That was quick," said Leroy, who did wonder how she got from Hillbrow to Braamfontein so soon, and into the building without buzzing from below. There was between them much excitement at meeting at last, and his response to her gift of the editing console. She then got 'heavy' about the new script, as in: 'I've come all this way for one reason, one reason only...we've spoken to a lot of people about you, so there are expectations that we should meet while there's active interest...' She relaxed and watched

his class's raw footage by way of introduction to them, while Leroy filled her in about the classes so far, and the festival. Gomez was excited and very pleased that she'd come to visit, as was Leroy, who was so over the moon that he'd quite forgotten to ask her about his new mentor.

"So," she said, rubbing her palms together with anticipation: "What do you have planned for this evening?"

"Tell you what Vera Gomez," he volunteered recklessly in a fit of goodwill: "For as long as you're here we do whatever you say," words of misguided gallantry that were followed by the opening bars to Ntyilo Ntyilo, or Bird Song, sung by Miriam Makeba, coming in through the open windows from the club below: 'I heard a sound from the bush,' she sang: 'I looked up, I drew near. The sound I heard was Ti, li, ti, li, ti, li. Ntyilo, Ntyilo, Ntyilo. That melody was beautiful. I heard the voice from the bush. I looked up, I drew near. The voice said: ' There is trouble in the land' she sang.

"There," murmured Gomez, entranced. "There, let's go to there," she whispered, mesmerized, pointing to the window: "How beautiful."

But this was not be, not quite yet: the old Ntylo's would re-open as Angel Eye's the following weekend.

*

Far from jazzy rhythms, Zarina Ishmael, who preferred the 'Nine Inch Nails' at full blast through earphones, was at the end of a huge, noisy gathering of the extended clans, filmed with their cheerful co-operation in the idiom of Monsoon tiffin. Most had left, leaving behind a gaggle that couldn't quite get to the door. Jamila, a colorful, expressive elder aunt on her father's side said something to them (this happened; you were never sure of exactly what was said), and they fled. Jamila seemed pleased with her work and settled in at Bagdad. Not for the first time, Jamila was to perform a sacred mission for her sister-in-law, Zarina's mother, Anahita, who squirmed about certain, delicate matters between mothers and daughters, due of course to her relationship with an emotionally remote mother, enough said. Jamila agreed to broach the subject of men, marriage and sex with Zarina, in that order. Jamila agreed that the girl was getting on in years. Anahita saw Jamila as a woman of tact and wisdom. Was it not Jamila who tactfully explained to a young and precocious Zarina that *hymen* was not Yiddish or English for 'song of praise'?

As if by design, Zarina's immediate family disappeared into other parts of the Killarney apartment on bogus pretexts, leaving Zarina and Jamila, who got right to it. Zarina experienced Jamila as head of the extended family on her father's side, because

she was the eldest and had more money. Technically, she could be over-ruled by a living older brother, but he'd never dare go up against her. He did once, and once only, when they were little, and had a tine scar to prove the folly of it. Because she was older than the matriarch on Zarina's mother's side, with more fixed property, she was indeed Begum of both extended families, and comfortable in that role. A filamentous Prima Vera Botticelli veil draped Jamila in piety, the carats of her adornments sparkling wildly in the light: Zarina was terrified.

"How do you feel about men," she asked Zarina with uncharacteristic tenderness.

"Really scared, auntie, petrified," replied Za Za in little girl tones.

"And so you should be," opined the formidable aunt gently, this long-suffering, scorned wife and widow of a philandering uncle, Salem, who left her a fortune. Zarina looked up.

Jamila paused dramatically in kaleidoscopic refractions from her jewels, and retrieved a *naartjie*, or African tangerine, nimbly from the bowl of fruit, nuts, dates and halva before her.

She gave it a vigorous squeeze under her nose and sighed with pleasure, wagging of a heavily bejeweled and henna'd finger that ended in a meticulously sculpted Chanel-red stuck-on nail that sent a shiver up, and then down, Zarina's spine: "In matters of men and marriage your happiness comes first. It's not a compliment: your happiness comes first because your unhappiness will be visited miserably on all of us around you, and we will then not want to see too much of you, which would be unfortunate. Do not despair. I think you have potential."

Popping a date into her mouth, Jamila looked up at Zarina as if to say, 'Do you get all that so far?'

"What about sex?" Zarina whispered, as if to her self, as Jamila flicked the date's pip into a springy pile of bright orange peel expertly.

Jamila sighed deeply and bowed her head. She looked up from beneath the shimmering embroidered edge to her veil with eyes of rage that locked onto Zarina's with the grimly liberated look of every woman who's ever been done over by a bloke, or lipstick lesbian. "It happens, as you well know," retorted Jamila frigidly, which closed that subject.

Zarina was deeply troubled.

"Oh grow a pair!" Jamila exploded: "We are women. It has to be one man or another, who cares which. The sooner you start the sooner you get to learn about yourself and what you enjoy and do not enjoy in life. There is enjoyment in everything, sometimes you find it, sometimes you don't, but you keep looking, don't you?"

Zarina was alarmed. Jamila fished about in her satin evening bag, which matched the shoes exactly, for a tissue, since an unseen though keenly felt tear had formed in the corner of an eye. It would not do, this sign of weakness in a moment that required strength. Besides, her mascara would run and smudge.

As Jamila ruffled about in the bag, a large bright purple and yellow casino chip fell out of it, and rolled silently, twirling to a rest flatly at Zarina's feet; plastic bright purple and yellow in the round on a plain dark grey wool carpet, pretty hard to miss.

Zarina pretended not to see it, and Jamila continued self-consciously, one surreptitious eye on the chip, one on whether Zarina had seen it or not, not that she cared too much: "If marriage doesn't work out, well murder is the cleanest outcome, but, these days, it is not popular, once it is known. I would have killed your uncle Salem, swine dog..." and here she dropped her head and spat drily though venomously onto the floor: "...Cur, if he didn't die when he did, thank god, and praise her magnificence, where was I, whatever dearest child, grab all of it by the horns and it ride it hard for the rest of your life, which ends soon enough, so you can't really mess it up too badly."

Jamila was surprised that quite suddenly, after she'd taken her eye off it for a moment to spit on Salem down there in hell, the chip was gone. Zarina looked quite blameless. Besides, she wouldn't, would she? With the parents behind him, Tahir entered Bagdad giggling, whereupon Jamila threw a hard pip at him with force, hitting his forehead dead in its center with a *donk*. He chortled no more and fell into a sulk.

"Tahir," said his mother, "Don't you have a home to go to?"

"She can't cook, had I known..." was his sullen reply.

"Three months," said the *Paterfamilias*, Zulfi: "Three months is all you two have left. Tahir, you have three months to learn how to cook, Zarina, in three months I'm taking your mother to the Taj-Mahal and letting out the apartment as an Air B & B, fair notice. Good luck my little chickens."

Anahita glowed at this assertiveness from an unlikely place, dear Zulfi, until then always too soft with the children. Good man, she felt, and lingered gazes of renewed affection upon him.

"About time," muttered Jamila under the breath, as expressions of uncertainty flickered upon the faces of Tahir and Zarina, officially now booted from the nest.

Jamila sighed and turned to her sister with a sotto voce: "It's useless, she has absolutely no interest in marriage, it happens, and doesn't mean that she has no interest in men. There's hope. Be at peace in your heart Anahita, she's a good child and will find her-self in time."

Zarina saw Jamila down to her car. In the lift she held up the casino chip: "Gotcha," she said playfully and returned it.

*

During Homer Mankazana's odyssey he developed a curiosity about, then fascination for old buildings, new architecture and modern architects. Buildings and architecture represented to him a sense of permanent place that he'd lost, and missed. Whilst imagining what he might build on Lorelei's roof in 1990 Fikile Mankazana, the Tramp of Lorelei Terrace, did a great deal of research. The architect of choice was a young renegade minimalist with a taste for recycled building materials used in conversation with newer materials and technologies. She was meticulous, but not a quick. Over the next twenty years she crafted Fick's new home patiently out of fixtures and fittings from a network of demolishers. These often solid teak, oak and such window frames, doors, floors, ceilings, partitions, skirting, paneling, jambs, and other materials went then to her team of expert old-school, mostly retired cabinet makers, restorers and French polishers. The project proceeded in fits and starts and was frequently put on hold. By 1994 there was much that had yet to be done, but Fick could start moving in. At fifty-four he was right at the top of his game in L.A. He kept a hand in with his new property in Africa with infrequent short visits. During his long absences he micro-managed Nhlohlotelo from afar to keep things together on the roof. She installed the buzzer to the roof and established the garden.

It was only in 2009, at sixty-nine, that Fick settled on the roof for longer periods of time. At seventy-eight in 2018 he spent little time there and worked and travelled as he always had. He accepted only work that switched him on, and even in late career was unafraid of new ideas and forms, meanings and technologies. His favorite space in the shed was the bathroom, where he was to be found on this morning of the Leroy's third film class, peering at himself through a self-floodlit magnifying mirror, tweezers steadily in hand. He'd gotten used to being wheeled out from time to time as the relic he was and contentedly felt him self to be. He'd fallen in and out of vogue many times, and enjoyed

the high of the one, and blissful anonymity of the other. Fick let it roll. While an appearance at a community film class was certainly not a lecture at The Sorbonne, and he knew the difference, he found them moving. He was there in his bathroom for a while, then got dressed, had a working breakfast with Gomez in Braamfontein, after which both went on to Stieman's Street to connect with Leroy, already at The Alexander, with not a clue that his hero was en route. Fick made a sensational appearance, as always, if he appeared at all, never a sure thing these-days, at the third and final class; Leroy nearly fell over when he worked out who Fick was, Jamar amazed that the Tramp of Lorelei lived on the roof, and was famous.

Fick got stuck into the class, which went on for much longer than usual, and was attentive and helpful. It turned out that Fick had been observing Leroy's observing him, and had taken an interest, reminded of a younger self. They hit it off, much to Gomez's relief. In the intense week that followed, Fick supported Leroy's development of the new script to near completion. Leroy was in Fick heaven and had many, many questions. Fick explained the supply chain to the highly lucrative, insatiable though corrupting global demand to be constantly and freshly entertained. He advised Leroy against any form of celebrity in the future.

When Leroy got around to Sophia Loren, Fick scoffed and replied through a grin: "Never met her."

Part Five

Chapter 13

The Sofa of Self-Doubt

After Smoky's death Tubby appeared to have lost his reason and was coaxed down from Number Three to Number One, which had been prepared for his various terminal conditions. His grandson, Junior, volunteered to supervise his care, and moved into the guest suite on the second floor. Uriah valued Lorelei's tenants of long standing with whom he shared a precious history intersecting in Smoky and Tubby's golden years, when their club at street level, Ntylo's, pumped with creativity and social interaction, like a syncopated River Sigcawu in the time of the ancestors.

At the end of the time of Smoky and Tubby, Uriah became *Paterfamilias* and inherited much debt and Lorelei Terrace, itself in hock to the bank, inconveniently right opposite Lorelei and hard to avoid, Braamfontein Savings & Loan. The manager he usually dealt with there, Rama Reddy, Smoky and Tubby's banker, had retired. He was a conservative fellow, colonial in an Anglo-Indian Merchant-Ivory sort of a way, who'd tutored Smoky and Tubby in the fine art of juggling debt and living well until an incoming royalties check, or billing for legal services rendered put it all to rights. The Rajbansi - Sigcawu debits were many and constant, a far more crowded column than their credits, which were few though substantial when they made fleeting guest appearances.

Rama loved jazz and frequented Ntylo's with his lovely wife, Sita. He, Tubby and Smoky grew older, through moments of plenty and the opposite; they became careless in a dawning awareness that there'd never be a final accounting in their lifetime. This liberated them to over value Lorelei as collateral, more than once. Smoky and Tubby had taken Reddy into their confidence about the value of the Ntylo's archive on master copies in the vaults. Reddy often enjoyed listening to his very own copy of the best of Ntylo's winter archive, the only copy in existence, which had been given to him by Tubby and Smoky to keep things sweet. Reddy had at various times introduced Smoky and Tubby to quite a few parties interested in the archive, including a Japanese monolith with offices in Joburg. As far as he was concerned it was more about guiding the Uriah's of present and future to deal with wealth, well on the way. That's what mattered, everything else was, well, banking.

His last words to Uriah before sailing off into the sunset of his retirement were: "Uriah, you're in a deep, deep hole, good luck down there! Surely, the only way must be up. By the by the by, I think you'll like Helene, cheerio, have a good long life, and keep in touch!"

The new manager, one Helene Ndlovu, had quite recently called Uriah in to determine whether he had a plan or was he stringing the bank along? This they took a dim view of, she'd have him know, swished the new broom. He'd have to give her something, he felt. They wouldn't yet understand the deal with the Japanese, although he could open with that, perhaps. He'd tell them about the new tenant, who seemed to have settled in; Uriah had put the guest suite on the second floor of Lorelei up for rental/Air B & B in anticipation of Junior moving down into Number One, and to placate the bank by way of demonstrating that he was actually trying. He put out 'to rent' notices, including one on the staff notice board at the bank, pinned there ostentatiously on his way in. The meeting went surprisingly well. Helene was a bright young thing with an open mind. She immediately saw the value in the deal with the Japanese.

"No problem," she said: "Of course I can't lend you any more, in fact I'm surprised that you owe so much already, and I am going to want it all back with interest quite soon, but I can give you a bit more time. Perhaps I should track your deal with the Japanese, no? Do cc me in. To be on the safe side? Let's close that deal."

Uriah was in awe and relieved that somebody other than himself was in control. He whistled his way out of the bank, smiling and waving at familiar faces in the hall.

*

Junior had sent the Japanese an inventory and samples of aspects of the archive he might offer to sell them. To confirm the stock on offer, clever looking, polite, sharp young men in smart black suits, arrived at Lorelei to go through the archive upstairs under Uriah's supervision. Junior called them the 'Nippettes'. They moved in and out of the building in a nattering gaggle, and put the hands together, bowed and greeted as one, which amused Holly, Nhlohlotelo and Mona hugely. The Nippettes didn't know quite what to make of Nhlohlotelo, who inspired wonder and speculation amongst them.

Junior arranged a meeting with the Japanese. He and Nhlohlotelo freshened up the boardroom on the third floor. Many of the chairs were in bad shape, and couldn't be used. With great difficulty Uriah, Leroy, Jamar, the twins and Nhlohlotelo moved the long cord sofa out of Number Three, up the stairs, and into the boardroom on the third floor. The senior, very serious executive Japanese duly arrived, each in his own huge

black Toyota SUV, and they all crammed onto the Sofa of Self-Doubt at the boardroom table with Senior, Junior and Nhlohlotelo. The twins acted as waiters. They moved very slowly, each action carefully navigated after static contemplation. Uriah grew anxious.

The Japanese introduced themselves through their interpreter. To wobble them Junior spoke in rotten Xhosa, interpreted into English badly by Nhlohlotelo, who caught on quickly, and flung in bits of her own to muddy the waters even further. The Japanese interpreter seemed perplexed as he translated, and stopped often to consult. Uriah frowned, closed his eyes, and sunk into his chair. Junior proceeded briskly with yet unseen confidence and assertion, opening with a hearty 'God Save The Emperor!' in Internet Japanese. Uriah opened just one eye. The room stood sharpish, and bowed solemnly. Uriah hastened to his feet and followed. The Japanese sat back down heavily; the sofa creaked; the Japanese fell silent and sat very still, peering under the sofa from time to time in discreet rotation.

"Now look here," Junior began: "The Americans have made us a good offer for the whole archive but we're aware of the deal you might have thought you had with Grandpa Tubby. Whatever, here's the current deal, as cross-checked by your people, who we really enjoyed having here at Lorelei Terrace."

Senior sat bolt upright and leaned forwards. The twins rolled into view three huge aluminum trunks on a trolley in slow motion. Each was sealed and signed by Uriah and the chief Nippette. Junior handed the Japanese a copy of the inventory for these boxes, and the price, which they'd already received in good time from the Nippettes. Tut-tutting, they looked at this and handed it back, shaking their heads. Their interpreter came in with their offer at less than half the quoted price, then, quite suddenly, the sofa upon they were all sitting cracked down the middle. They fell silent.

'You're not really all that sure of the value, are you? It could be much, much more than you expect, couldn't it? Should you take the offer as it is? Or not?' the sofa insinuated to each of the Japanese. They caved in to Junior's price, admittedly on the high side. Looking pleased, they signed, paid and left with the boxes of not quite the best of Ntylo's. Uriah was speechless: Junior operated very much like Smoky, not a bad thing necessarily. Thus did Junior redeem him self. He seemed changed, much for the better, spending rather a lot of time with his son and father, both having grown quite comfortable with not seeing him all that often. All three Uriah's grew closer, a generally annoying experience for all. Junior moved into Number One, and became Chief Clerk at Rajbansi - Sigcawu, the firm's new name, Junior's rebranding: he'd never liked the & Ass.

The panel of buzzers now read:

Ground Floor

Concierge Blank

Number One Junior

Number Two Angel & The Twins

First Floor

Number Three Zondi

Number Four Zenani

Number Five Mabasa

Second Floor

Rajbansi - Sigcawu

Apartment to let

Junior also redecorated. The broken corduroy sofa was thrown into a large skip in front of the bars opposite Lorelei, and was last seen being yelled at by a recycler, in Swazi: "What do you mean, 'you'll never make it; you'll never have a life'! I don't care what you think! I'm a good husband and father, let there be no doubt!"

"Of course you are," interjected one of a grungy pair of undergraduates passing by, who stopped, talked the recycler down, gave him money, and carried the sofa to their digs. On the way, pausing here, resting there, their exuberantly boyish conversation about how brilliant they each were in the sack was afflicted by equivocations that were not there before.

The one was heard to say to the other: "How would I know if I'm a good or bad shag? Who would tell me?"

"Well, I certainly couldn't, and wouldn't," replied the other: "If you have to think about it you're probably terrible."

He paused.

"Now that it comes up, how would *I* know?"

It was a ticklish subject they agreed, setting the sofa down neatly outside a bar. They went in, returned with a quart of beer and two Happy-Hour tequila's each, which they balanced delicately while settling into the sofa, without spilling, and continued the

conversation in earnest. Well, they agreed, you could ask afterwards, but that didn't generally go down well. Through no lack of vigorous application, neither got lucky that evening and upon the bright morning after, were to be found passed out on the Sofa of Self-Doubt in their sunglasses on either side of the night watchman, whose looked like James Brown and snored, surrounded by empty beer quarts and plastic shot glasses. The undergraduates heaved the sofa back to their digs up the road and it ever afterwards played havoc with their insecurities, which were many, leading eventually to their giving up and dropping out.

Chapter 14

The Film Festival

On the Saturday morning of Leroy's film festival the huge tiered and mirrored revolving display of video cameras was disassembled, crated and packed, and moved from Buy-Well across the Mandela Bridge. It was then unpacked and installed in the Alexander's foyer where it revolved and glittered once again, clearly visible through the Alexander's recently cleaned glass front and doors. Opposite, there was a skip, which filled with eminently re-sellable packaging and corrugated card over the course of the morning. Paul the recycler, he of the violet eyes and an inspiration to award winning filmmakers, happened to be passing by the skip and did a double take. He couldn't believe his luck. In he dived. With his treasure bound and compacted on his trolley he hot-wheeled it to recycling trucks on an open car lot in Braamfontein where he sold on his bales of waste.

In the rolling hills of Swaziland, Paul, his heavily pregnant wife, Nomava, and their existing child in the 'terrible' twos had lived happily on their smallholding adjacent to a vast swathe of land owned by the son of a minor Swazi prince. Paul grew enough fruit and vegetables to eat and sell. Three months ago the prince drove Paul and his family from their land, and Swaziland. There was some room for negotiation in this land-grab, but Paul was too proud and outraged to be reasonable. He and his family left Swaziland, and they now lived in a shack in Orange Farm, a sprawling peri-urban African favela two hours outside Joburg, with a fragile new baby. From here Paul went forth into the city for a few days to hunt and collect. Competition was always on the up, and he had to get to the city earlier and earlier to be first at the bins and skips. He slept over in a depot of stationery trains along Smit Street in Braamfontein. These digs were uncertain and he had often to move fast to evade detection. But, there were many trains, few of which ever moved. The rustier ones were a good bet.

While Paul continues on his rounds in and around Braamfontein a skinny, rickety African girl-child slides into her desk in an overcrowded classroom in a suburb close to Orange Farm. She is Paul's daughter and has not had breakfast or dinner the night before because her father hasn't yet returned from work. She is neatly groomed and dressed in a handed down uniform, laundered and pressed but threadbare and verdantly patched. She is bare footed and unable to focus because she's cold and hungry. But, she has done her homework. The well-fed porker she shares a desk with pokes fun at her

when her stomach grumbles loudly. If only she had the energy to steal his lunch. She's been awake for hours to get there and is tired before the day has begun.

She stifles a yawn while her mother, Nomava, leaves home with the younger child, who is ill, and gets to a clinic quite some distance away from where they live. Nomava is shivering and sweating, from time to time convulsed by a dry, hacking cough. After a long wait in a crowded room she is called and attended to, wondering all the while when Paul will return. The doctor asks her if she's been tested for multi-resistant TB recently when she looks at the baby. For this TB check she has to make another appointment. It is evening and getting dark quickly when Nomava and child make their way back from the clinic. She chews the bottom lip and schemes about how she'll feed herself and two children with half a loaf of day-old bread and small tin of pilchards. She tries to buy dessert, three loose sweets, but has money enough for only two. In Braamfontein, after a very good day, Paul makes his way to his digs in the train-yard under the Mandela Bridge. He is asleep when the yard is taken over by a violent company of thieves and muggers. They round up the non-South Africans. Paul flees before they have a chance to rob him, and they give chase. He flees towards Braamfontein, hounded by the mob in the direction of Stiemans Street. He runs for his life as the mob gathers co-conspirators and steam.

"*Amakwerikweri* bastard, taking the food out of our hands that's already been taken out of our mouths. Death to all *amakwerikweri* parasites and bottom-feeders!" bay the mob.

As the sun sets early arrivals at Leroy's film festival are dappled by sparkling reflections from the revolving display of video equipment reflecting across Stieman's Street.

*

A train from Maputo chugged through Pretoria into Joburg and under the Mandela Bridge to Park Station. Within, Pindile-Elizabeth, Holly's prodigal mother, caught a glimpse of people living there. Ever mindful of her own brush with rough living, she gave them the remains of her travelling food through the window. The train pulled into Park Station. Pindile, alive, well, with a plan, and Butch; her beau, the enormous circus strongman/knife-thrower, ex-Frelimo, who looked more ferocious than he really was, arrived to claim Holly, and to take her, and Nhlohlotelo back to Maputo, where they would open a bakery. Pindile had a business plan, and Butch had already leased premises in busy downtown Maputo, in their absence being gutted in preparation for being fitted

out as a bakery and coffee shop. Butch and Pindile made haste to Lorelei from Park Station, but there was nobody at home.

"They're all at the Alexander Theatre up the road," Phala informed them while putting up the new sign, Angel - Eye's: "In fact, I'm on my way there right now to meet Vera, you must meet Vera, oof, what can I say about Vera: she's very, very."

On their way to the Alexander Theatre in Stiemans Street they learnt a bit about one another, and rather a lot about Vera Gomez. Phala invited them to the opening of Angel - Eye's later that evening, after the festival. Pindile told Angel who she was and pressed him for news about her mother and daughter. He reassured her that they were both very well and living there still.

In Killarney, not too far away, Zarina Ishmael dressed hurriedly for the film festival at the Alexander in the company of aunt Jamila who'd arrived bearing a gift, a necklace of one string of small, pretty semi-precious stones with a delicate gold clasp. Jamila helped Zarina drape the trinket around her neck and tried to secure the clasp. It snapped and the stones scattered across the floor. Jamila freaked. She explained that retrieving scattered beads and fixing broken necklaces brought on a terrible fate.

"We're running very late. Leave the necklace. Let me tell you about the affair of the necklace in the car," she said, with a wag of that finger: "But, you can't film it in case I get it wrong and bring a fatwa upon my head."

In the car Jamila spoke while Zarina drove:

The Affair of the Necklace

'Aisha, or Al-Mubra, if you're Sunni, Al-Fahisha, the Whore, if you're Shia, drop the name and you'll soon know which is which, has to go to the lavatory while crossing the desert. She is with part a huge caravan in the middle of, well, the desert; she is travelling in a curtained bamboo enclosure, or *howdah,* on a camel, how it must sway, and, as we women know, there comes a time. No doubt, she'd been drinking a lot of water, I would hope so. Afterwards, she returns to the *howdah* and realizes that the necklace from her husband on their wedding is missing. She panics, steps from the howdah swiftly and backtracks to the toilet while the caravan moves on, assuming that she's in the *howdah*, and unaware that she's not with them; perhaps this is because she's taken a while. The necklace has snapped and she has to find each bead in the sand. She finds every bead, counts them to be sure, it is said, and returns to find the caravan gone. Sensibly, she

remains where she is, although, had she tried, she could easily have caught up with the caravan, it is also said. A handsome young soldier, Safwan, who was passing that way, and well may we wonder why, rescues her, and they ride into Medina together on Safwan's camel. It is said that she looked vulnerable, and he protective. This was not to work in their favor. Did I mention that she was the wife of Mohammed the Prophet? Anyway, this causes a huge and ongoing scandal, for Aisha was not popular to begin with. Twenty-five years later she's at the head of a Sunni army against the Shia's. To this day there is no clear winner. But, it is well known that us Shia have more fun and live longer. It's thanks to her that we have to wear these veils. Gossip, Za Za, oh it's a terrible thing. Never ever trade in gossip. Now, do tell me more about the fascinating Citronella in your film class, the one with pole and the feathers that you mentioned.'

Jamila and Zarina, bare-necked, approached the Alexander Theatre in Stiemans Street, Braamfontein. Inside, all manner of creative civil society, the fringe and the avant-garde milled about looking fabulous, posing here for a society shot, sipping there, this other side of the looking glass that is the silver screen. In and amongst 'dharrrling' this, 'dahhhling' that, ostentatious air kisses could be heard: mwah-mmmwah, and where *eva* did you find that gorgeous bag! You simply *must* tell me. They started to take their seats, arranged in in an arc in front of a white fire screen upstage, around large round tables. Here sat the film class members and special guests, with the two thousand or so great unwashed in the gently raked theatre seating behind. 'Twas a festive atmosphere with mimes, people selling crafty things, children having their faces painted, and so on.

The 'corporate' tables included Leroy, Gomez, his parents, all of Lorelei, except Holly who was preparing for her party at which she'd meet Thulani's parents, on that very evening; Dora, their store manager, his regional manager, her director, a Korean director of marketing for the movie camera manufacturers plus foxy one, who didn't come across as the Missus. Other tables include the family and associates of the film class members, Leroy's personal friends and comrades in the industry, the cast and director of Romeo and Julietta, and so on.

The theatre filled up quickly when it did, as theatres do, and the lights went down with a soft spot on Leroy at the front. He welcomed everybody and explained why he and they were there; he sang the praises of the Koreans after greeting them in inter-net Korean; he effused about the class, Fick, Soxy and Gomez, and concluded with a forgettable quote. The spot went down. In darkness, he crooked a forefinger, and was

about to press 'play' to start the first movie, when the Weitzman's suddenly appeared with their new chums, Malvern and Sheila. Up went the spot. There were welcomes and greetings. Cora handed Leroy her movie, Cruise Into Hell (and back again) that she'd shot and edited (on the camera) whilst on the ship. Leroy seated them, and called the proceedings to order. One more time, he crooked the finger, whereupon Pindile, Butch and Phala entered the theatre. Phala disappeared to find Vera.

Leroy pressed play. Citronella's 'That's Why the Lady is No Longer a Tramp' started behind Nhlohlotelo running to the front of house to hold Pindile. She ushered Butch and Pindile into the foyer, closed the heavy doors and drew together the thick curtains behind her. Here, in the reflected glittering of the revolving display of video technology, there was real drama: intense, tearful greetings and reconciliations too moving to describe. Suffice it to say that they were there for a while; didn't see a single movie and moved straight on from the Alexander to Lorelei to settle Butch and Pindile in, thereafter to attend the opening of Angel Eye's, oh happy, happy day!

*

In Braamfontein Paul runs through Stieman's Street at full tilt, the mob hotly in pursuit. He felt that he'd been running for a long time. He doesn't understand what the mob is saying or why they are after him. He runs towards the light of the display in the Alexander foyer, goes in and bumps into Nhlohlotelo, Pindile and Butch. The roaring mob follows, breaking the glass front doors, shatter, shatter, and destroying the uninsured revolving display. The mob advance and press Nhlohlotelo, Pindile, Butch and Paul through the doors and curtain to the theatre. It is all violently noisy. Nhlohlotelo fingers the sandalwood pin in her hair. Leroy loses his audience, presses pause and rushes to the front of house, followed by a curious audience in craning phalanx, to observe a standoff there between the mob and Pindile, who faces them squarely, with Butch, Nhlohlotelo and Paul behind her.

"Hold it right there!" commands Pindile in a deafening mezzo, over tightly folded arms, flaming eyes panning over the mob, now a hostile audience.

They hesitate. Silence. She steps forwards boldly in a clear marking of territory. The mob grumbles and they stand their ground. Seconds go by like hours. In absolute silence, the mob moves forward menacingly. The audience gasps. Butch moves to Pindile's side like a panther. They stand their ground, threatening to attack the mob. Paul is uncertain about who he has to fear most, the mob or these very odd people inside the theatre. Butch slips Victoria three long, thin flat knives. She throws them expertly at the

bristling mob, to land in the floor with a thunk, thunk, thunk, so close to their front line, they have to shuffle back or be impaled.

Pindile: Do you know why you're here? No you don't. You think you're chasing this poor man, who has done you no wrong, but you're only running away from yourselves chasing fuck all. Now, I'm here to see my mother and daughter after eighteen years, and you're in my way, so, stay and watch a movie in peace or fuck off!

The two-thousand strong festival crowd move forward en masse until they're right behind Pindile, Butch, Paul and Nhlohlotelo, who whips the sandal wood lance from her hair, which tumbles down maniacally: "Bring it on you bastards," she yells: "I know how to use this toothpick!"

The mob equivocates, turn in on one another and disperse, some staying for a movie. Paul flees back to Orange Farm with a mind to returning to Swaziland at the ready to negotiate.

Leroy settled things down and pressed play. After Kobus's 'Trip with Tony' and Cora's movie, Roger's movie played out in front of him, Wicus and Donay. It was mostly about them, and a revelation; his parents were at first horrified, then moved. 'Why are we all being *this*? What have we become, as people and as a family?' they thought as they watched one another watch themselves. Wicus and Donay realized then that Roger was prepared to grow up, if they were, and that he needed them to. They were immediately more sensitive to one another. Donay fished a bottle of chilled Evian out of a cooler bag for Roger, which he shared with them, most unusual for Roger, who'd normally glug it all straight from the bottie. Wicus drank a toast to Roger and his movie. He suggested they stop trying to be *normal* since it was clearly not working. Let's instead find the joy in the family we are, as we are, suggested Wicus.

"Would this be a good time," piped up Roger: "To say how much I hate cycling and Ethiopians, and that I don't like sport, war or violence, or believe in God? Is this a good time?"

"Oh my fuck!" exclaimed Wicus: "He's gay!"

"Halleluiah," returned Donay, eyes to heaven, hands raised and waving in the air, palms to the front, above shoulder height.

"No I'm not," protested Roger: "This is exactly how evil rumors begin."

En famille they made their way to greet Sonny and Mrs. Wietzman.

Jamar's was the final movie. The electricity cut out before it could be played. To boot, the theatre generator had run out of fuel. His movie was constructed around a

short story he'd written about his friend, Abdul, narrated by Abdul in the first person. He had a folded written copy of the story in an inside pocket to his jacket, which he'd worked on with Leroy and Fick, and he asked Fick to read it out loud. This Fick did movingly by the torch of his cell phone to an attentive auditorium. As he read, feelings of bitter regret intensified; here he was again, back at his beginning, by himself. When he'd done reading Jamar's story, which ended badly for Abdul, there was at first silence; Fick wiped an eye, deeply affected by what he has read, feeling that the only way is forwards in life. He felt more optimistic. They were all still there, alive, and in the same place; everything was possible, he felt. In the brief silence, clamorous with Fick's private thoughts, a slow clapping grew to a roar, then an ovation, which ran its course. Jamar sold the most copies of his film, unseen, winning the festival award for that year. The prize was a new camera.

The festival ended and people started leaving the theatre. Many would go on to the much talked-about and anticipated opening of Angel Eye's. Nhlohlotelo and Fick tried to find Paul to help him get back home, but it appeared that he had already left. They engaged in a long-overdue and difficult conversation in the foyer whilst picking up shards from the door and revolving display; very civilly, they explained themselves; it seemed to Fick that they were picking up the broken pieces of their past and putting it behind them. One last time, they tried unsuccessfully to find Paul, in his own mind, well on his way back to Swaziland via Orange Farm. Sure, he felt, Swaziland was hell, but it was a hell he could understand and navigate: as for Joburg, never again.

An elegant oval sign, Angel - Eye's, in bold copperplate, lime green on orange with a dark blue shadow-line hung over the entrance to the new club. An upright piano stood at an angle to the window facing a recently dried lemon yellow wall. Framed sepia photographs of the foremost tonsils of the South, including Dorothy Masuka, Miriam Makeba, Nhlohlotelo Klaasens, Dorothy Radebe and Abigail Khubeka, at play, and work, all with expressive eyes covered much of the wall. Here they would live on forever. Angel - Eye's was ready for it's opening.

Chapter 15

The Party

Holly's first significant, young adult romance with Thulani Hunye was moving along passionately. She'd had one or two previous light encounters, but they were different: Hunye commanded her attention, or so it felt. He had recently raised the possibility of her perhaps agreeing to meet his parents, at a party, at their house. It would be the last party there since the Hunye parents were moving into something smaller, by themselves. To her it was a bit early to be meeting parents, but she felt that refusing the invitation might be confused with a lack of interest in getting more 'serious'. Besides, why should she not have such an effect on a fellow?

Holly had already decided what she would wear, having been inspired by an earlier visit to a Joburg Art Gallery exhibition about Tsonga-Shangaan art and culture with Jamar, where they'd seen an object of great beauty, the traditional Tsonga layered pleated skirt, or 'xibelani', a full, knee-length skirt trimmed finely with embroidery in bright colors and worn in layers to the effect of padding, or rounding out the hips particularly, accentuating the rolling of them whilst dancing. Off the rack in Diagonal Street it retailed at ZAR1 800 +, way beyond Holly's budget, and they'd decided to make one themselves. It vexed Holly that the Hunye party fell on the same evening as Leroy's film festival, was it not always so? All was not lost: the film festival after party would go down at the Angel Eye's opening, and she'd get there after the Hunye party. She was excited and anxious about the imminent return of her mother, but you never knew exactly when Pindile would appear, and certainly didn't plan around it. This, and many other things about the notorious Pindile-Elizabeth she had picked up from Mona and Nhlohlotelo over time, indirectly, by way of listening in since first being able to hear.

Holly was embarrassed about how obsessive she'd become about what she would wear to the Hunye party. The skirt would do well also for the club opening afterwards, she figured. She wouldn't have to change. Surely this trivia couldn't, nay, shouldn't be that important to her? Whatever, the logistics of the skirt's construction had helped her not to dwell on Pindile's return too much.

In Saxonwold, her hosts, Lindiwe, or Lindy and Sydney Hunye, were being dressed in a cavernous walk-in wardrobe, between the bedroom and marble bathroom. Their 'his and hers' dressers presented the options with a flourish and brief description

of what the 'look' would do for them. Not unkindly, the Hunye's talked over them. It was a rare private moment after a busy day. They caught up. They crowed about the excellent price at which they'd sold the house, and congratulated themselves. What a good thing it was that Thulani was content in the apartment they'd bought for him a few years ago. It was all working out. They gossiped and wondered loudly about this girl who made Thulani so happy. Is she The One? Can't be, they reasoned: they haven't known each long enough. How long have they known each other? What do you mean you have no idea? Where might she come from? Hillbrow? Surely not.

Lindy took a call while choosing which shoes to wear: "No," she said emphatically, rejecting a fine pair of Ferragamo pumps.

The dressers left, not quite bowing as they walked backwards, but close. Madam Hunye waved them off whilst continuing her call: "They've all been licking my butt to be here, and they're here to see *him*, to be sure that he's going, so they should be there and settled in by the time he arrives. They'll howl that they've paid: everybody pays; it doesn't necessarily get you what you want."

She glided down to the lower, public floors of her home and swept through it with the party planner, barman, caterer, music director, lighting consultant and security, all of whom were terrified of her, for a final check, tweaking here and there. She navigated tender dilemmas of protocol, seating plans and such. It all mattered.

"No, no, no," she said to the evening's butler, correcting place names at the long table: "Not together those two, not now; they've fallen out, and she's going to jail, doesn't know it yet...put those two right opposite each other, they're having an affair...she sits closest to the cloakroom, she spills...oo, no, no, no, he's going to need far more space than that."

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A humid evening draped itself with languor over Joburg like an Edyth Head satin sheath. Jamar had cut back much of Holly's hair to reveal fine, angelic features and a long, slender neck; the nails were a putty color, and he trimmed the brows into high, quizzical arches. For the first time he noted Holly's eyes, of warm hazel, flecked with green, over which he curled the lashes extravagantly. He gave her a fine pashmina for good luck and warmth. Feeling profoundly fabulous, inviolably within her middle-kingdom labyrinth of Tsonga skirts, Holly was on her way to the party in a car that Thulani's mother had sent for her, a large black official government vehicle with the country's coat of arms on the driver's door. Upon arrival at casa Hunye, they were waved through at the start of a leafy

winding driveway; many expensive square meters later, at the house itself, she fell in with a line being received by the family Hunye, then moved on to a reception room off the dining room. Sirens and the sound of outriding motorcycles with large engines blared, squawked, revved and roared up the drive, announcing the arrival of the guest of honor. She felt a fizzle of power in the air, and the fine hairs at the back of her head stood up as she watched the broad back of the honorable guest coming in and greeting people, chatting to some. Not once did she have a clear view of him, due to so many heads and shoulders of craning self-interest in between. He went into conclave in the study. Lethal palace gossip began as a low murmur. The guest of honor left quietly well before dinner.

Holly felt overawed and missed *her* mother with a deep longing, different to missing having *a* mother. In her mind she knew Pindile as the worst mother ever, and in her heart she felt that from what she'd heard over her lifetime, the woman was an awesome and funky baitch worth meeting and hanging out with. Holly felt vulnerable, and it brought out radiance in her features. When Thulani came to find her, he was more smitten than ever before, visibly so, much to the delight and amusement of his too keenly observant family and closest friends. The sound of a gong, more Oriental than 'Big-Ben', announced dinner, which led to a Serengeti stampede.

"It's a nightmare," Thulani forewarned: "But we'd better go in. Please don't hate me too much for putting you through this. I'll seat you, but then it's every guest for itself. God knows where you're seated. Make the best of it, remember, keep it light: five mins to your left, then right, then opposite, by which time you'll probably be moved. My mother keeps the earth shifting under the feet of those around her, be aware. And oh, try not to spill, she'll judge you for spilling."

Holly was stricken, and seemed much more so with her eyebrows plucked into raised arches of permanent surprise by Jamar, not a bad look for the moment. Dinner, for Holly, wide-eyed and high-browed, was a surreal blur filled with flat and glass wear logistics and table talk, which she carried off like an old pro, by instinct and swift observation mostly. She'd catch Thulani's reassuring eye from time to time. She chatted with ease to her left and right, waving her fork to emphasize a point like the rest of them, whom, she noted used the phrase 'at the end of the day' a lot. After one glass of wine she tried it on: "Well, at the end of the day," and here she paused, not knowing how to proceed: "As we know, the sun must, well, go down."

Her company muttered warm approval at what they felt was a well-timed and appropriately discreet metaphor, African politics being what it e'er was. With a full fork

close to her mouth, and one hand near a delicate wine glass, Holly caught Lindiwe Hunye's eye. Lindy winked and Holly twitched, promptly spilling everything around her over herself and opposite, to the left and right of herself in the most spectacular spill at dinner Lindy had ever seen. She found herself guffawing and forgiving the offender immediately, rising from her seat to herself deal with the disaster. Sydney Hunye and Thulani seemed surprised. The Lindy they knew never left her seat at a formal dinner, and had no sense of humor about spilling. Well, well, well.

Dinner ended and drifted to a party in a greenhouse/indoor tennis court, with a border of exotic African flora, and a dance floor of wood palettes over the court, all lit by twinkling lanterns. A jazz quintet in tuxedoes started up. To the occasional far off roll and crack of thunder and lightening, Thulani took Holly for their very first real dance. The skirt earned its keep; how splendidly it rolled, stirring envy, in particular amongst the high-end vamps with the long and side-ways eye on Thulani, one of whom dared to cut in, but was rebuffed, sweetly and firmly by Thulani. After the dance he was called away. In the shadows of an old African broadleaf, hanging out with herself and her pashmina on the edge of the dance floor, Holly was taken by surprise, and pinned up against the broadleaf's trunk by an unpleasant friend of Thulani's, who she'd met and ignored through dinner, even though he sat right opposite her. How could she forget his look of disdain at the baby carrot that landed in his lap from her fork?

He put his mouth too close to her ear and hissed: "Playing hard to get eh, you who he picked up out of the gutter in Hillbrow, com'n, we all fuck each other here, who else is there, once you get to here? Look around you!"

So saying, he shoved his hand up the layered skirt aggressively, where it got lost for a tactical moment in the multiple folds. Holly now saw the party differently: she picked up on the wheeling and dealing, phone calling and texting, and coming and going of people with personal security. It felt sordid, almost pornographic. Her stomach turned. Where am I, she wondered, and wished that Mona would appear. The thumb of the hand misleading itself up them skirts pricked itself deeply on a large pin, which escalated the aggression. She heard herself say 'no' quite loudly, enough to mean 'no' without at all sounding hysterical, followed by a blank moment, a crunch, and Mona's voice booming in her head: 'No means no!' Holly turned and walked away calmly and erect: the very picture of dignity and self-control. Behind her, the rapist writhed doubled-up on the floor spewing maledictions and vulgar classist and sexist epithets at her back,

clichéd bile without end. The band stopped playing. Dancers froze. There were asides, and louder comments and enquiries.

"Who *is* the peasant in the gollywog doorstopper skirt?" Holly heard and found amusing, since it did about sum the look up, but with no redeeming irony.

"She's so fat," Holly heard, and flinched: "Can't figure what he sees in her, but hell, there's no way he's going to see *past* her, ha-ha-ha."

"He'd lose at squash, definitely, how would he see the ball, haha, ha-ha," observed a swizzle stick with nails and a weave on Manolo Blahnik stilts.

Well, thought Holly, as she adjusted her skirt ostentatiously, you've never had a lifetime of doughnuts from the Alpine bakery, ignorant noodle. She walked past the 'them' for quite a distance, all the way around the dance floor to find Thulani. She drew her pashmina, that talisman that had yet to earn its keep, around her like fine chain-mail and navigated the walk of notoriety with aplomb and grace, observed by Thulani moving in to the rescue. He intercepted her, and led her gently into a gazebo. Storm clouds rumbled over Saxonwold. The band started playing; rain fell in turgid drops. Thulani embraced Holly with his arms around her shoulders, rather than waist, uncertain that his arms would make it all the way around. A starling whistled a dulcet come hither.

As they were about to kiss the vengeful rapist scorned and his cronies approached, with Capulet/Montagu dynamics to follow. Cloaks were flung back and daggers drawn. Punches were thrown, ending with Thulani, in a spectacular class suicide, declaring that he'd rather have one Holly than all of them! The party cooled and thinned out considerably, to a much better social result, and he introduced Holly to the few friends he had left. His parents were proud of his stand as news of it buzzed through, and they did like a buzz and a stir. They warmed to and embraced Holly, who brought out a warm grace in their son that they noticed immediately, since it had not been there before.

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Pindile texted Holly that she'd arrived and had been to the film festival which had not been dull, and would be at Lorelei Terrace to meet her whenever she got back, or at Angel Eye's if she got back to Braamfontein later rather than sooner. Holly was floored now that the Pindile had actually returned. She didn't know what to make of it or how to respond. In the car with Thulani after the party, en route to Braamfontein and Angel Eye's, Holly explained Pindile to Hunye and to herself, sitting bolt upright and looking straight ahead. Hunye took a long and winding road to Braamfontein and listened in

silence. From time to time he'd peek at Holly. Her chin seemed to sticking out a bit more than usual, and she didn't appear to be blinking. Holly shivered out of her present mood and texted Pindile that she was on her way. Pindile waited for her on the festive and brightly lit corner of Juta and De Beer, where Hunye dropped Holly off and went to find parking.

Pindile, whose first impression of Holly was that she'd have to work hard for the rest of her natural life to get back in there, was at first all 'oh my baby girl' touchy-feely with the swinging arms and knocking knees. She lavished hugs upon Holly, who stiffened in the novelty of her mother's embrace.

'Mmmmm,' thought Holly: 'A bit too Whitney Houston after leaving the baby at the chemist, but not a bad effort.'

They found a table on the sidewalk away from the noise, where they sat by themselves, at first in silence. Pindile's chin jutted out a touch more than it normally did. She slid one hand smoothly into her bag and deftly brought out a pack of slim cigarettes and a smart lighter. She lit one and breathed in deeply.

Holly broke the ice: "Do you know how old I am?"

"Y'know what, let me get us a drink, tell me, what do you drink?" deflected Pindile.

'Mmmmm,' thought Holly: 'So that's how she's going to play it.' She felt her mood dip.

Pindile reappeared, put the beers on the table and lost it: "I mean, what do you say to a daughter you haven't seen for eighteen years because you didn't want to fuck her up with your shit? You tell me Holly, you tell me."

'That's more like it,' thought Holly: 'Much better.' So began around about two hours of at times emotional to-ing and fro-ing that led to them having some sense of how to be with each other.

Holding up one pristine, soft lemon yellow finger nail, Pindile looked Holly in the eye and said: "Let's take a break and agree to, one, enjoy this evening."

Holding up a second mid gray digit, she continued: "Two, you can ask me anything, anytime."

She displayed a third light lime green finger: "I forget the third."

"Who did the nails?" Holly inquired.

"Did I say how much I love the eyebrows, whose are they?" replied Pindile.

Pindile felt tearful and moved around the table to hold Holly tightly from behind.

"The hair, Pindile, please, the hair," cautioned Holly. Pindile flapped with apologies.

"I hope you're not always this intense, *Mummy.* Relax. I don't hate you. I don't know you well enough."

"So wise, where did you come you come from?" oozed Pindile, rubbing the sides of Holly's shoulders well away from the hair.

"You tell me," retorted Holly with her chin: "Or was it a stork called Vinny?"

Pindile winced. Arm in arm they returned to the festivities inside Angel Eye's where Mona and Pindile fell into each other's arms and wept. Gomez struck a passionate chord with the pianist who accompanied her to a smoking hot interpretation of 'Besame Muchos', or 'Kiss Me A Lot'.

At the end of the song, after a protracted ovation, she announced: "Everybody to my hotel for a party!"

Holly introduced Pindile to Thulani, and they all went upstairs to find Nhlohlotelo, Fick, Butch Marino and Leroy playing scrabble and drinking mint tea.

"Not a good idea *kiik*," or 'sister' in Mayan, as they'd recently learnt from her, was the consensus amongst Gomez's many new friends at Angel Eye's, since Gomez was buying: "We love you, it's been fabulous meeting you, but, no, this descending upon the Saxonwold is a very bad idea."

It firmed her resolve.

"No, no, no," they urged: "You are being drunk and Mexican Mary contrary; Vera Gomez you have no idea how fucked you are. You are about to visit a worst fear upon the Saxonwold: a gaggle of black creative people. You'll break their spirit," they entreated: "Please don't insist."

"*Preshisely* why it must be done," she asserted from the top of the bar counter, downed more tequila, and called for three hotel busses.

It was the oddest thing: Gomez's detractors, which was everybody other than Gomez, seemed to be persuading her to their most sensible view, when she clapped her hands briskly to produce what sounded like dulcet birdsong. The detractors were mesmerized. Gomez began a feathery serpentine dance of such enchantment that they all followed in a hypnotizing interplay of gyrating shadow, dancer upon dancer. They found themselves following her in a swaying line into the taxies from the hotel, which had

arrived, and had no recollection of any of it afterwards. With everybody safely under her spell, Gomez bribed the drivers generously into a joyride through Hillbrow before descending on the Saxonwold Hotel bar. For a short while the bar was turned into a tavern in a favela, which didn't go down well, leading to an exchange of views between Gomez and the management. Consequently, Gomez was thrown out of the hotel. She spent that night with Angel, who was in her thrall and enjoying being there immensely.

Gomez didn't have much time left in Joburg. Leroy had finished the script, but was fiddling and holding on. Gomez and Fick took charge. Fick marched Leroy and Gomez up to his shed, where they logged Soxy in on Skype, and worked steadily through the two days and nights before Gomez's departure, during which time Gomez would, choosing her moments, slink off and disappear for short and long periods of time, to reappear balming her lips, in a telltale Cheshire grin, not forgetting a spring in the step, all of which went unnoticed by the tramp and prodigy. Nhlohlotelo came and went with victuals and useful contributions to the process. When Leroy felt Fick out about a swim in his heated pool, Fick laughed heartily and confessed that the 'babe' was his South American agent, who had seen Leroy on the security camera in the bar, and took the piss; and that he sometimes viewed the tape, often with others, from here and abroad, for a laugh.

"Never assume that you're not being observed while you're observing," advised Fick.

They showed the final draft to Nhlohlotelo one last time. She pointed at and commented on a detail, which required another three hours of revision. Finally, it was done.

A new day rose over Braamfontein to birdsong through the light early morning traffic, and the sound of sprinklers on the roof garden flicking and gyrating. Gomez stepped onto the sidewalk outside Lorelei, took off her shades, and peered into the window to Plumage. She knocked on the window and waved at Jamar who was with an early client, listening to music through earphones. He didn't see or hear her. The early client waved back at her. She popped into Angel Eye's for a dignified farewell with the Phala, there practicing scales by himself. Three hours later, a taxi pulled up and she sprung into it, grinning, with a fresh hard copy of Leroy's new script in final draft snugly in her luggage, the backup memory stick safely in her front pants pocket, which she patted with satisfaction on her way to O R Tambo International while Holly, who'd been reading 'Mafiuso' through the night, to the end, slept in, and dreamed of Sicilians scoping

a way in and out of the vaults under Braamfontein Savings and Loan through a series of old mining tunnels.

*

In Holly's dreams they blasted their way into the vault, while in reality a team of bomb disposal experts in a tunnel below Lorelei engaged in the controlled explosion of a rogue old mining incendiary, which shook Lorelei and woke Holly, who got up in a funk and was amazed: the 'Sins of the Fathers' had been ejected from under the bedside table, now perfectly on the level, and lay there in the sun, glinting: 'Read me, you want to, you know you do.' This Holly was moved to do immediately, and it was a revelation from page one. Her intuitive sense of justice was outraged. During this time of her acquainting herself with the sins of fathers, she braided her hair with Nhlohlotelo's expert assistance. Nhlohlotelo couldn't help herself, and twirled gently the skills and intuitions of the muse into Holly's head.

Holly decided that she simply had to do something to make the world a better place. However, as she skirted a sense of purpose, in that part of her head as yet unaffected by Nhlohlotelo's almost invasive fingering of the roots of her hair and thinking towards humility and compassion, a more sedentary position formed: if she did nothing, Holly mused, at the very most precious little, she'd not make the world any worse, surely. Nhlohlotelo's plan had backfired, and Holly became the anti or counter-muse, exhibiting thereafter and forever onwards every aspect of prosaic, uninspiring practicality.

One week after their eventful party, the Hunye family sat down to an informal meal in Saxonwold. The parents were excited about a property they'd seen down in Franschoek, Cape Town. Should they put in an offer? Did Thulani need any furniture? A Weber? A bookcase? After the meal Sydney went to his study while Thulani and Lindy cleared.

"If you don't ask me you'll never know," said Hunye to his mother playfully.

"Well then," she replied gravely and paused waving a plate in mid air: "Who is she exactly, and what are your intentions?"

"No, no, no, appropriate but wrong response!" lamented Thulani: "You really want to ask about the grandmother with the dreadlocks and the famous old writer who was slapped by Sophia Loren; then there's her mother, the knife-thrower, who Holly saw last week for the first time in eighteen years, and Butch, the lover, both from the Maputo Circus.

Mrs. Hunye dropped the plate and looked up sharply: "Now you have my attention."

Chapter 16

Lambi Yatra

It is no longer there, the unpolished 0,9 carat Burmese pigeon blood ruby once set in Lorelei's foundation. The ruby's Lambi Yatra, or 'long and eventful journey' in Hindi, began in the sixteenth century in Mogok, in northern Myanmar or Upper Burma, along the Mogok Stone Tract, a unique geological phenomenon rich in colored gems of a reliably high quality, including, amongst others, sapphire, spinel, peridot, zircon, topaz and very rare painite. Nowhere else on the planet is such a variety of stones to be found in one place. In the age-old market for natural, colored stones, flawless pigeon blood rubies from Mogok are the most rare and expensive.

The ruby was first brought to light from one of the very first mines there. Through the fullness of time, peace and peril it was sold and bought; lost and recovered; coveted, stolen and looted many times over, witnessing the best and worst in human nature and experience. In the 1740's the ruby found itself in the Deccan: an arid, triangular-shaped plateau, close to the sky, stretching from Bombay in the west, to the Bay of Bengal, in the east, and Mysore to the south. By this time that exotic India of bejeweled Mughal Princes on richly caparisoned steeds; of Maharajahs, Begums, Nizams, Nawabs; of slaves and harems; of thundering platoons of elephants charging into epic battle, and tiger hunts had all but crumbled together with centralized administration and government, and the rule of law. India was rotting from its core and overripe for the picking. The triangulated India/England/China rough trade in raw and manufactured cotton, tea, silver and opium intersected here, in the Deccan, a very busy place indeed where notaries, agents, messengers, treasure-bearers and drug mules crisscrossed the dry and pitted landscape.

Then, there were the Marathas: studious, highly literate and implacably Hindu devotees of Shiva. They were both a product of and contributor to this volatile instability. Increasingly militarized they were moved to more artful cunning and trickery in tactic and strategy by every attempt by the Muslim Mughals, some Sunni, others Shia, and the English to put them in their place. Based in Maharashtra province on the southwestern coast of the Deccan, they campaigned constantly, often far away from home and the treasury. Yet, soldiers had to be paid. Rather than wagon loads of heavy gold or silver, gemstones were easy to courier swiftly and could be sold on to pay troops.

In this parched Indo-Oriental Wild West it is a clear and starry autumnal Diwali's in the seventeen-forties. A young lady of astonishing beauty is on the last leg of her journey from Maharashtra province to a middleman who will sell on the ruby and a sapphire she secretly carries to pay Maratha troops on campaign to the east. She carries also the child of her true love back home, but doesn't yet, and will never know this.

She is one of a party of nine travellers, increasing to twenty-one as twelve others join them at various places en route, at different times. The original nine travellers are not aware that their new fellow travellers are Thugs, or 'Land Pirates', especially since they all so solicitous. The enlarged group of travellers is an evening away from their destination. The nine want to press on through the night, but are persuaded by the Thugs to rest, and get there refreshed first thing in the morning.

"It's dangerous," warn the Thugs: "We might be robbed or worse on the road in the night."

It is the last chance for the Thugs to make their move. Their endgame is to seize the cash, gold, gems and opium balls carried by treasure-bearers and drug mules. The Thugs are well aware of this treasure on the move: their associates at various customs searches along the way, who will receive fair reward, keep them informed. The travellers make camp.

In a serene moment, after a splendid repast, they sit around the fire, one Thug behind each victim-to-be. A Thug volunteers to wash up; another plays a reed flute that lulls the audience into letting down their guard. A third leads them in prayer that gives thanks for their meal and safety. Together, they look up at the sky raising the hands leaving the fronts of their necks exposed. In grim concert, twirled and knotted *dhoti's,* each with a coin twisted into the middle of it to crush the windpipe, are tightened swiftly around nine necks, and pulled. It all happens very quickly.

The lady is robbed of, amongst other things, her life and that of her unborn child; a natural, unpolished sapphire the size of a quail's egg, and a smaller, unpolished Burmese pigeon blood ruby, both stones cursed forever thereafter; the ruby spread melancholy, and the other sought revenge.

*

Rabia Khan was twenty-nine and butt ugly though did come from musty old Mughal lucre. At thirty-two she agreed to a marriage down to one Palwasha Khan: twenty-three, dull, irritating, but sexy. His mother gave him a ruby to give to Rabia to create a false impression of wealth and generosity. When they married in 1939, she gave Rabia a large

sapphire with a small rose cut into it. Immediately after Rabia took the stone into her hand, there was in the mother-in-law a profound and lasting change for the better in her mood and disposition. Rabia doubted the stones' authenticity and might have said as much. Palwasha took umbrage. Archly, he claimed that they were in fact rare and ancient stones, and worth a small fortune. The ruby and sapphire were amongst his mother's best stones, he added sharply, and therefore the gift was to be received as a huge compliment. Sure, he conceded, they didn't look like much, but this was because they came from so long ago. Was the sapphire not once owned by the Tyrant of Mysore, Tipu Tip? In those far off days he explained pedantically, taste tended to mainly rubies, sapphires and emeralds, and the innate mystery of the unpolished stone; its flaws, and passage through time; where it was from, who had owned it and so on. He pointed out that only part of the sapphire was rose-cut and polished to allow a glimpse into its personality. Brilliant cut stones were a vulgar, modern invention he fulminated.

The new bride, Rabia, freshly put in her place, developed further an instinctual enmity towards the in-laws, who she trusted as far as she could boomerang a *chapatti.* To be clear, Palwasha's surname was Khan, from his father's side, and Rabia's mother's surname was also Khan, from her father's side, both originating in the direct line of Genghis (1162 to 1227), through the wise queen, Mandukhai (1449-1510), wife of a son of the sons of Genghis himself. From the Steppes of origin of the Mongol Khans, Palwasha's Khans knew only that they'd migrated to India from somewhere else; Rabia's Khans were more self-aware, perhaps too much so, of their journey through historical times never ending, from steppe through China to India. Palwasha's Khan's knew only what they'd become, not who they were; Rabia's knew exactly who they were, because they were that still, with wealth and a rather lush family tree to prove it. Not for nothing was Rabia's mother's name, Mandy, or Mandukhai, after her mother, and so on.

Women in Rabia's family retained and went by the maiden name even after marriage, confusing in the not unusual event of twice a Khan. In Rabia the ancient Mongol custom of it being the woman who builds the home was strongly present in the architecture of Rabia's mind. It was therefore not unusual for her to imagine her own home to a Mongolian scale, a home that would serve her well over the longer term. It was how these women did what they did, to a scale informed by their having in their time ruled over more people spread over more land than any women before or since. When she married, Rabia was not thinking of home as a suburban pile in a good part of Joburg or a *faux* Tuscan simplex. Lest we forget, it was a Khan, Shah Jahan, who built the Taj

Mahal, and studded its ceilings, walls and foundation with gems and semi-precious stones. Rabia decided to build a block of apartments.

She secured a site cheaply on the corner of Juta and De Beer in Braamfonein by lending many small sums from friends, family, associates and loan sharks against the half-value of the sapphire as collateral. She chose those who feared her, or those she had in her trust or under her influence, those who'd not dare question the value of the stone. She found a lady architect from Europe working in Joburg in the deco style, who designed the building. The night before filling in the foundation to her building, to be named Khan's Corner, around mid-October and close to Diwali, Rabia tossed and sweated, murmured and groaned to horrifying dreams of a strangling in a grove, and the sound of unborn babies howling in purgatorial suspension. The next morning she yawned loudly while the foundation was filled in. Once the builder's left, she watched the cement start to dry, her hand around the ruby in a little onyx box in a pocket. She dropped the box and ruby into the foundation for good luck, turned and left. The foundation set quite suddenly.

Palwasha, or 'light-ray of the moon', made suits for men, and 'translated' post-war French designs for the modern woman, from a shop at street level below Khan's Corner. He collected and traded in rubies, emeralds, jade and pearls, often not legally. In another shop, Rabia, an expert beadier and embroiderer, made bespoke hats, fascinators, gloves, and covered shoes and buttons in silk and satin. She had a long waiting list for wedding dresses in particular: it was said that if you wed in one of her creations, you would have a long, happy marriage, of relevance in a culture where widows, one way or another, threw themselves onto their dead husbands' pyres. As she cut and shaped, pinned and fitted, the brides-to-be told her about themselves. She'd sew, bead and embroider the pattern of the rest of their days predictively into the dress, veils and trains, little of it good news, on account of the curse of the two stones, one beneath; the other nearby.

The small, rounded onyx box in the flash-dried foundation to Khan's Corner was turned to dust by the ruby's melancholy soon after the building went up. The ruby spread bitter mourning through the architecture. Khan's Corner became a very unhappy place. The negative miasma of both ruby and sapphire infected also the immediate neighborhood around Khan's Corner to eventually afflict all of Braamfontein, which fell on hard urban times. Bust went a promised boom before it went boo. Property prices tanked. Braamfontein soon degenerated into a slum. All birdlife and butterflies fled, and

all foliage, tree or shrub, withered and died, leaving only weeds.

*

Rabia used the sapphire as a paperweight but it disturbed her. It seemed to require attention. She was about to pack it away, forever, when it appeared to sparkle with the colors of the rainbow. She paused and looked closer at the rose cut into it. She held it up to the sun, fell prey to its wicked vengeance and under the spell of a scorching desire for it to sparkle again, but it did not. Desire turned into an unseemly, uncharacteristic lusting. Rabia angled the sapphire at sunlight through a magnifying glass to no effect. Her ever-increasing fascination drew her into the sapphire and tugged her away from reality: at a pace with which the environment around her decayed, she let things slide, and herself go. Lorelei soon fell into disrepair; various Khans boarded up their apartments and left for greener and safer pastures. Rabia hardly noticed; she'd become mesmerized by the sapphire's countless flaws and imperfections, in which she tried, unsuccessfully, to find a celestial pattern. She became even more obsessively attached to it, keeping it with her always, in so doing bringing on the worst years of her life.

On Diwali at lunch in Braamfontein her husband, Palwasha: beam of light from the moon, choked to death on a renegade shard of tandoori chicken wishbone, and shone no more. Usually, she'd remove the bones for him, since he ate slack-jawed, full and open mouthed, but this once, she'd forgotten. Palwasha's debts, of which Rabia had not a clue, then came due in an endless stream, each requiring the sale of one or another asset, often itself not fully paid for. Rabia embroidered her way out of this mess for many months. She was in the process of succeeding admirably, when, on Diwali, exactly a year after Palwasha's death, she played sadly with the sapphire whilst reclining on the Sofa of Self-Doubt that had been so difficult to install.

Moonlight struck the stone momentarily and it sparkled briefly. There was then a blinding flash. The next morning she woke up and could no longer see. That evening, blind in the middle of a stormy night, the sapphire snugly in her housecoat pocket, she thought she heard distressed yowls and tight gurgles of from a baby child, on the roof, as if being throttled, and felt her way there uneasily over wet and slippery floors. Becoming more agitated she got to the roof, but the child sounded further off; hands outstretched, she slipped and slid toward the very edge of the top of the building in sheets of rain and howling wind; the child sounded closer the further toward the edge she went. Suddenly, her sight returned; she could see, clearer so than ever before. As she raised her hands to her eyes and heaven in ecstatic relief, praises be, she lost her footing and plummeted to

the sidewalk below, on the corner of Juta and De Beer, above the ruby in the foundation. The sapphire was crushed and broken into many little pieces that were hosed away with Rabia's blood.

*

Urban Joburg is crazy about cinema and film; story telling and television, branding and advertising; and is a major center for film and television production in Africa, home to the South African Broadcasting Corporation. A movie was being shown on the wall of a building in Braamfontein in early November, 2021. The title, *Mandarin Court*, pulled into focus in an oriental, bright red font projected onto a freshly plastered and painted wall to a block of apartments and shops called Lorelei Terrace on a warm early summer's evening. After four years in production, this premiere of the recently released international blockbuster in Africa was a joyous, open occasion, with a huge crowd, press, television, a street party, and a sensational attendance by the hugely popular Hollywood and television star, Soxy Thornton, and her P.A turned co-producer, Vera Gomez, two of the many producers of *Mandarin Court.*

They stood in a huddle in a secure VIP tent, with, amongst others, representatives of the Hong Kong producers, two Arabs representing sovereign funds, representatives of Armenian and Quaker film capital, a fourteen-year old technology billionaire from Seattle, a younger fellow, and a very old woman with high white dreadlocks, drinking champagne. 'Developed From an Original Story by Leroy Zondi,' read the credits as they scrolled up: 'Written by Leroy Zondi and Beatty Tomtom'. The intimate gaggle turned to one side, and raised their glasses to a portrait drawn on a napkin from a hotel in Portofino in a frame, on an easel, with a bouquet of Camellias on a tall stand obscuring the entirely inappropriate inscription, signed 'R Couplet' almost illegibly, bottom left. The movie played in reflection on the glass over the portrait, its soundtrack clearly audible above the loud social buzz from speakers suspended from the front of the building, as if the building itself was speaking.

When Leroy's new story, 'Lorelei Terrace', was completed as a finished film script, with Gomez and Fick's guidance and Nhlohlotelo's occasional inspirations and corrections, and finally made into a movie (in the east, titled Mandarin Court, after three years of Fick and Leroy re-writing and re-negotiating), Lorelei became an enchanted ancient Chinese homestead, Mandarin Court, with a magical sword buried beneath it; Fick became the wizened sage, misunderstood to be a tramp, and Leroy the swarthy orphan who took refuge there, in the middle of a travelling Chinese opera, and so on for

around 145 hugely entertaining minutes. It was a hit that drew attention to Leroy, Lorelei, and Fick, who was, not for the first time, re-discovered and re-acclaimed as a national treasure; the Japanese paid up and saved the Rajbansi – Sigcawus and Lorelei Terrace. They released aspects of their respective, and complimentary, perfectly adequate Ntylo's archival selections with no expense and effort spared on publicity and marketing, and made much more than they'd spent on the archive.

Fick's roof was left exactly as it was when he sighed his last, in a plush screening room in far away Hong Kong, before the end credits to *Mandarin Court*, about a year before its release; was it this that killed him? Lorelei Terrace became and is today a tourist destination, and place of cultural interest on account of Fick, and Leroy, who spends little time there, travelling often and widely. Angel - Eye's is a feature on a Joburg Kofifi Tour and thrives. The roof is a living museum and study center managed by Nhlohlotelo, Junior, Leroy and the twins, but mostly by Holly, who didn't become Mrs. Holly Wood, is as yet unattached and studying economics at the University of Joburg. Lorelei has a new panel of buzzers, which reads:

Ground Floor

Number One Junior

Number Two Angel & The Twins

First Floor

Number Three Zondi

Number Four Zenani

Number Five Mabasa

Second Floor

Rajbansi - Sigcawu

Wietzman

Roof

Fikile Mankazana Foundation and Museum

*

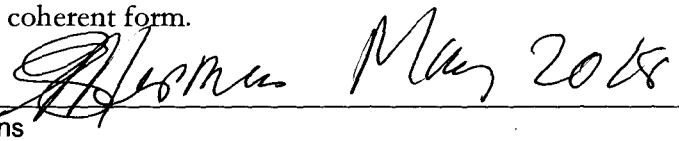
As *Mandarin Court* drew a close the ruby in Lorelei's foundation glowed with happy memories of what it once mourned, and reflected blessings upon the place it once

cursed. For the first time since being dropped in it, the ruby felt constrained in Lorelei's foundation, and needed desperately to get out. It started turning about slowly, working up to a steady revolving grind and shattered, as if made of glass. How could Rabia have known, when the sapphire sparkled at her with all the colors of the spectrum, that real sapphires reflected only one color? That an authentic natural blue sapphire would reflect only blue light, a white one only white light, and so on.

In the Deccan, many years ago, the risks of transporting tangible assets inspired imaginative mitigations. For example, it was commonplace to send irreplaceable precious and rare gems with a number of couriers: one courier with the real thing took the most direct route to the true destination, usually in disguise; and decoys carrying fakes were sent in opposite directions and at different times.

Reflective Essay

A contemplation of the mechanics of improvising a new fiction to book length, and attempts at structuring it into coherent form.



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Reflective Essay

Stanley Hermans

Image 1

Medina Court, small pen ink and wash on paper, 2017, an example of drawing into writing





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A. **Introduction**

After all, why has a novel to be planned? Cannot it grow? Why need it close, as a play closes? Cannot it open out? Instead of standing above his work and controlling it, cannot the novelist throw himself into it and be carried along to some goal that he does not foresee? (E. M. Forster)

This essay contemplates the mechanics of improvising a new fiction to book length and attempts at structuring it into coherent form in conversation with the following: the language of art and the approach of post-Impressionist studio painting; Milan Kundera and E. M. Forster's observations on crafting fiction; and Rene Berger's thinking about coherence, scale, proportion and perspective. The new fiction is entitled 'Wush!' (ref. creative writing submission).

Perspective refers to a point of view, or, where the writer could be coming from, often in a context of where and when the writer is working. In art, perspective is a method of representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface, as in drawing, painting and shallow relief; linear perspective depends on the illusion of parallel lines at right angles to the picture plane, or orthogonals which lead the eye and imagination with motifs and themes which signpost the viewer into meaning. Thematically, Wush! originated in a search for a personal/creative perspective in history, experience and culture with which to better understand the present reality.

The main character in 'Wush!' Leroy Zondi, is linked to his father and grandfather, and a rhythm of ideas by the motif (a recurring symbolic feature employed by the writer to guide the mind's eye of the reader with a particular narrative purpose) of a shared habit, a dusting off of the cuffs, which begins with the grandfather, who arrives in Joburg by a 'long and dusty road.' Smoke a motif which initiates, baptizes, clarifies, communicates and heals; and as in smoke and mirrors, smoke that obfuscates, a reference to an opaqueness of history.

Linear Renaissance perspective, as in Alberti's treatise, 'On Painting' (1435/36) which represents the gaze of anthropomorphic humanism, employs a single vanishing point on the horizon, usually but not necessarily in the center of the composition, corresponding to the spectator's view-point in front of the picture. Here, the relationship between artist and viewer is mediated, if not prescribed, by a role and function, or by a canon for the artist as inventor of illusion. The same might be said of the relationship between the reader and the writer of fiction. These techniques of illusion:

...enable the artist to calculate the precise scale of an object diminishing in the distance...it allows the depiction of a measurable environment...It serves to clarify narrative, to help focus the viewer's attention, and to mobilize his or her empathy by making the viewer an eyewitness to the event or scene depicted. It can also be used to make symbolic points, either through application or by disruption of the laws of optics. (Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists)

My approach to inventing an original fiction to book length was at first referenced not in writing practice and expression (for example, the experimental spontaneity of Kerouac's improvisations, or, for that matter, the inventive immediacy of the Dadaist performance poets at the Cafe Voltaire), but more in the method and process of a post-Impressionist, studio or easel painter improvising in layers from the unknown into the more certain. For the purposes of this essay Henri Matisse represents the genre:

The word 'impressionism' ... is not an appropriate designation for certain more recent painters who avoid the first impression, and consider it almost dishonest. A rapid rendering of a landscape represents only one moment of its existence....I prefer, by insisting upon its essential character, to risk losing charm in order to obtain greater stability. (Matisse)

The shape that 'Wush!' has taken is due also to explorations reflected in the bibliographical references, to the north, west and east of the setting in Africa. Visits to other times and places, suggested by where a character might well have come from and been to, interact with themes, settings, motifs, and character development mostly in where identity and place might intersect: the relationship between being 'from' and 'of' a place and time. Rabia Khan is very much from and of ancient Mughal India and a moribund past, and behaves accordingly; Nhlohlotelo Sigcawu is from the Transkei but of urban Joburg, inhabiting both the modern 'hip' world and the other-worldly, which includes intuitions, dreams, visions, imaginings, premonitions and day-dreams. The reader is taken to where and when a character might have originated or journeyed, as is the character's imagining of themself, mostly by way of historical fact transformed into fiction, which functions also as a respite where more is learnt about a character or circumstance away from Braamfontein and the present.

B. **Inspirations**

More significantly so than any other feature of creative process, in this painterly approach inspiration propels the idea into expression well in advance of formal considerations. In the creative writing submission the matter of inspiration is raised with the Poppie character (page 25), which references the Greek muse, Persephone, Queen of the Underworld. The following section attempts to illustrate the mechanics of particular inspirations ('experience', 'a place', an icon or personality, or a particular human condition or aspect of history) processed into expression.

Inspirations of place and people

Braamfontein and Lorelei Terrace:

'Spread over more than four square kilometers Braamfontein is today a young, trendy, African urban enclave with no children or domestic pets. The Nelson Mandela Bridge affords safe passage across a train-yard of carriages, sheds and such, from Braamfontein into Newtown, home to the vaults of The South African Reserve Bank. Braamfontein is home to many students, The University of the Witwatersrand (and it's unique collection and museum of African art), various private colleges, and municipal and corporate offices. At street level are rats, pushers, tarts, pimps, a vigorous criminal element and many bars with cheap beer, hearty meals, sports cable and excellent live music, and beneath, a warren of old mining tunnels.' (page 43)

Braamfontein was an early inspiration for an intimate urban neighborhood and sense of community where the action and plot could be centralized and controlled. Lorelei Terrace is a reference to the last remaining few deco blocks of apartments in Braamfontein, some of which appear to have a story to tell.

Buy-Well:

'For now, and for not much longer, he lived close to work in Newtown. The supermarket that employed him, Buy-Well, was in a newly built shopping center in Newtown, a hop and skip over the Nelson Mandela Bridge from Braamfontein. Absolutely everybody was talking about it. Buy-Well's post-modern super duper very latest Pan-African flagship store was, truly, a marvel: brilliantly lit aisle after aisle of everything you might need or desire from a supermarket anywhere in the world, and

booths for specialized consumer and financial services, like paying the electricity, renewing a dog license, or booking a flight. The alert staff glowed with wellbeing and sharp grooming from meticulously coiffed top to shiny-shod toe.' (page 41)

The Leroy character was found in the many floor managers at this impressive new Shoprite in Newtown.

Venice:
'It was 2014, early evening, high summer and Venice was aflutter like a tubercular courtesan about to receive. A huge blood-red sun lowered itself against the salmon-flecked turquoise of a Turner sky. Leroy Zondi, African prodigy of contemporary film, swayed on a nippy *vaporetto*, or water taxi frothing through The Grand Canal, in which shimmered Venice's blinding illusion of itself. He held on tightly and though giddy enjoyed the refreshing spray against his cheek, even though the rest of him was getting soaked.' (page 38)

As an inspiration of place, Venice is European, African and Oriental in function, look and feel; and modern and ancient in the sense that it might be experienced as what it is now and was then, an illusion of perception and history reinforced by the city appearing literally to float on the seas of time. Not so Braamfontein, Joburg in Africa, particularly after the weekend, when it seems to float on a sea of uncollected garbage and empty beer bottles.

Fikile Mankazana:
'Fikile Mankazana left high school in Durban at sixteen and came to Joburg where he worked in a boilermaker's and lived with a cousin near the Western Native Townships. He was young, good-looking, intelligent, articulate and sociable. He learnt how to drive, and worked as a messenger for a newspaper for as long as it took to accumulate a deposit on a good second hand car. At twenty-one Fick became an independent owner taxi. By the end of his first year he'd paid off the car, and become popular: he understood the client's mood immediately, with a sense of where it wanted to go, and possessed excellent instinctual communication skills: when to speak, what to say and for how long, and, crucially, when not to speak. He quickly established a loyal base of regular inner city fares...' (page 29)

Fikile Mankazana is in part inspired by the Chaplinesque idea of the genius as tramp, a doffing of the bowler to the thespians and their craft. There is a specific reference to 'Chunky Charlie', who, in *poesboekies,* or A5 pocket photo-dramas of the 1960's, was a larger than life tramp who mis-adventured about the Joburg CBD in a large and magical coat: it had many pockets in the lining from which he would retrieve one thing or another that got him out of peril. He moved very fast, in a real-time survivalist scuttle. Fikile's surname honors a returning South African exile, a young lady who played Chopin on the ward piano in rehab, where, in my youth, I first met her in the queue for meds.

"What are *you* in for?" I enquired.

"Murder," she replied, the beginning of a short but memorable friendship.

She came from England, was studying psychology, and had recently returned to face matters of displacement and identity. Alas, she had no Afrikaans, and found herself amongst mostly depressed whites and coloreds, who, together with the staff, had no Xhosa. Often it was like she wasn't there, invisible in communications that she could neither understand nor respond to.

Miff Mona:

'...not too far away, inside The Alpine Bakery, Mona was at work counting rolls. Her often cantankerous, ninety-two year old mother, Isobel Zenani was prone to episodic public displays. Mona's bad penny, horny, once sizzling-hot older half-brother, Vincent, or Vinny, suspected father to Pindile's daughter, Holly, dropped in from time to time, amused them hugely, robbed them blind and disappeared. Even though Vinny sometimes hung about Lorelei, he was very careful not to bump into Nhohlotelo or Holly.' (page 84)

Having lived here in Braamfontein since 2010, I often visit the Black Forest Bakery in Juta Street, in the book called the 'Alpine Bakery', where there is a spirited woman called 'Meisie'. It intrigues that 'Meisie' is Afrikaans/Dutch for 'girl', and, risking untenable assumption, I doubt very much that this conceivably pejorative moniker began as a compliment, yet, and whatever, she has made the name her own, since nobody, but nobody in the forest crosses Meisie. She is a strong, independent and inspirational working Joburg dame, with duties and responsibilities, not unlike the character Miff Mona.

Inspirations for the narrating persona

The first inspirations for a Joburg persona and voice with which to tell a story set in Joburg were the 'Drum' magazine writers of the nineteen-fifties.

They were highly literate, sophisticated men with an understanding and love of the English language. But theirs was an irreverent love, because their models were American - more specifically Langston Hughes, Damon Runyon and the movies of Humphrey Bogart - and they were attracted to the fast, slangy, mixed language talk of the streets. So Casey Motsisi would write: 'By the way, pardner, let me introduction you' when he meant 'introduce'. (Mike Nicol)

The function and effect of these snappy, fearless 'tellers of the truth' seemed to represent a progression from the Imbongi, who in African oral tradition reminds his people about their history and heritage.

The Imbongi is also a village bard with a profound role in African society – that of articulating the mood of the community and capturing these collective sentiments in crisp poetic lines...among the Xhosa people in particular, the praise singer's craft has a healing effect on the listener who is emotionally wounded. (Sam Mathe)

This suggested another possible aspect to the role and function of the artist/writer as one who might also help to heal. The Imbongi speaks to perceptions of who wields authority over what might or might not be said, and who might say or withhold it, and may be speaking to power generally, to particularly someone in power and/or to the power within each. In Xhosa culture then and now the poet is allowed the greatest freedom to express anything in the appropriate metaphorical form, and at the appropriate time. It is omnipotence conferred for just that moment of candor. The tone and rhythm of the praise poet is ironical, elliptical and not entirely transparent; the narrating persona is wry and arch; it ducks, dives and weaves, not unlike the 'witchdoctor' character Majeke, an historical figure about whom little is known, making it possible to imagine him without historical constraint:

'Phalo sought advice from the wily old village druid, Majeke, he of the floating lower jaw with a radical overbite reminiscent of Sammy Davis Junior. Majeke agreed that it was a prickly impasse, and informed the king that he'd need time to think.

After a brief trance Majeke inquired: "Your Majesty, what is greater than your head and stronger than your right hand?"

"Absolutely nothing! How dare you! There is nothing greater than my head or stronger than my right hand!" exclaimed the King.

He slapped Majeke who ducked under the next blow with practiced agility, and continued nonplussed: "Perfectly right answer, Your Majesty: one could be the Head wife, the other the Right Hand wife, and they'd be of equal status."

Delighted with this solution, Phalo apologized to Majeke and gave him a farm, seeds, cows, one bull, tobacco and a chorus line of virgins.

Majeke danced a jig and chanted: "The day and the night; the sun, the moon and the stars; the wind and the rain belong to all; the land, the seas and the rivers belong to everyone, everyone, everyone." (page 16)

Interacting with these inspirations articulated the following: we relate to inspiration differently: some respond exuberantly as if to a happy instruction from a deity, others wouldn't know what it is, and feel it as nausea. Then there are those who ride inspiration hard, often for a lifetime, those who thrive on not much of it and the terminally uninspired. Are some of us more inspired than others because we don't 'have it in us', or because of how we choose to relate to it? Is receptiveness to possibly being inspired socially conditioned, or in the personality type?

Where am I writing from: the heart? Head? Soul?
Who am I speaking to or writing for?
What part of their humanity am I appealing to?
What's my way into their imagination?
How, and for how long do I need to hold their attention to communicate what I want to get across?
What might I want to communicate?
What for?
How?

Image 2

Example of an inspiration of vintage mass media: Alfred Hitchcock



Alfred Hitchcock talks about WOMEN

THE OLD MASTER of suspense speaks out again, but this time on an unusual subject. We asked Alfred Hitchcock to give *Preview* a few observations on the opposite sex.

He refused to commit himself on the wayward behaviour of females, but we got him started on women's fashions, about which he holds quite definite opinions.

"A woman wanting to subdue a man would do well to subdue herself first," he smiled. "If she is interested in catching a man's eye—or both of them for that matter—her dress should be as subtle as her actions. No man enjoys a woman who is loud, either in her costume or her manner. For me the well-dressed woman is one who exercises great restraint in her wardrobe and the use of cosmetics."

Warming to his subject, the rotund and often irreverent director continued, "Too much jewellery, too much glittering eye make-up, too much, too tight, have ruined the appearances of more women than the kitchen stove and kitchen sink combined."

At the same time, he added, "I am not really averse to artificial means of enhancing a woman's appearance. I don't see why a girl who has bad colouring shouldn't do something about it. After all, the way science has progressed, it's hard to *tell* whether a woman touches up her hair or wears false eyelashes. And if there's something missing, there's no reason why she shouldn't resort to quiet deception."

We weren't sure if Mr. Hitchcock wasn't still teasing, so we changed the subject. Rather apprehensively, we asked him what he considered the most flattering colour for a woman to wear—obviously he wasn't going to be in favour of the current greens and nasturtiums.

"Black," he said firmly. "A woman can't go wrong when wearing an outfit of that faithful basic colour. It sets off her face to great advantage.

"On the other hand," he mused, "she might have a face she wouldn't *want* to set off. In that case, I'd suggest pink, green or another floral colour. Those tones *distract*. And *everyone* is happier."



Mr. Hitchcock directs Eva Marie Saint in North by Northwest—*location here is Chicago's La Salle Street Station*

Image 3

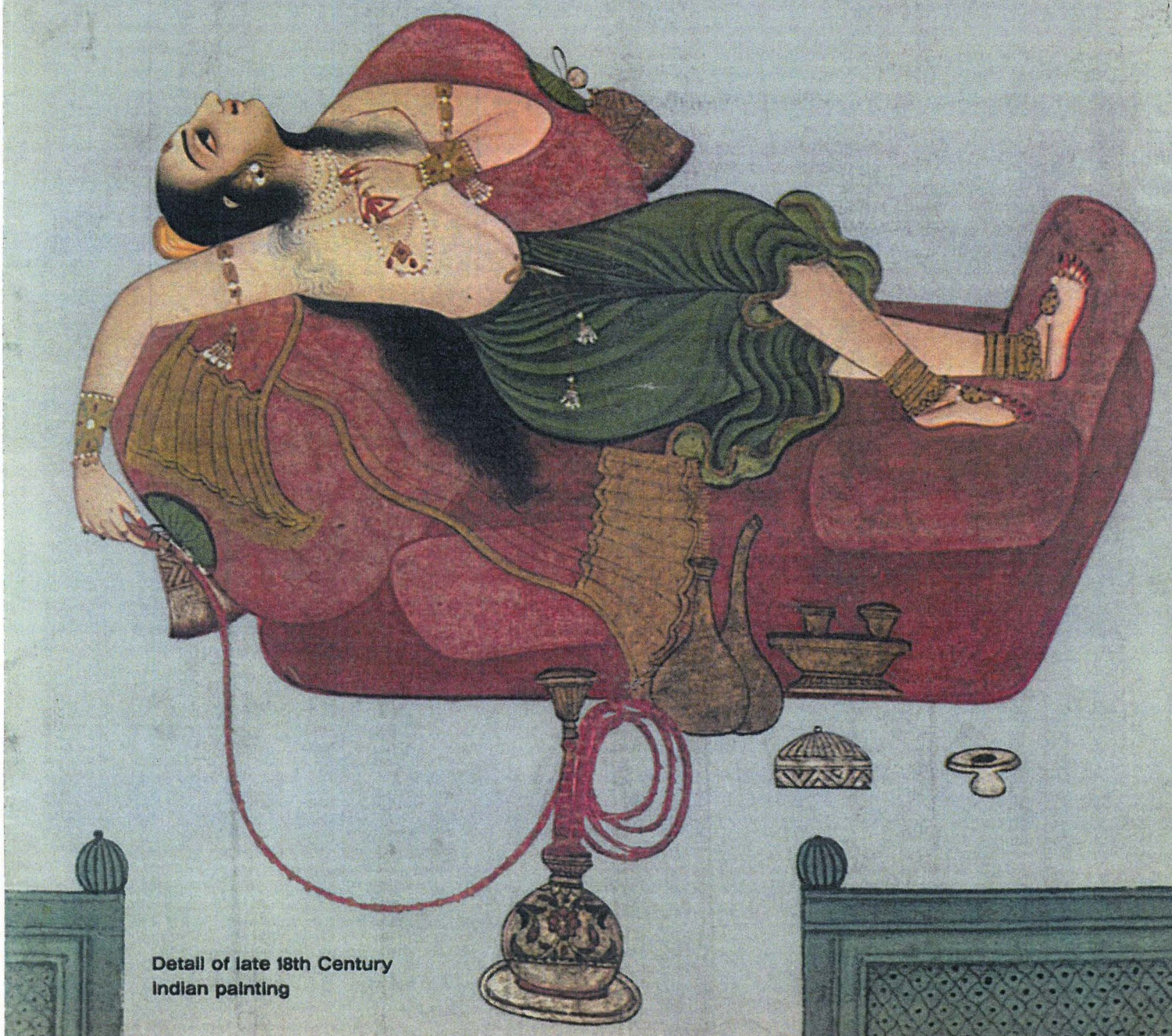
Example of an inspiration of vintage mass media: The Sofa of Self-Doubt

LIFE INTERNATIONAL

THE EXOTIC ART OF INDIA

10 PAGES IN COLOR

VIETNAM: A searching assessment of what the U.S. is doing there



Detail of late 18th Century Indian painting

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BAHAMAS	2/6	EL SALVADOR	75¢	LIBERIA	30¢	PERU	S/7	THAILAND	B 6
BERMUDA	2/6	ETHIOPIA	Eth$ .75	MALAWI	2/3	PHILIPPINES	P 1.00	TRUCIAL STATES	Rs 1.50
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®

The Sofa of Self-doubt

...the huge, long sofa, which had travelled over land and sea, hill and vale, by road, ship and rail from India to Rabia's mother in Durban, a wedding gift from her grandmother, who came from a family of carpenters and upholsterers.

It arrived in a crate with a fine inlaid enamel gramophone in the shape of a peacock, and a collection of Caruso recordings on thick long playing records, all padded with fine linen, and embroidered textiles. A system of pulleys had to be installed: there it was, the sofa, dangling with equivocation, twisting precariously on ropes as it was hoisted up to, and pulled through a gaping hole in the wall to the second floor, Apartment Number Four, yet to be fitted with the heavy teak double doors would open out onto the balcony.

"To the left," Rabia instructed: "A bit to the right, up now, be careful you morons!" she admonished: "It's swinging too much! Be careful! It belonged to my mother! To the right, *your* left, you imbecile peasant bastards! There, see, it's already torn!"

Rabia's mother was perfect in every way but one: a tending to self-doubt. She would recline on this same sofa, back of her hand to her forehead and doubt herself loudly to increasingly scratchy Caruso interpretations: was she a good enough mother? Wife? Daughter?

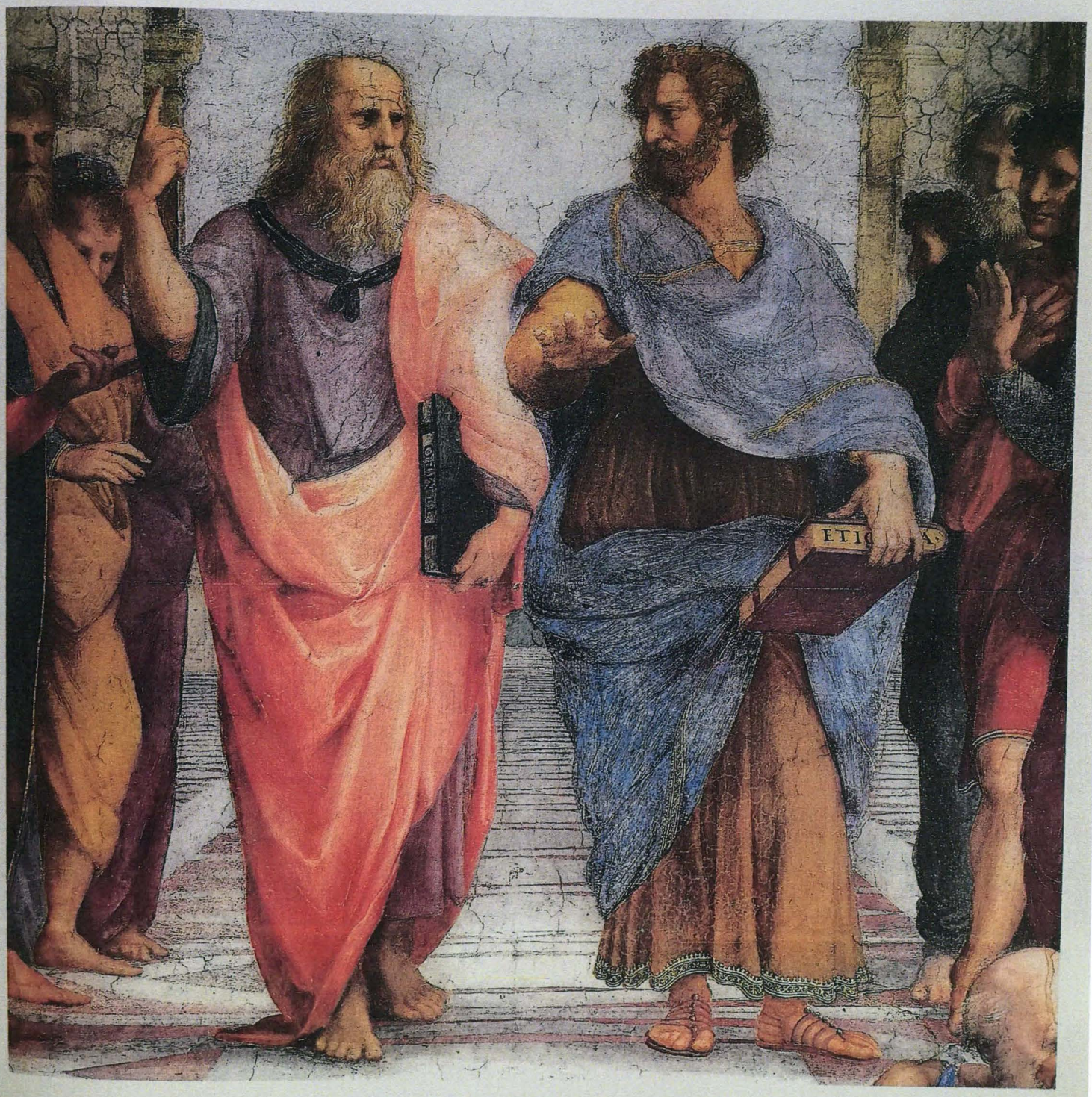
She took to Buddhism and explored further the emptiness of worldly existence, which didn't help. In her thirties, these introspections took her to a place where she doubted that she was or should be alive at all, the end of her, on the sofa, with an expression of beatific certainty.

The same could not be said about Leroy Zondi, who slept there now, snoring from deep within with quivering lips, a spittle river running through the corduroy just under the corner of his mouth.

Image 4

The School of Athens

The School of Athens,
Detail: Plato and Aristotle



C. **Structure and Form**

Referring to Raphael's *School of Athens* (page 23), Rene Berger's thinking in getting to coherence and proportion through scale is instructive. The Italics are Berger's:

'...coherence is the foundation of any work of art. But coherence is a complex phenomenon with many sides, and one of its aspects is proportion, *which concern questions of size or scale in the work.'*

Raphael's *School of Athens* 'at once gives the feeling of something constructed...mind and sensibility are soon made aware that its dimensions are not a chance matter...but that they are all related to some scale of magnitude', or a bigger picture:

*'...we become conscious of the relationships in scale that control them...*Indeed, the nature of the objects has nothing to do with the proportions: *the relative and respective dimensions of the forms within the work as a whole are what matter.'*

'Defined in this way, proportion in painting serves to convert figurative or non-figurative objects into plastic forms. On the one hand, forms are developed as figures, architectural elements or intervals, *and on the other – simultaneously - they are developed as relationships of scale within a given format.'*

'This is exactly how a writer proceeds. Situations, characters and scenes in a novel exist on the one hand as elements of the action, and on the other as parts of the book as a whole: chapters in each part, paragraphs in each chapter and sentences in each paragraph...', what Kundera refers to as the book's 'articulation', the division of the novel into parts, parts into chapters, chapters into paragraphs. Kundera's insight and approach to how the elements of a book might fit together and interact with one another suggested an approach to composition and coherence that to my mind had to begin with words, which were of fascination at the beginning of this process in the same way that Matisse describes 'the expressive aspect of colors' that 'impose' themselves upon him 'in a purely instinctual way': the discovery and animation of them in the activity of writing, as if conjuring colors; the sound of them in one arrangement or another; their talents for setting pace and rhythm, often in syncopation in the sense of destabilizing a regular flow of rhythm, and a placement of emphasis where it wouldn't normally occur: the sudden clash of a cymbal, or vivid word, where you'd least expect it, or the softness of a flute or vowel in a surprising place; and their taste or flavor, a capacity to communicate sweetness (joy) or bitterness (regret).

In considering how big or small, loud or quiet the fiction should be, painting practice suggested that bigger statements ought not to be too noisy, they exist enough; smaller statements need gently to call attention to themselves, never shouting; people duck, dive, run away and hide when they're shouted at; few move *towards* a raised voice. Tone and register became relevant to meaning. As in Watteau: the small can be operatic. Picasso's harrowing 'Guernica' protests loudly with mostly diagonal slashes of outrage expressed; his point and purpose is clear and direct, counter-propaganda as art because it works as art first, and then only as propaganda of the best sort. These considerations framed choices of scale and tone.

Set Pieces

The conditions of production were that of a fortnightly creative writing class with each student turning in around 12 X 5000 new words over two years. These submissions became 'set pieces', for example Sonny, Cora and the lion (pages 101 to 105); Zarina, Jamila and the mango (pages 100 to 101), amongst others. These set pieces were propelled by the activity of inventing and writing creatively, and much enriched by calls and responses in class encounters. They are character/setting driven, and exist in the final submission as areas of intensity, or primary colors. While characters did interact at this time in early process, and their narratives did intersect, they were generating a great deal of activity and there was much storytelling, but was any of it narrative action? Those set pieces that worked as coherent new writing tended to prose, which:

...applies a natural flow of speech, and ordinary grammatical structure rather than rhythmic structure, such as in the case of traditional poetry. Normal every day speech is spoken in prose and most people think and write in prose form. (literarydevices.net)

When they related to one another thematically and narratively the set pieces started to cohere, more so after pieces that clearly didn't 'work' or 'fit' were dropped. What was left ('First Treatment', 'Breakfast at Lorelei Terrace' and 'On Special Offer') was an urban yarn about a bright young Afro-urban film maker, Leroy Zondi and his film class, their characters, interactions, lives and times as 'new' urban Africans, Black and White, of the present and future. It was a story on the back of a matchbox about the challenges and joys of creative expression, a day – in – the - life urban African story of interactions around a pretext (film classes) that didn't quite sustain itself beyond possibly

a short story. Characters were many and promising enough, but they appeared as if from nowhere, with no provenance or origin, and often for no reason, hanging about in narrative places where they had no business being.

'I've always constructed (my novels) on two levels: on the first, I compose the novel's story; over that, I develop the themes (existential enquiries). The themes are worked out steadily within and by the story. Whenever a novel abandons its themes and settles for just telling the story, it goes flat.' (Kundera)

These early drafts 'just' told a story, and, however 'flat', were not without some reason for restrained optimism, opening up more than they closed down in the following ways: they established Braamfontein in the present as a viable core setting and location with flexibility in the travelling to and from there, then and now; they suggested a main character, Leroy Zondi, placed in the company of five film class characters (page ref.), a broader microcosm of Joburg experience.

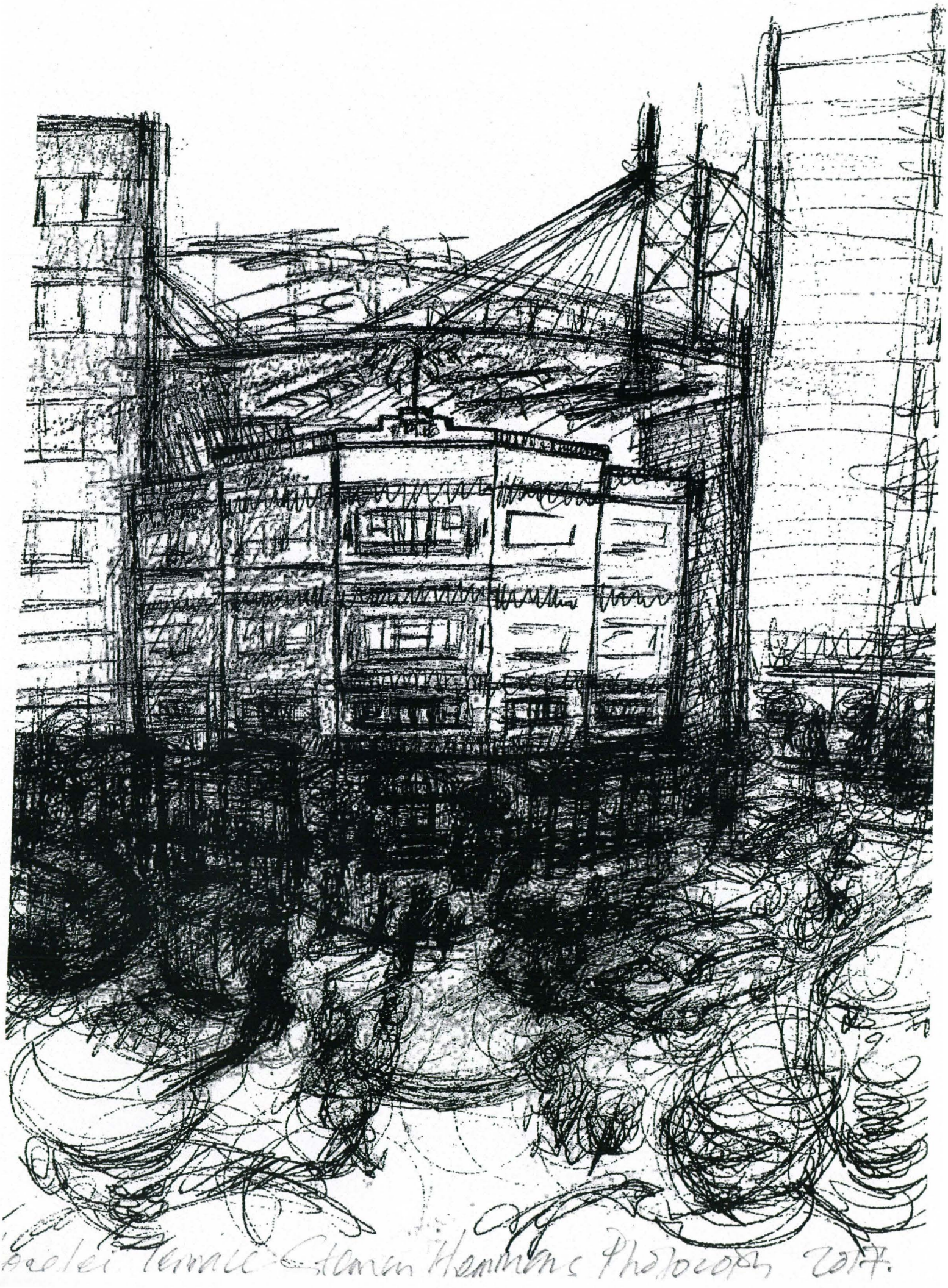
Structure

In the rich currents of the learning process my thinking tended more to that of a writer: logic, cause and effect interrogated the why, when, how and where; guns on Chekov's wall in the first act not used by the end were removed; how things became possible, where they might have originated and their journey into this fiction, or 'what is that doing there?' led to before the invented 'now'. These beginnings of a need for coherence were in the writing expressed by the invention of a building, representation of a magical, metaphorical architecture, of and out of place and time, into which the major characters and much of the middle of the story were moved.

Lorelei Terrace is a small deco block of apartments with five shops at street level, built at an angle on a busy corner in Braamfontein, central Joburg, South Africa. Lorelei was at first built and named Khan's Corner by the original builder/owner, Rabia Khan, in 1939, and inhabited by a closed society of blood relations, with a particular consequence. In 1960 Khan's Corner was sold on, renamed Lorelei Terrace and re-populated by a Popperian, Bohemian open society of self-liberated, free thinking, highly individual, deeply flawed yet enchantingly self-redeeming characters. At Lorelei Terrace existing characters met other characters, and sometimes created the necessity for new characters. These stories within stories suggested a structure.

Image 5

Lorelei Terrace Imagined, small pen and ink on Fabriano, 2017, an example of writing into drawing into writing



Form

Taken together the various stories represented the journey of their being improvised and written up. Story One (Deny The Thing You Know) was a stand-alone short story that placed the reader at the beginning of something in the ironically imagined mighty African urban jungle; the reader knew where it was: somewhere at the beginning of a jungle book, but not why; Story Two (Lambi Yatra) went east, and back in time to Mughal India, then came back in subsequent stories to Lorelei Terrace, corner of Juta and De Beer Streets, Braamfontein, Joburg, South Africa, Africa. The birth and waving of Smoky through the smoke in Story One (page ref.), its origin in history, tradition and social custom, and the appearance of Majeke brought magic, myth, history, lore and fantasy that led to 'Wush!' as interconnected stories to book length which glowered at one another but didn't quite reflect.

The story, besides saying one thing after another, adds something because of its connection with a voice. It does not add much. It does not give us anything as important as the author's personality. His personality - when he has one - is conveyed through nobler agencies, such as characters or the plot or his comments on life. What the story does do in this particular capacity, all it can do, is to transform us from readers into listeners, to whom 'a' voice speaks, the voice of the tribal narrator, squatting in the middle of the cave, and saying one thing after another until the audience falls asleep among their offal and bones. The story is primitive, it reaches back to the origins of literature, before reading was discovered, and it appeals to what is primitive in us. (Forster)

Together my stories had less allure than individually. Arranging them differently pointed to the need for a different structure entirely if the stories taken together, as a book, were to become more than the flat sum of primitive parts. A transformative architecture was suggested by the novel as 'a meditation on existence as seen through the medium of imaginary characters' (Kundera), and 'a fiction in prose to not less than 50 000 words' (Forster). Prose fiction is 'a literary work that is wholly or partly imagined or theoretical. Examples are novels, usually written in the form of a narrative and may be entirely a figment of the author's imagination.' (literarydevices.net)

The order of everything changed in restructuring the stories into a novel. For example, Story 1 established the Smoky character and Story 2, Lambi Yatra, followed to describe and explain the curse on what was then 'Khan's Corner' in an attempt to create

a pretext for magic. Story 1 continued to delve into where Smoky might have originated and became a standalone story while Story 2 went back in time to explain Rabia Khan. There was more than enough in Smoky's provenance in Xhosa history with which to create magic and illusion from historical fact, which made it possible to move 'Lambi Yatra' to the end of the novel to echo and confirm the magical in retrospect, and in an attempt at narrative tension.

Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up. Why is this necessary? Why is there not a convention that allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels muddled or bored? Alas, he has to round things off, and usually the characters go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness. If it was not for death and marriage I don't know how the average novelist would conclude. (Forster)

This final story, 'Lambi Yatra' appears after a very possibly feeble end to the novel, after the plot has been wound up, and seeks to bring life to what might be a deadness of character and expression by linking the beginning (or where Smoky originated, in Africa), to the after-end, where Rabia Khan began, in India, generally an attempt to end by opening up rather than closing down.

Style

My existing writing style was increasingly challenged by requirements of structure and coherence, which compelled an approach to style as being predominantly a consequence of attempts at coherence, at whatever cost to charm, that might express something of the writer's personality, rather than style as an imposition of personality and taste.

Encompassing the complexity of existence in the modern world demands a technique of ellipsis (the omission from speech or writing of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues), of condensation. Otherwise you fall into the trap of endless length. (Kundera)

At this, time a new chapter started with a synopsis, for example:
'Gomez's visit takes a turn; the opening of Angel Eyes; Gomez has the time of her life, particularly with Mona and Sibusiso, the Uriah's, Holly, Thulani and Thandi; Gomez strikes a chord with the pianist after he accompanies her most sensitively to her smoldering interpretation of 'Besame Muchos', or 'Kiss Me A Lot'; at some point toward

the end of the evening Gomez, (stoned, drunk and coked-up, with a nibble of magic-mushroom?) announces, 'everybody to my hotel for a party!' She starts to get a sense that Leroy's new story might be hidden in plain sight; in his life in Braamfontein, Joburg, perhaps told by an outsider who arrives, observes and leaves. There was certainly enough to work with...'

The synopsis suggests further exploration into who Gomez might be, and where she might come from, which informs and opens up features of her character's personality to appear as the following in the finished text.

'Gomez was a bird of many Meso-America, or central South America before the Spanish, feathers: she was first the distant consequence of early intermarriage amongst the ancient Mayans; then, the Spanish nipped over from Cuba to the Yucatan, a flat, hard peninsula, after which the Gringo arrived from the north and elsewhere. In more recent times Vera Gomez was born to the son of a mother whose mother, Mamacita, meaning 'gorgeous' married a North America archeologist in Chechen Itza, meaning 'at the mouth of the well of Itza' in a culture where *cenotes*, or ancient underground wells are sacred. Mamacita, Gomez's great-grandmother excavated that the archeologist she'd married in good faith had a family in America, and other families elsewhere where he'd worked. She ran away to Tulum and remarried, moving then to the United States, where she birthed Vera's own grandmother, on her father's side, to be clear.

She was no stranger to illusion: the priest kings of the ancient Mayans were smarter than most, and worked with natural elements. For example, in the middle of the substantially excavated and restored sacred center of ancient Mayan civilization, Chechen Itza, on the Yucatan Peninsula, there are three open chambers right at the top of a huge 75 feet high pyramid with 91 steps on each side, the Kukulcan Pyramid, surrounded by an expanse of open, flat ground, or plaza. On spring and fall equinoxes, the king priest stood on a very particular spot, thirty meters away from the center of the pyramid's north stairway and clapped the hands once; the sound of the clap drifted up and through the transformative acoustics of the chambers right at the top, and echoed out as two Quetzal (a long-tailed exotic bird) chirps, as if from the heavens; on an equinox sunset, the steps of the pyramid create a serpentine shadow which appears to slither down the structure...' (pages 128 & 9)

'...Gomez struck a passionate chord with the pianist who accompanied her to a smoking hot interpretation of 'Besame Muchos', or 'Kiss Me A Lot'.

At the end of the song, after a protracted ovation, she announced: "Everybody to my hotel for a party!"

Holly introduced Pindile to Thulani, and they all went upstairs to find Nhlohlotelo, Fick, Butch Marino and Leroy playing scrabble and drinking mint tea.

"Not a good idea *kiik*," or 'sister' in Mayan, as they'd recently learnt from her, was the consensus amongst Gomez's many new friends at Angel Eye's, since Gomez was buying: "We love you, it's been fabulous meeting you, but, no, this descending upon the Saxonwold is a very bad idea."

It firmed her resolve.

"No, no, no," they urged: "You are being drunk and Mexican Mary contrary; Vera Gomez you have no idea how fucked you are. You are about to visit a worst fear upon the Saxonwold: a gaggle of black creative people. You'll break their spirit," they entreated: "Please don't insist."

"*Preshisely* why it must be done," she asserted from the top of the bar counter, downed more tequila, and called for three hotel busses.

It was the oddest thing: Gomez's detractors, which was everybody other than Gomez, seemed to be persuading her to their most sensible view, when she clapped her hands briskly to produce what sounded like dulcet birdsong. The detractors were mesmerized. Gomez began a feathery serpentine dance of such enchantment that they all followed in a hypnotizing interplay of gyrating shadow, dancer upon dancer. They found themselves following her in a swaying line into the taxies from the hotel, which had arrived, and had no recollection of any of it afterwards. With everybody safely under her spell, Gomez bribed the drivers generously into a joyride through Hillbrow before descending on the Saxonwold Hotel bar. For a short while the bar was turned into a tavern in a favela, which didn't go down well, leading to an exchange of views between Gomez and the management. Consequently, Gomez was thrown out of the hotel. She spent that night with Angel, who was in her thrall and enjoying being there immensely.' (pages 159 & 60)

When you reach the end of a book you should still find it possible to remember the beginning. Otherwise the novel loses shape, its 'architectonic' clarity is clouded...This is why I see the art of ellipsis as crucial. It insists that we go directly to the heart of things... (Kundera)

In this way of developing a character much is gained by exploring around the character, but, a great deal of this is lost in final edits, especially, for example, where a paragraph might be interesting but gets in the way of a pace and flow that gets 'directly to the heart of things'. Charm is often lost in pursuit of stability, in this case the greater priority because of the profusion of characters, settings and moving to and fro in place and time.

Plot

If it is in a story we say 'and then'; if it is in a plot we ask 'why?' Forster describes the 'story' as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence; the plot as a narrative of events also, but with the emphasis on causality. For example: 'Smoky went to Joburg' is a story, or statement of an action, with no cause and affect, no 'why' or 'because of'. 'Smoky left the Eastern Cape and went to Joburg to find work', is more of a plot. The plot, then, for Forster, is 'the novel in its logical intellectual aspect' Considerations of plot, as in: why did Smoky leave the Eastern Cape; what was it in the nature of the Smoky character that made it possible and credible that she could consider moving to Joburg at all, and, at what age then did Smoky leave the Eastern Cape, took the character back in time to the ritual of her traditional Xhosa baptism in the Eastern Cape and opened up rich possibilities for how the character could develop.

Requirements of form began to select from expression. The narrating voice had now to pitch and pace itself, in retreat, as a cohering feature of the book as a whole. Overarching omnipotence belonged only to requirements of structure. Characters now had particular things to do and places to be in the service of continuity and coherence.

Image 6

Paul the Recycler, large gouache on Fabriano, 2016

D. **Intersections and Parallels in Painting and Writing Methods**

In considering the following a conceptual vocabulary might help clarify:

mark=marking the space in which expression might occur; the first expression of the thought of it;

dot, or mark refined=the word; the assertion of intention; communicates meaning; Matisse adds: 'If I put a black dot on a sheet of white paper, the dot will be visible no matter how far away I hold it: it is a clear notation. But beside this dot I place another one, and then a third, and already there is confusion. In order for the first dot to maintain its value I must enlarge it as I put other marks on the paper.'

line, a series of connected dots to a particular effect: fast/slow; light/heavy; curve/diagonal etc, carrier of pace=the sentence; a fuller, more considered and more purposeful expression of intention and meaning;

texture, or mark-making to a particular 'felt' result, smooth or rough; light or heavy=carrier of mood, calibrator of meaning=adverbs and adjectives;

color: hue, or a color in purest form; tone=hue + white; shade=hue + dark; compositional devices with which to manipulate perspective and emotion.

Paul Motshweneng

An intersection in writing and painting method in process

Paul the recycler represents a particular human condition, sourced in a weekend newspaper feature about recyclers, who crisscross the Joburg cityscape for much of the day and evening. They seem to become 'part of' by keeping well away from; 'fitting in' by always passing by. They are strangely quiet and seem to work alone. Curiosity inspires a painting alongside writing. It is a too - large work tending to sentiment and fantasy; Braamfontein suddenly has bright continental awnings over the windows of Paris dress shops. For no reason, Cora Weitzman appears as a superimposed profile, like an eerie Judeo-Egyptian cartouche; Leroy walks into the foreground in a herringbone jacket and tie; Nomava, Paul's wife, and the kid are at the bin; Jamila walks out of the composition to the viewer's right and Smoky peers out from the wings in a white clay mask.

More information about the character's life and profession is found:

From: The South African Informal City (http://informalcity.co.za) Working and living in Johannesburg: Insights into informal recycling Tanya Zack and Sarah Charlton, Johannesburg, 2011.

The world's 15 million informal recyclers clean up cities, prevent some trash from ending in landfills, and even reduce climate change by saving energy on waste disposal techniques like incineration. (Chaturvedi 2009).

"Recyclers choose to spend work nights in Johannesburg to save on transport costs; and have to be ready to start their outbound journeys to suburbs very early in the mornings. They choose spacious places where their accommodation may be cramped but they are able to store their goods. Recycling work involves gathering and then later, sorting the load prior to having it weighed at the depot. Recyclers need space for separating and sorting bulky items and they need time to do this sorting. They also need place to stockpile items until they have amassed enough of a particular material to make exchange at the depot worthwhile. The business of informal recycling depends on the prices paid by buyback centers for particular categories of waste. Recyclers typically accumulate stock over the week, and on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings they sort the stock and take it to whichever accessible recycling station offers the highest price per category. Informal recyclers comb the dustbins and sidewalks of residential and commercial neighborhoods in Johannesburg for selected solid waste items with resale value, which they load onto makeshift trolleys. On foot and with sheer muscle power they pull their loaded carts for many kilometers through the streets to privately owned buyback centers where the waste material is weighed and sold. Recyclers operate independently of labor regulations and protection, without employee benefits, using improvised transport, and frequently inadvertently contravening bylaws and city rules in their living and working activities. But they are intimately entwined with the formal, recognized systems of urban life: essential suppliers to registered recycling businesses, intense users of city roads, sidewalks and public spaces..."

The information is processed as a back-story:
Paul Motshweneng and his partner have both worked as recyclers since they came to Johannesburg from Swaziland in 2005. Back in Lesotho, Paul has been ejected from his

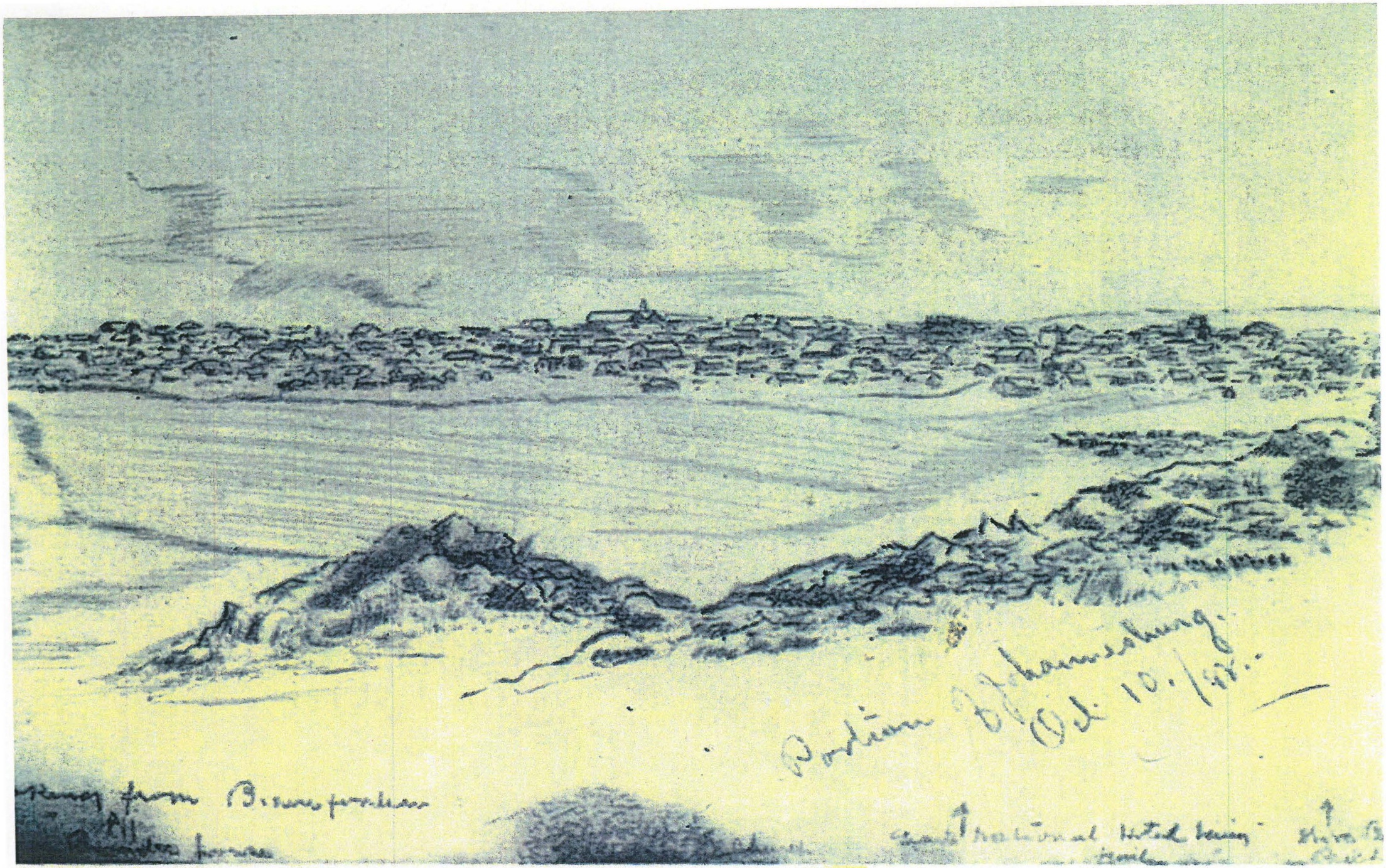
smallholding where he grew good dagga. Alas, his smallholding is adjacent to a vast swathe of land owned by the son of a Maseru notary, who drives Paul and his family from the land, and Swaziland in order to extend his own crop. They now live with their baby in a shack in Orange Farm. From here Paul conducts his daily routes. Competition has increased and so he has to wake up earlier and earlier to be first at the bins. Like many of the recyclers who sleep rough in the inner city, who go to homes elsewhere in Gauteng, at weekends or several times a month, Paul gets home as often as he can, but spends most of the working week in and around the Joburg CBD, Newtown, Hillbrow and Braamfontein.

Aspects of this information assist in the development of Paul's character and in placing him in the story:
'In the rolling hills of Swaziland, Paul, his heavily pregnant wife, Nomava, and their existing child in the 'terrible' twos had lived happily on their smallholding adjacent to a vast swathe of land owned by the son of a minor Swazi prince. Paul grew enough fruit and vegetables to eat and sell. Three months ago the prince drove Paul and his family from their land, and Swaziland. There was some room for negotiation in this land-grab, but Paul was too proud and outraged to be reasonable. He and his family left Swaziland, and they now lived in a shack in Orange Farm, a sprawling peri-urban African favela two hours outside Joburg, with a fragile new baby. From here Paul went forth into the city for a few days to hunt and collect. Competition was always on the up, and he had to get to the city earlier and earlier to be first at the bins and skips. He slept over in a depot of stationary trains along Smit Street in Braamfontein. These digs were uncertain and he had often to move fast to evade detection. But, there were many trains, few of which ever moved. The rustier ones were a good bet.'

In this intersection in art and writing practice the image is less successful as art than as part of a creative writing 'imagining' process, and led to a greater veracity in the settings and characters, and a taking of responsibility/acceptance of accountability for how they might be perceived by the reader.

Image 7

The Joburg CBD from Braamfontein by I. M. Stone, 1888.



Portion of Johannesburg – October 10, 1888. Looking from Braamfontein, perhaps from the point where Smit and Harrison Streets cross. The growth of the town in two years is apparent. Drawing by I. M. Stone.

The Joburg CBD from Braamfontein by I. M. Stone, 1888

In the beginning Braamfontein was originally a farm that adjoined Randjeslaagte (the triangular piece of government-owned land between the farms) on the west. It occurs in the records as early as 1853 and was owned by Gert Bezhuidenhout. By the time gold was discovered in 1886 various families were living on it. The name means 'bramble fountain'. The original farm stretched from Westdene in the west right through to the western boundary of Houghton in the east and from Greenside and Emmerentia in the north across Parkhurst and Parktown and right down to the bottom of Newtown in the south. The valleys that lie between the ridges contain tributaries of the Braamfontein Spruit which run to a point near Victory Park. One rises at Sturrock Park and runs under the gas works. Another rises on the ground of Barnato Park in Berea and the third runs under the Johannesburg Country Club cricket field. Braamfontein spruit itself rises in the vicinity of Parktown and runs down to Sans Souci, through Parkview Golf course, Parkhurst, Craighall, Bryanston and Rivonia. On its course it is joined by a feeder from Zoo Lake, the Sturrock Park tributary, one from Westdene dam, which eventually flows into Emmerentia Dam. A further feeder rises from Newlands/Greymont area running through Roosevelt Park to join the Emmerentia feeder. In November 1892 Herman Eckstein formed the Braamfontein Estate Company so it could take from him and develop the 1580 morgen of the farm Braamfontein that he had acquired from Lourens Geldenhuys and his brother Frans. The company would go on to develop the exclusive suburb of Parktown which I'll cover in some detail in the future. Before that, Lourens bought one of the subdivisions of Braamfontein from the Bezhuidenhout family who owned Doornfontein. On selling the eastern part to Eckstein, the brothers kept substantial portions for themselves (now Greenside and Emmerentia) which were still being farmed up until the 1930s. The area we know as Braamfontein today runs from the Braamfontein cemetery in the west to the Civic Centre in the east and from Wolmarans Street in the south up to Hoofd Street in the north and includes the ridge. It's been known by this name since 1888 when the area north of Noord Street was surveyed although it was never declared a township. However, there are two almost forgotten older names associated with Braamfontein. One is 'Clifton' or 'new Braamfontein' and the other is 'Lindique's Portion' or 'old Braamfontein' (From https://joha

nnesburg1912.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/history-of-braamfontein-pt-1/)

Image 8

The Nelson Mandela Bridge, medium ink and brush on Fabriano, 2016/2017



The Nelson Mandela Bridge

'He grit the teeth and crossed the Nelson Mandela Bridge, in accusatory disrepair, passing a matching pair of pubescent urban Goths with safety pins in the bottom lips; a lone Shembe levitator, or was it a Masai on one slender leg, hard to be sure, warming up here, a wedding group posing there, and a very interesting looking young woman playing the violin. She dipped toward him gallantly, flashing a brilliant smile as he passed by slowly, much taken in. He didn't know the tune, 'The Lorelei', but tarried and enjoyed it nonetheless. When she concluded with a Grappelli flourish, he put money into the open violin case.' (page 43)

Image 9

Under the Bridge, large oil, 2016/2017



Under the Bridge

'After Holly's birth Pindile put on a convincingly brave and joyous face; there were hopes that the birth had 'straightened her out' and that she'd be all right. Not so: it laid her out low and flat like a shadow of a former self peeled off her person. She fled Lorelei into a bender, spiraling further downward into a vortex of drugs, alcohol and denial, washing up under Ponte Bridge with Vinny in tow, 'under the bridge' being the most modest positioning in Joburg where to be certain, the only way was down. From this dark place Pindile made contact with Mona on a cellphone that Vinnie had stolen, threatening to come back home to ruin all their lives if Mona didn't bring money, right then.' (page 79)

Image 10

People on a Train 1, medium brush and Japanese ink on Luang Prabang paper, 2016/2017



People on a Train 1

'Ravai scrutinized Pindile rocking to and fro with the lulling click-clack of train wheels in deep sleep, and read as much as she could about that life. As she absorbed the worst of Pindile's pain she enshrouded herself in a shawl so as not to be seen, since the exercise momentarily drained her of any life, a sight that could not be seen by her or anybody else, for fear. Ravai shivered out of her throw as they pulled into Komatipoort, the final South African stop. She got up and stood over Pindile to wake her. She touched Pindile's shoulder lightly, whereupon Nhlohlotelo appeared to Ravai in a pithy vision, and begged her to help Pindile, who stirred child-like from her slumber. Ravai accepted that she had one more soul to save before Maputo: she did after all make a promise to a friend. Pindile woke up and collected herself. She leaned on Ravai as they navigated the short distance from Komatiport to Ressano Garcia, a sub-tropical little Mozambican border town, where they checked in with the Mozambican authorities after a substantial meal of baguette and peri-peri chicken on an open fire, and a Portuguese salad. Pindile felt much, much better on the ongoing Mozambican train from Ressano Garcia to Maputo, a four-hour journey, in the company of Ravai, who had initiated a conversation.' (page 80)

Image 11

People on a Train 2, medium brush and Japanese ink on Luang Prabang paper, 2016/2017



People on a Train 2

'A train from Maputo chugged through Pretoria into Joburg and under the Mandela Bridge to Park Station. Within, Pindile-Elizabeth, Holly's prodigal mother, caught a glimpse of people living there. Ever mindful of her own brush with rough living, she gave them the remains of her travelling food through the window. The train pulled into Park Station. Pindile, alive, well, with a plan, and Butch; her beau, the enormous circus strongman/knife-thrower, ex-Frelimo, who looked more ferocious than he really was, arrived to claim Holly, and to take her, and Nhlohlotelo back to Maputo, where they would open a bakery. Pindile had a business plan, and Butch had already leased premises in busy downtown Maputo, in their absence being gutted in preparation for being fitted out as a bakery and coffee shop. Butch and Pindile made haste to Lorelei from Park Station, but there was nobody at home.' (page 146)

People on a Train

A parallel in writing and painting method in process

These paintings and drawings (images 7 to 11, pages 41 to 47) are of the same view as an 1888 drawing (image 7, page 41) of the Joburg CBD from Braamfontein by I. M. Stone. Image 8 (page 43) is of the Nelson Mandela Bridge (a prominent architecture in Wush!), which depicts what exists now in Stone's vista. Image 9 (page 45) goes under the bridge; 10 and 11 (pages 47 & 9) look into these carriages at work, filled with intersecting humanity.

They were produced alongside the creative writing M.A process over 2016/2017 and are about people moving through place and time, engaged in a common and cohesive activity, or social ritual, of necessity, and not entirely by choice; people in the process of forward propulsion, going from somewhere to where ever, of people advancing. They represent explorations of/meditations on the human condition in a group in dynamic motion and en route to one or another aspect of their day's destiny; these many endless, tiring and tiresome daily journeys that we make might not exclude some element of magic and fantasy. It is possible that in the romantic imagination nobility might be found in the commonplace; the epic might be uncovered in the ordinary, the profound inspired by the pedestrian. In images 10 and 11 (pages 47 & 9) the drawn figures represent impressions upon the memory; it might be a nose here, a gesture there, a style or 'look'; an aspect of everyday ordinariness that expresses particularity. Painting and drawing might volunteer less information than writing about what is seen and heard, for example, writing's capacity for the internal monologue or conversation echoing into the story from within a character.

This specialty of the novel is that the writer can talk about his characters as well as through them or can arrange for us to listen when they talk to themselves. He has access to self-communings, and from that level he can descend even deeper and peer into the subconscious. (Forster)

In a drawing or painting you'd know perhaps what state of mind and mood the figure is in, generally speaking, and not a great deal else. The figure is there in support of a more general statement, and significantly as a compositional device. The drawing establishes the figure as a representation, not necessarily as a character.

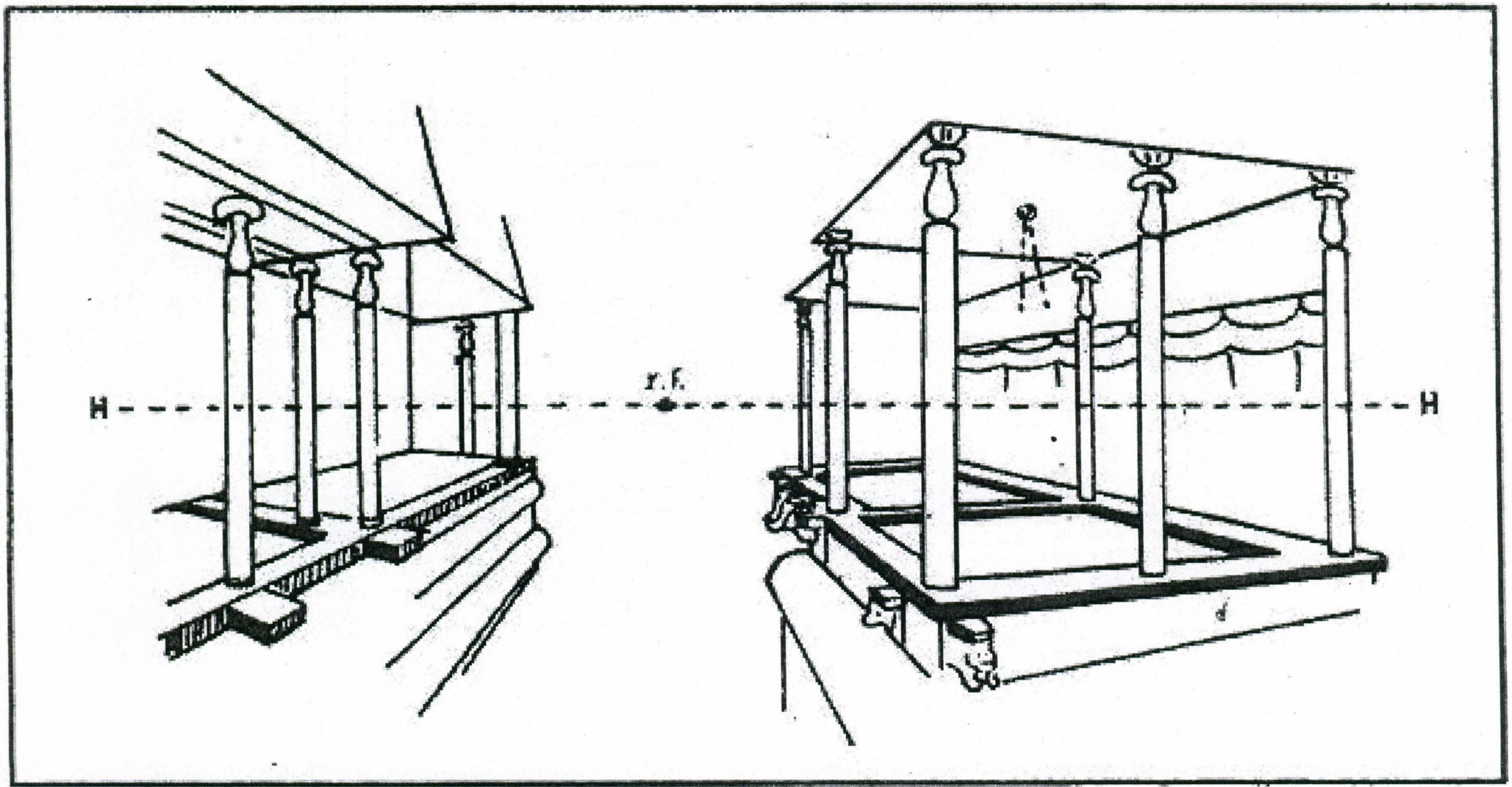
Image 12

A Building in Classical Perspective

J. Auboyer

(Berger)

FROM BERGER, PGE 123, CLASSICAL ONE POINT PERSPECTIVE - DRAWING: J AUBOYER



BUILDING 1 IN CLASSICAL PERSPECTIVE.

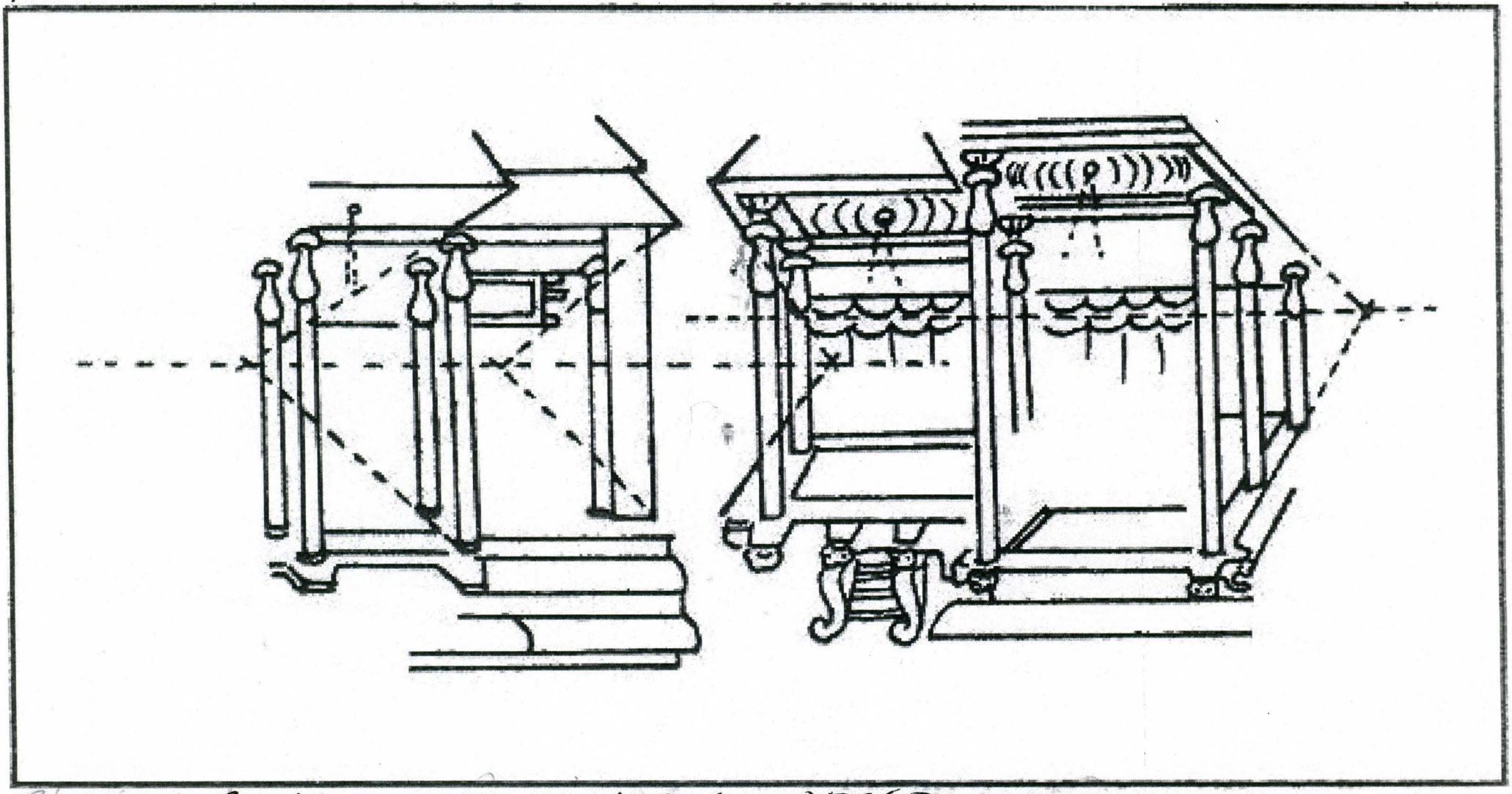
Image 13

The Same Building in Indian Perspective

J. Auboyer

(Berger)

FROM BERGER PGE 123 INDIAN PERSPECTIVE - DRAWING: J. AUBOMER



BUILDING 1, SAME VIEW IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.

E. **Conclusion**

In fixed one-point perspective (page 53) the viewer is *outside and in front of*; the eye is directed *at,* and leads *into*, like looking straight ahead into a tunnel; it's about the tunnel, and looking *at* it. This *looking at*, directed and contained by one canon or another about how to look at and accept what you think you see, distracts the eye with *looking,* and takes the eye off *seeing*; what is being looked at is more readily accepted as real, unseen. Indian perspective (page 55) encourages the eye to wander, which is closer to how we look, and has little to do with what we might see, or think or feel we see. Into the tunnel we go certainly, but also around it, over it and above it, more about the tunnel's *being* there. It is tempting to speculate that an African perspective might more readily see a bridge than a tunnel. An African perspective might include and even accommodate these profound, indelible differences in culture and identity that point to where we are not and will never be the same, particularly in where traditional African art practice generally differs from those notions of permanence, originality, and the role and function of art object, the artist and art coming from the west, north and east. For example, the much-collected African mask comes onto the market as an art object/artifact often because it is deftly created for a particular purpose, used just once and then discarded. Yet, it is never signed, or attributed to a particular artist, suggesting that its value is symbolic, or more to do with how it is seen and valued than who made it.

While what might be meant by 'African' perspective falls outside the scope of this essay, in 1936 Eileen Jensen Krige interpreted an African perspective, a particularly Zulu conception of the universe, to mean that the sky is a solid (possibly infinite) blue rock that completely encircles the earth; the sky, or space, is experienced and felt as being reliably omnipresent, like a cocoon of solid rock. The moon and stars are fixed on this side of the rock, the moon as a 'hole in heavens'. Krige's image of the sun moving through a path in the solid blue rock each day might imply an African perspective that is more of an endless trajectory, and less of a journey, with a beginning and destination.

With symbolic and metaphorical intention, from the view of past and present African history and experience, the creative writing submission, Wush! might then be described as partly a trajectory of improvised expression from a particular place and time in Africa, that in searching for a structure applies and disrupts the rules of the form of the novel in pursuit of meaning and perspective.

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G. **Appendix**

About Henry Nxumalo (from Bailey's Drum Archives)



Henry Nxumalo was born in 1917, near Port Shepstone, Zululand. His grandfather Gqobo was an ordinary tribal Zulu who died by falling over a cliff. Henry's father Lazarus, and his mother Josephine, had seven children, of which Henry was the eldest.

Henry's parents died when the children were still young, leaving them to look after themselves, with Henry in charge, and this developed his strong spirit of independence.

Henry left school at the age of sixteen and went to Durban, where he got his first job working as a kitchen boy. He did not like his job very much and trekked to Johannesburg where he found work in a boilermaker's shop. In his spare time he began to write poetry. Some of his poems were published by "The Bantu World", where he was later employed as a messenger, rising within three years to sports editor.

When the Second World War broke out Henry joined the army, went north and became a sergeant.

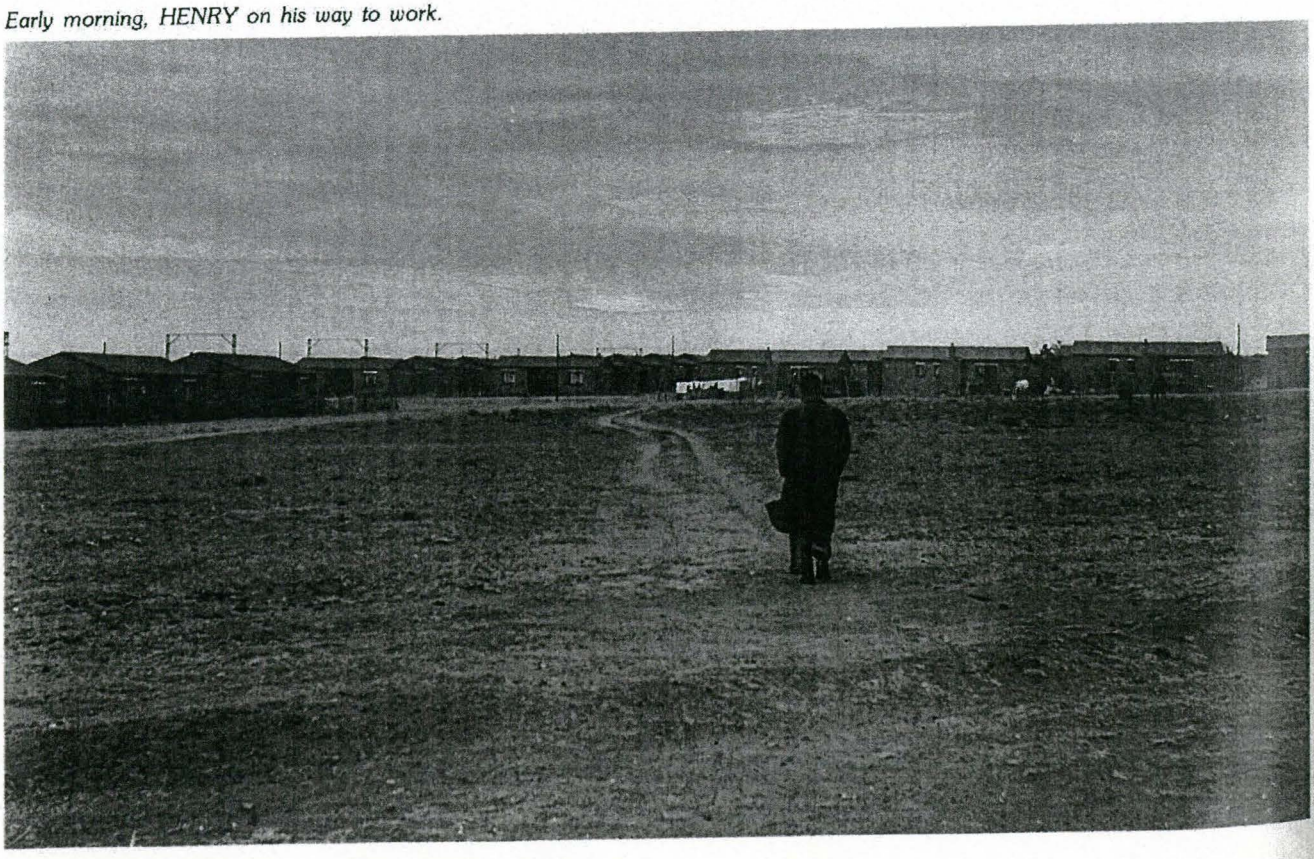
After the war he went back to work for "The Bantu World" and wrote a regular column for the "Pittsburgh Courier". In 1946, he married a young nurse called Florence, got a job on a gold mine and did welfare work for the British Empire Service League while free-lancing for European papers.



HENRY reading to his three young children at his home in Orlando township. Soweto.

MR DRUM working as a labourer on Johan Snyman's farm (right)
"SNYMAN TORE UP MY PASS BOOK INTO LITTLE PIECES 'NOW YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PASS, YOU CAN'T LEAVE WITHOUT PERMISSION.' HE THEN TOLD ME TO FACE THE WALL AND KICKED ME BETWEEN THE LEGS THREE TIMES WITH HIS HARD BOOT. I SHUDDERED WITH PAIN."

Early morning, HENRY on his way to work.





In 1954, Johan Snyman, a farmer near Rustenburg, was convicted of beating a labourer to death. Barefoot and unshaven, MR DRUM walked to the gate of Snyman's farm to ask for the job which would enable him to investigate the labour conditions.

HENRY weeding mealie plants on Snyman's farm.



Henry Nxumalo joined Drum as the sports editor in 1951, and the character of "Mr Drum" was created in 1952. First the idea was a stunt whereby Henry would walk through the townships and the first person who identified him received a £5 note. The idea of Mr Drum had other possibilities and the first opportunity came with the "Mr Drum goes to Bethal" story. Farmers were rumoured to be ill-treating their labourers in the Bethal district, and to investigate Henry signed up as a labourer. He came back with a story that shook the whole country. "Mr Drum goes to Bethal" was the first Mr Drum exposure with which Henry had set a model for the future.



FR. RAKALE leading HENRY NXUMALO and his pallbearers to HENRY's final place of rest. Front bearers: left, Sy Mogape; right, Bloke Modisane; behind Sy, Arthur Maimane; behind Bloke, Can Themba.

After the Bethal exposure Henry had himself arrested under the curfew regulations and served five days imprisonment at the Johanensburg central prison. His experiences made a chilling story and caused an international sensation.

"A warder kicked me in the stomach with the toe of his boot . . . I tried to hold the boot to protect myself, and fell on my face. He asked if I had had an operation to my stomach. I said no . . . we were taken to collect our food. Each prisoner picked up a dish. The zinc dishes were rusty. The top of my dish was broken in three places. The food was boiled whole mealies with fat.

". . . There was a stinking smell when prisoners used the toilet bucket at night without paper. The blankets were full of bugs. I turned round and round without being able to sleep. We were up at six and I was ordered to wipe the urine which was overflowing from the toilet bucket with a small sack cloth. The breakfast was porridge with half cooked pieces of turnips, no spoons were provided and I had to eat my breakfast with my stinking, soiled, unwashed hands."

In the early 1957, Henry Nxumalo left Drum to write his autobiography for an American publisher. To keep in touch Henry was still working on the