

BETTER THINGS

by

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A Red-letter Day

A longhair lilac-point Himalayan walks along the paving under the acacia trees, high-stepping over the mud washed down by the sprinklers and avoiding the thorns. Her coat lifts in the breeze, her tail waves behind her. Anna Purrna of Khorasan has been visiting the shrubbery that lines the driveway. For the rest, this place is paved over and bricked up. Houses front the other side of the road, each in a different style but all equally huge, with only a token garden before each one: four standard roses here, a row of squared-off golden privets there.

From somewhere above the cat, a loerie's creaking call sounds; she looks up, locates the bird on a high branch and sits down to consider it. Her long fur has picked up mud, leaves, twigs. When the loerie, unsettled by the flat blue gaze, flaps off, she rolls over on the driveway, rubbing her back against the rough paving. A gardener comes past carrying a rake and spade; he stops to rub her ears and tickle her tummy. She waves her paws about in the air.

One of her people is calling.

'Anna Purrrrna, Purrna, Purrna, Annaji, come, come kits.'

Mahadevan swoops her up, draping her over his shoulder where she settles, looking at things with interest from this new vantage point. He strokes her, talking as he walks. 'Flirting with the gardener, you little ho? You'll jump into the wrong arms one day and get stolen. I'd like to know how you got out this morning with the windows all closed. How will we ever clean you up? We'll have to wash your feet. Mandy will hold you while I scrub. You've got to look your gorgeous best today'.

Home is a Spanish-mission style double-storey with two formal saguaro cacti on either side of the carved front door.

'I've got her,' Mahadevan sings out as they enter. 'Found her in the drive, rolling in the dirt. Just look at her!'

He holds her up for inspection. Mandai comes into the hallway from the kitchen, wiping hands on a dishcloth, and raises theatrical eyebrows at the sight.

'Haiyai, this is going to be a long job, Deva. Look at her feet - even the nails are caked with mud. Come, bring her into the kitchen, I've got the kit there.'

'We'll need a basin of warm water too, and the nail brush. Let's spread out a big bath towel.'

A white Persian with fur somewhat shorter than Anna's rubs up against Mandai's legs.

'No, not you today girl. You're staying home to keep Kheis company while Anna goes to the Nationals.'

Anna Purrna is easy to work with. Except for her feet, she enjoys being groomed. They chat as they rub fragrant powder into her fur and brush it out, clean her ears and teeth, do all the hundred and one things needed to prepare her for the judges.

'I think she's going to take Best of Breed'.

'Oh that's a cinch. It's Supreme Champion we're going for: Best Cat in Show! Just look at that perfect breed-standard conformation. OK, we know she's slightly too heavy for perfection but rather than too small. Her coat's in great condition, the lilac points are spectacular.'

'But what if she doesn't like the judges? Remember Bloemfontein? Disqualification under Rule 7: Fractious Cats?'

'Nevah! She's a sweetie-pie. It was that terrible *brutal* judge who got her back up, poking about in her ears and forcing his fingers into her mouth. Of course he was going to get bitten and scratched.'

'Maybe a little something to calm her down just before we get there? A small squirt of diazepam? There's some left from Kheis's op.'

'Nah, it'll only make her sluggish. The judges want to see a bright lively animal.'

'Just a bit of catnip then?'

'She doesn't need it, sweetheart. She's a relaxed good-natured queen. Just like me.' Mandai laughs at his own quip. 'Not Mozambican, no MBA, but otherwise just like me - a sweet laidback queen. We're all just going to take it easy today. Nationals or not, it's just another show, so relax!'

'Yeah, *you* can say that, but you know how nervous I get.'

The competition is being held at the Northgate Dome. Long before they get there, coming in from the east along the highway, they can see it, rising vast and silvery-grey on the green veld. The sheer size of the thing induces awe and a tuning-up of nerves. Deva and Mandai, with Anna Purrna in her handcrafted teak catbox on the back seat (giving tongue in long drawn-out cries because she hates the car), feel the tension mounting.

Mandai loves it.

'Hey, we did a product launch at the Dome when I was still with Shongwane Macarthy. Must have had every CFP in Gauteng there. A banquet for over 900 people, tables stretching so far you couldn't see the end of them. Food was lousy though.'

The words 'Dome - Doom - Dome - Doom' keep pulsing in Mahadevan's head. There is a gnawing at his gut, so he chatters.

'I came to a baby competition here once when I was just up from Durbs. Drove my cousin and her baby. I was staying with them. The baby show was in one part and in another there was a boxing ring and seats built up on scaffolding with screens. There was high fencing all round and over the

ring, and two guys were fighting in it. It was like with no gloves, no *rules* man, just kicking and hitting to kill each other. It was only over when one guy stopped moving. I think they called it Martial Mixed Arts. A bit like wrestling only they couldn't get out of the ring. Blood all over the place and the audience screaming for more.'

'Yeah, I've heard of cage fighting, never seen any. They have far-out stuff here, like female body-building competitions and horse fairs with racing round the outside. Exhibitions of fake limbs and false teeth, you name it.'

They have arrived a bit late and the only parking they can find is far from the Dome's entrance. Mandai levers the box up and off the back seat of the BMW on his thighs. They each take a sisal handle and half-walk, half-trot towards the distant entrance.

Mahadevan clears his throat. 'I always take much more weight because you're such a shortass. This damn box needs wheels.'

'Hey, like a little circus wagon - let's paint it red,' Mandai gasps. 'Then we'll charge people to come see our wild Himalayan tiger.'

'We - we'll teach her tricks. Juggling, somersaults.'

'Whoo hoo, can you just see it! A highwire act with all three of them!'

So they arrive, out of breath and laughing. The entrance is noisy: people shouting greetings to friends, trying to chat above the mewing and miaowing, yowling and howling of their cats, as they wait in line to register and get their tickets. Anna Purrna is P33, thirty-third in the Persian ring; she will be judged late.

Inside, people are making their way to their particular breed's area, marked on high boards, and settling their cats down with a favourite titbit or a tickle. Mahadevan and Mandai carry Anna to the PERSIAN sign and find their place on a table at the rear.

The Dome looms over them solidly; no windows, no doors, only artificial light. Deva tries to draw a deep, steadying breath, but manages no more than a shallow gasp. There is a man-and-wife team beside them, fussing over a smallish smoke Persian on a white cushion. Deva catches a sidelong glance from the woman, sees her whispering to the man, and knows that he and Mandy have been sussed and condemned. He swallows two or three times, and says casually to Mandy that he needs the loo.

'It's always when I get excited, Mandiji.'

Deva has a joint in his pocket. If he can just get by himself, outside, somewhere alone and quiet for ten minutes, he'll be alright.

'You take over here. Just stroke her gently a bit - dry your hands.'

'My hands aren't wet man! Go on then. Don't be long, judging starts in five minutes.'

Mandai watches his partner swaying his way through cats, trestle tables, people until he disappears around the entrance door. Then he pulls a bunch of catnip from his pocket, pushes two leaves through the box's fretwork lattice. They disappear quickly into the flat mouth below Anna's moustaches. He gives her another one; she eats it very fast, miaows for more.

'No more, Purrny. You can't be stoned when the judges look at you.'

The Persian ring is almost full - the last cat on the trestles behind them is #46. Competition will be stiff.

Deva has made his way through the people still crowding the entrance, has walked around the curving side of the structure and found a shady spot far from anyone. He sits on the grass, lights the zoll and drags deeply. After a bit he lies back on the grass, gazing up at the unbroken blue sky. It takes him only a few moments to finish the smoke but he lies calmly for another five or so, before getting up.

At the stand, Mandai is setting out the purple velvet showing cloth. Anna's lilac points - the dark tips of tail, paws, ears - look a deeper lilac against it, her creamy fur even more creamy. An old towel goes over the velvet for her last-minute grooming. He takes her out of the box. She is quiet in his hands, relaxed from the catnip, as he gently scratches her ears and chin, runs his nails down her spine and rubs the base of her tail hard. Then he goes to work with the silk-finish brush.

When Deva finally comes back, the three judges are already well into the Persians and are looking at #28. In a lifting motion, Mandai applies the soft brush to Anna's coat for the last time, fluffs her tail, buffs her points. Deva places her in showing position, tells her to 'Hold your pose, baby' and then the judges are there.

They make notes as they look over Anna, putting figures into a grid, scoring her various aspects on the standard table. Deva imagines one judge's face softening as she runs her hand over Anna's coat, he sees a look of admiration in her eyes as she looks at the other two with a flick of the eyebrow and a twitch of the corners of her mouth. That must be judges' code for 'Here's a beauty, don't you think?' But they say nothing and move on, to the rather thin-coated grey cat next to Anna Purrna.

There is a pause before the second round. The Persians on the shortlist are announced. Those not called, including the thin smoke next door, are out of the running. Mandai smiles, shrugs at the couple who are consoling each other and their cat, and packing up their kit. Anna is on the shortlist.

In the second round, the judges spend far longer on each of the six shortlisted cats, probing again into ears, mouth and tail area, palpating the stomach, pinching the skin for adipose layers, parting the fur all over to check condition. Tipping the scales at 6.5kg, Anna might be considered by

some too heavy for a Persian, but as her owners assure themselves every so often, it's not fat - it's muscle. She is just a big meaty cat.

Deva shoots a glance at Mandai as they handle Anna, but she submits quietly to their examination, even rolling over and playfully batting one judge's hand with soft paws. This time they talk a bit about the breed standards that they're looking for, pointing out to owners where their cat excels and where it falls short. Anna Purrna's only weakness is that her paws could have been a shade wider, more stubby in appearance, and she looks a little crestfallen, Deva thinks, as he puts her back into the box.

Their closest competition is the blue longhair Persian at #17, also an outstanding example of the breed. The Persian judges confer, then join all the breed judges at the top table. More conferring before the Best of Breeds are announced, Persians first, and the name read out is 'Anna Purrna of Khorasan.'

Mandai's chunky frame visibly relaxes, Deva squeals. They hug each other, shake hands with other Persian owners who have come up to look at Anna Purrna. The couple alongside give them a grudging nod; the blue's people are generous in their praise.

'Now for Best on Show,' Mandai says. 'I think we're in with a good chance.'

Owners of each different breed's winners are asked to bring their cats up to the top table where they will be compared. Another wait while more conferring goes on, papers are exchanged, new judges examine Anna.

'I don't mind now,' says Deva softly to Mandai. 'She's got her recognition, Best of Breed is OK for me.'

'Wait, wait, let's see.'

And then the announcement is made: Best Cat on Show - Supreme Champion - Anna Purrna of Khorasan. She reclines on the purple velvet as if with a smile, acknowledging the applause; as if perfectly aware that she is the most beautiful cat of all the hundreds there.

Then she stands up and begins to circle enquiringly.

'Oh lord, she needs her litter-tray! It's been almost three hours.'

They have to grab Anna Purrna and the ribbon and hurry back to their stand, cutting short the ceremony and somewhat spoiling the dignity of the moment, but everyone is laughing.

At home, Deva heats the chicken mughlai and roti he prepared yesterday while Mandai opens a bottle of chilled Bollinger to celebrate. The cats all get fillet steak cut up fine and tossed in hot butter.

Much later that night, about three in the morning, Mandai is woken by Deva's thrashing about and calling out in terror. He shakes him gently.

'Hey, hey, wake up! You're having a nightmare.'

Deva sits up, buries his face in his hands then rubs his head.

'Aaagh, that was horrible. There was blood - these men were attacking the cats, cutting them up, and I couldn't move. Anna was being burned - I could smell her hair singeing.'

'Just a dream - nothing real. The cats are all safe and happy downstairs, all asleep on their beds. Go check them if you want. It won't seem so terrible in the morning light.'

'I should be happy tonight, not fighting with these dark things.'

Mandai says nothing, just rubs Deva's back, massages the nape of his neck. Deva sits upright for a long time, and Mandai falls asleep watching his pure silhouette against the blind.

Face to Face

She rested the tray of baklava on the Mercedes' boot and shook the fringe of dreads off her forehead, this slim girl dressed in the deli's kit of orange shirt, black slacks and white apron. The customer peered into her bag for the keys. It was dark in the covered parking garage and the madam had to fumble about for them. The hand holding up the bag was white, smooth, with slim fingers, and on one of the fingers, two rings gleamed: one a thick gold band, the one above that, gold with a diamond in it. The nails looked like the adverts for Diamond Nails in *Bona*. In a moment the other hand came out with keys. Bonisiwe watched, remembering her loss.

She had scabbled in her bag, had not found what she was looking for, had felt only the empty space where the pink purse should have been.

That morning, she had squeezed out of the bad-smelling morning taxi, slid the door to with a bang. The taxi was off down the hill and away before she noticed it. Her lipstick fell against her ankle and rolled on the pavement. But her bag's zip was closed. And yet it suddenly felt light. She looked down and saw the long cut just above the bottom seam. The bag hung open like a fool's mouth.

'Hawu, isikhwama sami sihabukile!'

She felt inside through this strange new way into the bag, a hollow bag now with little in it. Her fingers felt the toilet paper to blow her nose on, a spare tampon, but just a black hole where the Hello Kitty purse should have been. The cellphone, thanks God, was still in its own little pocket on the bag's lining. But the purse was gone, fat like a pig with money - a lot of coins from all her tips that week, a R10 note for the taxi fare home. The rest was the worst: her ID book, plastic card for the money machine, paper cards for the clinic and stokvel - any more? She couldn't think.

'Inkosiyami! My purse! It's gone!' Her cry brought sympathetic looks from others on the pavement but no one stopped. They were all on their way to work, many of them going in her direction, to work in the many shops of the mall where she worked. She knew some of them by sight. But what could anyone do anyhow?

That man on her right in the crowded taxi - it was him. He kept shifting uncomfortably against her with his thick thighs in brown-checked pants, till she frowned at his profile, willing him to sit still. But there were six of them crushed together on the minibus seat so she couldn't really blame him. The bag was on her right hip, her arm safely across it. He must have had a very sharp blade, must have slid it across the bag below her elbow.

She was reading a horror story in the *Sowetan*, over the arm of the passenger on her left, and was lost in the drama of a three year-old missing for five days, the mother's suspicions that the neighbourhood umthakathi had stolen the child for muthi, the community's fury at the police for not

looking hard enough. She made it easy for him, the thief, and now he had it, the pink Hello Kitty purse that she had bought off a stall at the taxi rank with her first wage packet. She must tell the bank not to let any money out of her account.

As they changed in the staff locker room behind the kitchens, the others were sorry for her.

‘Hayi Boni, it’s a bad problem’, said Siphon. ‘If you haven’t got ID you are nobody. You must go tell the police it’s stolen and go to Home Office for a new one soon-soon. It takes a very long time to come. And it costs a lot’.

Her special friend Masontwa offered to lend her R10 to help.

Someone else said that ‘they can take all your money out of your savings’, so she ran to find her boss, Ma’m Elena, showing her the ruined bag and asking if she would phone and speak to the bank to cut the card off.

‘Don’t worry my dear. You can go across to the bank yourself just now when the morning rush is over. Nobody can take money out without knowing your secret code so you’re quite safe’, and she patted the girl’s shoulder.

‘Eish - that secret number - it’s on a piece of paper with my cards. I can’t remember it when I come to the machine so I wrote it there.’

Ma’m Elena’s fingers flew up to her cheeks and over her mouth. ‘Blakas! What have you done! We must phone now.’ She got the phone book and called, getting Bonisiwe’s details as she spoke. But already R100, her daily limit, had been withdrawn.

Bonisiwe went into the packing room, pulled on plastic mitts, and began the morning task of helping Masontwa and Simmy to fill the trays with the Greek pastries for which the deli was famous. Baklavas went six to a long black tray - layers of fine phyllo pastry stuffed with a spicy mix of minced walnuts, almonds and hazelnuts, cut into diamonds and soaked in syrup. She lifted them out of their syrup bath with a flat blade, packed them neatly and passed them on to Simmy to cover with cling foil, Masontwa at the end sticking the label and price tag on.

Here came Siphon from the clattering kitchens with a tray of still-warm melomakarona, fragrant with cloves and a dash of ouzo, dripping with honey, also to be packed, tucked up tight in cling wrap and priced. He carried the finished cartons out to the display tables in the front; the girls chatted as they worked.

Simmy was worried. ‘You must go to the police today, now, and tell them about the ID.’

And she told them the story of her mother’s friend Irene who had also lost her ID book to a thief, but hadn’t gone straight to report it. She thought a week or two would make no difference. But the police had come to her; three policemen had banged on her door one night and tried to arrest her for theft. Some other woman had used her ID to take a car for a test drive, and hadn’t

come back to the garage. Irene was nearly put in jail, and had a hard job getting the police to believe that it wasn't she who'd done it.

Now Siphon was bringing through the galactobourekos, delicate little pastry cups filled with custard cream and sprinkled with cinnamon. You had to be gentle with these when you packed. And then the last lot, the kourabiethes: almond shortbread cookies covered in icing sugar, so brittle they broke if you just looked at them. Finally the day's stock was packed, crumbs, syrup, drifts of icing sugar wiped off the counters.

The girls cleaned themselves up and went to the front to serve customers. It was busy this Friday morning, with business people stopping for coffee and breakfast rolls, and later on customers coming in for their weekend cakes and treats.

Not far from the mall that housed the Greek deli, Diana Findlay's day was taking its usual course. She was doing the morning chore of ferrying the children to school before going on to the gym. Thirteen-year-old Camilla - a shiny black ponytail her best feature - sat next to her, champing on her braces. Sebastian, two years younger, sat behind them, and lord alone knew what he was doing, thought Diana, studying him in the mirror as he wrestled with something in his lap.

'Do stop that irritating noise Camilla. Chafing can't be good for the enamel', she said. 'And what are you doing in the back there?'

The boy's blue eyes flew up to meet hers in the mirror as he held up a catapult trailing a strip of rubber.

'Just trying to fix a new thing on. Mine broke.'

'You know I don't like catties. They're dangerous, and you're not ever, ever to shoot at birds, d'you hear?'

'Yes Mom. There's some big drums behind the bike sheds an' we have competitions. You've got to stand fifteen steps back and try and knock a can off the drum. I'm one of the best.'

As they waited at a red robot, she looked approvingly at her hands on the steering wheel, still unblemished and smooth at forty, knuckles just a demure crease in the slim fingers, nails all perfect crimson caps. You could always tell someone's class by their hands; the time, effort and expense of the manicurist were worth it. Her two rings glittered reassuringly at her.

Camilla had taken a book out of her school bag and was reading.

'Don't push your face into the page like that. You'll get a headache,' she said. 'And why you have to read on a short trip like this, I can't imagine.'

'I don't like looking at them,' the girl replied, throwing a look at the vendors and beggars who crowded round the car, holding their goods or scrawled placards up to the windows.

'You don't have to look at them.' Diana's eyes swept over the men and fixed on a distant office block. 'At any rate, you don't have to *see* them.'

The robot turned green, the crowd retreated to the island, Diana moved off. Better settle Camilla's birthday party before they got to school.

'Now, this coffee party you're having tomorrow afternoon. Your father tells me he's booked some suitable DVD's for you, pop music concerts and so on. I've bought the flavoured coffees you asked for, and the stuff for iced coffee, but how many girls have you invited?'

'Bout sixteen're coming I think. Jenny's still got to let me know, and Alexa.'

'And what are you going to give them all to eat? I'm not baking anything at this late stage. You know we're attending a Personal Power course, your father and me, and this evening's seminar is a key one in the programme, on identifying yourself.'

'Oh Mother don't stress. Just buy some stuff. Some of those Greek things from Stournos'll be fine.'

So after dropping her offspring at their separate schools and before going on to her Pilates class, Diana drove to the mall, parked in the sunless parkade, and went into the shop under the 'Zacharoplasteion' sign. She was looking over the trays of pastries when Bonisiwe came forward to serve her.

'Can I help you, Ma'm?'' she asked. This was a smart customer, wearing a designer track suit and Converse trainers, with highlights in her dark blonde hair and an expensive leather pouch bag over her shoulder. Her eyes were roving over the rows of cling-foiled trays.

'Yes, I want to get some of these pastries. What's in those? And what're those green things? *Pistachio* nuts? Alright, two trays of them ... '

Diana remembered that she was buying for teenagers, who could be ravenous. They were girls, true, but at thirteen they weren't obsessed with their figures yet: children in fast-growing bodies. And if everyone came, with Sebastian who could eat for two, there'd be twenty or so to feed.

'Better make it three trays ... What're those brown cookies? *Ouzo* in them? I'll take four trays.'

She bought a lot. Boni got some boxes from the back.

'Are there any cakes, you know, like a birthday cake? Not that she'd want icing or candles - that'd be far too childish. It's a birthday so we have to have a cake, don't you think?'

Boni agreed though she was a bit surprised by the idea. She showed the customer the *karythopita* in the glass case. It was a walnut cake, a speciality of the house, usually sold in slices because it was so expensive. This woman said she would take the whole thing.

Ma'm Elena came over when she saw the size of the sale, asked if everything was alright. The customer was happy with Bonisiwe, and told Ma'm Elena that she knew everything about the pastries, earning Boni a nod of approval from her boss.

'Kali orexi for your party!' Ma'm Elena was smiling.

The lady took out her brown leather wallet, looked through a pile of cards and gave the cashier one. When she had signed, she asked Bonisiwe to take the trays and boxes out to her car.

Three trips it took for Boni to get everything into the car. Diana stood by the open boot, wishing the girl would hurry up. She didn't want to be late for Pilates today because she was wearing the old track suit and if she had to come in late, from the front of the class, every eye would be on her. And they were sharp eyes.

At last it was all in. Should she give this girl a tip? It was the girl's job after all. But as a kind gesture, she pried a kourabiethe out of its tray, and gave it to Boni with a smile, saying: 'Here's something for your help'.

When the car had gone, Bonisiwe walked over and gave the kourabiethe to Simon, the parking attendant.

Good Eating

My name is Alfrons Sibaya. I lay bricks and I am good in my work. If I make a wall, it is straight, up and down and left and right. I learn from the old bilikis when I am daka dibi. Then my job is just to fill the bhala from the big mixer and take it on the bras laying bricks. They work fast those majitas and the dibis run. All day, with a heavy bhala, we run. You get strong there. Some just go because the work is too heavy.

My first job is a big building, deep in the earth and high, in Sandton, is called Greenfield - you can see it today. I am there. I help to build that when I come on Jozi from Nquthu. My uncle, he get me a job there - he is biliki in that building. Many men work on that job, we get pay every Friday, and I am happy for that work. One problem, is too far from the umkhukhu of my uncle. The taxi's ask R27 - is R12 to Alex, R15 to Thembisa - so it is R54 every day. When the money is R350 a week, then R270 for transport - eish, that is too much. Also, it take long time, we come home eight, nine o'clock and we must vuka next day at four o'clock. So we sleep on small places by the work at night, on the back of shops or by the river, the men on that building, sometimes other men too. There is too much building in Sandton then, very big and high places, and the men from working there always sleep on the small places.

First, uncle and me and a lot of the other bras sleep in the empty place under the Eskom wires. If nobody is looking, we jump over in the place where that fence is cut, and go in there. There are small trees where nobody can see us. It is warm there, the wires talk all night, sometimes they spit out little bits of fire. The houses all round that place is big and very rich with high walls and razor wire on top to keep out amasela. When the waBenzis come home or go out at night, the gates open on themselves and the rich men go in. They don't know we are so close we see them and we are sleeping there behind they walls every night.

But someone know we are there because one night amapoyisi come. They hold big lights on us and say we must suka there. We must take out our things and our cardboards for sleeping and clean up and voetsek. They say we can stay till the day, but then is finish. It is OK because that place got dirty with old pap and sous and chicken bones with izimpethu eating on it. Also a lot of majitas were pissing and kakking there so it smell bad and the rats run on you at night. It is good time to go.

Next day we look for a place. Dushi say he take us to good hotel. That bra, he come from Lesotho not CapeTown. He come from a mountain called Thabana Ntlenyana and their town is Mokhotlong. He talk a lot about that place, how it is so nice with all the mountains and he got horse there and lima with oxen and the people there are good, but it get very cold and too much ice in winter. We call him Dushi because he got no teeth in front and he always put a flat hat on his head,

even when he sleep. That mother make him very white with muthi on his face when he is small so he look like that dushis from Cape Town. He is good friend to me and clever. He say the majitas from the building sites, we are amaphelane of this place Sandton.

So in the night he take us on this good hotel he know. It is in that parking place by a school, an open place. It is build up on one side with round concrete blocks full with sand, ten courses high, and under that is a hidden place 2 maybe 3 meters wide, where the people can't see us. On the other side is high wall and that place with many rich houses all together, not in they own fence. There are big trees behind that wall with the branches on us.

We can see that people are there in that sleeping place before us because we see old fires and rubbish but it doesn't stink so bad. And there are three men there who are not bras, they are not from our work. They look at us but sit far away and talk. Then a cellphone ring and I hear the big man say 'Yebo, yebo, we are in a good place'. Then he say to the two bras, 'Is Kidneys 5 tonight'. They are smoking insangu and drinking some gologo in a bottle. Then late in the night, they are working with they guns, the big man, he got a shining gun, putting bullets in klik, klik, and they go out. They don't come back there.

We sleep in that place maybe two, three weeks, the bras from our work. I got a problem there and Dushi is utshomi wami, he help me that time when I am in bad trouble.

This smart bra, he come to the site one Monday on lunchtime, and he got umlabalaba board with some plastic cows. He say:

'So who want to play?'

I say Yebo, because I like that game, I know I can play. If I am home in Nqutu, I can beat even the old men and the young bras they don't put money down with me. He say:

'OK, it's half a tiger for a game.'

My money is little short for the week, R25, but I can play five games and khula it to R50 or more maybe. I put down ten rand for two games. He give me nine cows. He start by a corner. I put down by the other corner and he put down by the middle before I am finish, before my hand is off the board.

'Make fast,' he say. 'You play too slow.'

Then all the pieces are down, and the cows start to fly. His hand is too fast I can't even see what he do, and then I go out. I don't want to play again, he is too fast but the others say, 'Play, you must get the money back,' so I try again and lose. And again. Then I put down the last R5 and he beat me again so I lose it too. Dushi say that bra is moving my pieces when he flies his cows too fast on the board but we are just slow to catch him.

Now the money is gone. On Tuesday, uncle give me some food, but Wednesday and Thursday he is not there, I just scratch the ground from what the other bras give me. Thursday night, I feel bad. Hungry like I am when I am small. When little brother he come in the house of us, my mother give all the milk for him and I look on him drinking and rats are eating inside my stomach. It is bad that time. This brother he die. When I cry for food my mother she cry also. One time when I cry, my mother she pick me up and push the sibeles in my mouth but there is no milk there, she is finish. When you are hungry, your eyes can look only on the earth. Or you lie down all day and put a paper on your face for the flies.

That time with the big building, I feel like that but I must go on Friday to get the money. When I am not there, no money. But when I am there, I must run in the hot sun with the bhala all day. I tell Dushi, I scare to fall down there tomorrow.

Dushi he say, 'No problem bra, there is good food round here. I see pangelo in the trees here on us - listen you can hear them scream. God give us food, we must just take it.'

'How can you catch them?' I ask him.

'They are very stupid and no problem. Ginfowls are good to eat.'

And he tell us a story, Dushi like to tell stories:

One time I work on that office park in Lone Hill, six buildings with grass and flowers all over. They bring big trees, six, seven years old to put on the garden, and that big dam in the middle with flowers on top of water. Then one day iloli come with wood box big like umkhukhu. Iloli go to that dam and men put the box down there very slow. We look inside it when we go home in the night and there are two shining black birds, they sit in some grass. Very big with red mouth and long neck. The gardener feed them and give them water every day in the box then after few days they let them out. Those birds swim on the dam and they can't fly because their wings is cut.

We live in umkhukhu at Stop 14 by that place and one bra there, his name is Solly, say those birds are good to eat. Better than chicken, better than meat. They are like something good and soft in your teeth. So when it get dark that night, Solly and five bras from Stop 14 take some big sacks and biliki hammers with that end sharp. The security guards got them placed on the other side from the dam, far away, and is Friday night so they drink some gologo and smoke some dagga.

That bird is hard to catch. He swim in the middle of the dam when he see us so we must go out in the water and our bhulukwe get wet but the dam is just one metre so is OK. Then we catch him, he kick and fight. He can hit with the wings and mouth very hard and Solly fall over and cry he can't swim help help, then he see he sit on the bottom and all the

bras laugh. We get that bird on the side we hold on his wings and feet and neck. Solly and the bras hit him on the head and neck till he die. He scream bad and the other one too, we scare the guards come but they don't hear. I hold a big sack there and we push that bird inside. We just took one bird. Then we carry it back to Stop 14.

We go to the place of Solly. Gladys is his woman in the umkhukhu there, she call all the sisis, they pour hot water on that bird and pull the feathers. We make a fire outside it is so big. Solly he sticks a broom right through it and wires round and round and we hold it on the fire. We are all helping, it is heavy and it take long to cook. Then we eat - that bird is good. KFC or Chickin Lickin is not so good any day. There is too much meat, some people who are looking there, omakhelwane also come and eat and they thank Solly and Gladys and everybody for the good meat.

Then we go to work on Monday and there's big trouble. The Chief ask about the big black bird. Is swana, he say, not Tswana from here but swana from far away and it cost big money and they are all kwadile because is not on the dam now. Where it go? they scream. It can't fly so someone take it. Then they find that place with the things and blood in the grass by the dam. Where is the thief he's kill our black swana? The big chief, his face is red and he shout a lot. That bird is our sign of high class he say, now the other one also die because she is his wife.

We keep quiet and they don't find out, so is OK.

Bra, I am not happy with KFC from that day. When you eat like that, then shepile food is not good any more. But pangelo, is OK when you cook it right.

He say he go alone because there's security in that place. I help him in the tree and he go on the wall and I hear him jump on the ground. I wait there for a long time. The pangelo make a big noise for five minutes then quiet. I am tired so I lie by the fire those bras have made with some pieces of shuttering and I sleep. Dushi come back and he carry a long white thing in his hand. I think it's unogwaja but he say no, is a cat.

'I try catch those fokkin birds, but they run and fly very fast. This big cat come and lie down and rub his back on the bricks. He is there by my feet so I pick him up and say thanks God and break his neck quick, he's not even fighting. Cat meat is right, same like chicken. We just make a good fire and cook it nice. But first we get some water.'

He go back on that tree with a bucket. I wait there and then he put it up on the wall and I lift it, full with water. He come on the ground and we get the cat. Dushi got a good knife, cut the head and tail off. He say is too much hair, you take front feet, he hold back legs, and we turn it quick over

the fire and all white hairs burn off. That smell bad but the cat come out clean just in his skin. I can feel lot of meat on it.

Then Dushi cut down the stomach and on the four legs and pull the skin off just like is a coat that cat wear, clean and soft. I say, Dushi, is mistake that we burn his hair off, it can be good hat for winter. That cat, he got soft hair like amasi colour and little bit dark on his ear and feet and tail, good cat impela and if he not dead, we can give something for the amadlozi. They are please with a rich white cat. Then we can make some ziphandla from that good skin and white hair and have white luck when we wear it on arms. But is too late, that cat is dead when Dushi bring it on the wall, and now his hair is burn.

Dushi cut the stomach and tell me I must pour the mathumbu out in a far place. He wash the meat in the bucket, make it flat on the back of old wire chair, then he put some big wood on the fire. We lift that chair on the fire. He turn that meat on two, three minutes. First I feel sick and not hungry to eat it but the smell of good shisanyama come in my nose and the fat on the meat getting brown and hashukile, then I ask Dushi give me some. But he say wait, is not ready. Then we take it off the fire and cut it up. That cat is too fat and got thick meat on him, soft meat like the unogwaja we eat at home. My big brother Mfaniseni is umhlaseli omkhulu and his dog JikaJika, they get them in the veld and rocks. I eat good that night, and Dushi, and the other bras eat some also. Then on Friday I go to the site and I am feeling strong so I work and get the money. Ngempela, Dushi help me that time.

At about four o'clock his secretary, Lulu Jacobs, brought in the newspaper.

His back was to her, shoes up on the windowsill as he contemplated the city below. From the eighteenth-storey office he could see the Newtown Precinct, the crowds at the North Street taxi ranks, Park Station with its shunting yards, the highrises of Braamfontein. On one of these was a Johnnie Walker advert. It took up one whole side of an apartment block: a man striding out in boots, breeches and tailcoat, carrying a cane and wearing his tophat at a jaunty angle. It was the start of the weekend, and the advert was a powerful inducement to have a whisky.

Lulu laid the folded wad of newsprint on his desk.

'There you are Boss, your paper. I'm off now. Have a nice weekend.'

'Thanks Lu, you too.'

He didn't much like being called 'Boss.' Of course, she knew that and never called him James or even Mr Findlay. 'Boss' asserted her independence and kept a nice edge to their really very good relationship. One of mutual liking, even affection, he thought.

He swivelled round in his chair, picked the paper up and turned, as he always did on a Friday afternoon, to the *What's on This Weekend* section.

Nothing new at the movies; they had seen the good ones. Precious little under Art, except a show by Leigh Voigt at the Everard Read. He would make a point of seeing that, even if he went alone. He had given her book on country life, with its lovely illustrations, to Diana one Christmas, but he had the feeling that he had enjoyed it a lot more than Diana, who didn't care much for art. James knew and loved Leigh Voigt's shimmering work on Nguni cattle; the theme of this new exhibition was trees. It had opened a week ago. Had there been a review that he'd missed? He would check on the web over the weekend.

He found the music section and ran his finger down the entries. A lot of jazz on at the moment, by musicians he didn't know, at venues he had never even heard of. Once he had known everybody who blew a horn or plucked a double bass here in Joburg. He had been part of the jazz scene, helped a couple of young guys on their way, had been a personal friend of Ray Phiri's. At all the venues where jazz was played they had known and welcomed him: the three clubs in town, a few restaurants in the suburbs, the shebeens in the grey areas and townships. The shebeens. That was where the best jazz had been heard, not practised or professional, but free, exciting; musicians trying new things, playing for the sound and feel and spirit of it, the whole of Africa channelling through in the sound. Usually with an undercurrent of the illicit, when it was in an unlicensed

shebeen and the liquor was flowing against the law, or because he, a white man, was in a black area without a permit. It was different now.

His eye fell on the name of a place he knew: Bass Blue. When it was still in Melville he had been a regular customer and he had been to the new place twice, both times with business visitors who wanted to hear some live African jazz. Its entry for that Friday night listed men he didn't recognize: Selaelo Selota, Zim Ngqawana, Jimmy Dlodlu. But there was one name that he knew in the lineup: Mahotella Queens. He had listened to a CD of theirs on his way to work that very morning and it had made the morning traffic bearable. But how could they still be performing? They must be venerable old women by now. West Nkosi and Mahlathini Nkabinde, their managers, had been dead a long time, surely a decade or more. Did they have a new leader? Were they still the Queens of mbaqanga, still producing the skin-tight *a capella* sound that had been their trademark?

He got up and stood in front of the wall-length window. Lights were coming on here and there in the buildings around him as the early winter dusk seeped up from the streets. A whole block of lights came on suddenly in the Transnet building on the far right of the cityscape. His office, still unlit, was growing shadowy in the last yellowish glow of twilight.

Pulling out a drawer of the desk, he took out a cellphone and punched in his wife's number. The ringtone he was hearing, he knew, translated into Mozart's 41st symphony at her end and he heard the first few bars in his head as it rang: 'Da da dum, da da dum, da da dum dum' No reply but the answering service with her poised message: 'I am not able to talk to you now. Kindly leave a message.'

He was brief: 'Something's come up at work Di, the Chinese deal, and I've got to entertain them tonight. Be home late. Don't worry about dinner for me. Don't wait up.'

Yes! He would treat himself to an evening of jazz, begin getting in touch again with what was new, hear for himself what the Mahotella Queens were like these days.

The streets of downtown Johannesburg were quiet as he drove through them. The rush-hour crowds had dispersed, the jostling taxis had gone, and only a few late workers stood hopefully at the taxi ranks or bus stops. James locked his car doors, something he now did whenever he drove in the city. Two years before, he had been mugged as he waited at a red light. The unlocked passenger door had been wrenched open and his briefcase grabbed off the seat. It was rush hour, the roads and sidewalks swarming with people. He jumped out of the car, shouting 'Stop that thief! Stop him!' but he had no idea where the briefcase had gone to, and didn't even have the vaguest impression of what the thief had looked like. The police, when he reported the incident, were reluctant to open a docket. It had really been his fault for leaving his briefcase on the seat and his door open, they implied, and if he hadn't insisted that he needed a case number for insurance purposes, they would

have dismissed the incident. At home, to his family, he made light of it, joking that traffic lights were now to be called 'rob-its', but a quiet fury possessed him as he realized how much he had lost and how tiresome it would be to replace everything, especially the business documents. Tonight, the streets were quiet, but he was still alert.

The Queens were sold out. The woman behind the ticket office window was regretful.

'Sorry, main stage all sold out for tonight. Mahotella Queens don't perform much and everyone wants to hear them, the young fans too.'

'Not even a place on the stairs?'

'Nothing, nothing. But you can buy one of the Queens' latest CD's inside if you like,' she offered. 'Or I can give you a ticket for tomorrow night.'

'No thanks, it's OK,' and he was turning away when she called out:

'What about the second stage? If you sit in the bar area you can still hear some good music.'

It was better than going home and cooking up another lie, so he took out his wallet and paid the cover charge.

There was a table in a corner away from the busy main floor. He ordered a double Johnnie Walker and settled back. People, mostly black, were coming and going, calling out to friends, laughing excitedly; everybody out to have a good time. These people were well-dressed, sophisticated, the women with jewelry on their arms, ears, necks, the men in expensive suits, flashing gold at the wrist and fingers. The place was clearly no shebeen; the music would probably also be smooth and polished.

The stage, a raised square in the middle of the floor with a drum kit and electronic keyboard on it, was some way off. Presently a trio of young men straggled onto it. The sax player slithered up and down his scale; the man on drums did a roll or two to loosen his wrists; keyboards tried a few chords, shook out his heavy dreads, and then they were off. It was a number he didn't recognize, with a lot of improvisation and riffing in it, keyboards anchoring it all with a marabi vamp while the other two played about with the basic melody line. Then it was keyboard's turn to do a cadenza, a lyrical digression but still with a core of marabi that he returned to as they came back to their theme at the end.

Afterwards there was applause that he joined in. He was still clapping as a hand fell on his shoulder, someone leaned down to him and above the noise a voice said: 'It's Jim, isn't it? Jim Findlay?'

The face shocked him. It belonged to a dead man. The quick grin, that scar over the right eye, the brown eyes steady as an owl's behind small round glasses; they belonged to Donny Ngidi and he

had been dead for twenty years or more. Dead and buried no one knew where, because he had disappeared and been gone for weeks before news of his death began to creep about.

‘Donny? It’s not Donny Ngidi?’

‘Yebo, that’s just who it is, my friend,’ and the ready smile confirmed it. ‘Ndondakusuka Ngidi at your service.’

‘But you’re dead! Or at least, that’s what we all thought?’

‘And now I’ve climbed out of my grave to come and enjoy the jazz at Bass Blue? No my friend, I was never dead.’

‘Shit man! Sit down, sit down, have a whisky.’ His hand was shaking as he signalled the waiter with two fingers. ‘We heard you’d been given a Vlakplaas exit, we even had a wake for you at Mpho’s place.’

Donny leaned back in the chair, hooked his elbows expansively over the backrest, revealing a red satin lining to his jacket.

‘Oh yes, I was on that death list. But we had a friend in there and she told me about it. I got out before they arrested me and I fell down the stairs at John Vorster. Or got a terminal illness or got run over. I got out fast.’

‘Where did you go?’

‘There was a well-organized route to Maputo. I hid in Nelspruit for a few days in the house of a comrade who was a teacher there. Then across the border at Ressano Garcia in an old truck, and up to Maputo.’

‘They didn’t pick you up at the border?’

‘I was hidden, with two other guys. The truck had a false floor that was screwed down after the three of us got in. I still have nightmares about that metal coffin. The lorry carried prawns from Mozambique to Joburg but it wasn’t a fridge lorry, so the ice they packed the prawns in melted on the trip, and the prawn juice also - it all ran down into the flat space under the floor where we had to lie. It had been cleaned up a bit but it still stank. They put us in there at Nelspruit and it was the longest few hours of my life until we were away from the border and the comrades opened up and let us out. Fresh air tasted like the best thing I ever had. But we smelled like old prawns for weeks afterwards.’

‘What happened then?’

‘We stayed in Maputo for a few days, then went out to an uMkhonto camp in the bush. We had some preliminary training there. You knew me then: a young guy trying to be a photographer with no military knowledge or skills. A good shot for me was a picture that would make people cry or

feel angry. But it was war and so we had to get some fighting skills: hand-to-hand combat, methods of surveillance, subversive activities. Also, we learnt a bit of Russian, and then it was off to Moscow.'

'Moscow! You went to Russia?'

'Yes, in an Ilyushin Moskva, a long range transporter. After we took off from Maputo airport we only stopped once, at Cairo, to refuel.'

James shook his head wonderingly as the waiter brought their drinks and the trio started up again. This time it was something he knew, an old Abdullah Ibrahim number, 'Shisa'. Donny raised his glass: 'To jazz and old friends,' and they fell silent for a while to listen.

Donny turned to him. 'So what have you been doing with yourself since the eighties?'

'Nothing so brave as you. I just kept my head down when things got really bad, worked away at my business. Got married in '96, two kids.'

'Hey that's something! Congrats Baba! I've got two myself. And who is she? - your wife?'

'Oh someone I met ... twelve years younger than me, she's blonde and beautiful.'

'Serious? So you married a whitey. I always thought you should marry that Zulu girl who could boogie all night. I remember you two did a wild jive. She had long straight black hair from her Indian granny - what was her name again?'

Jim tossed back the last of his whisky.

'Samina.'

The name that he had not spoken in over twenty years.

'You two had a good thing going there bra.'

He wanted to say something but didn't know what so he held up two fingers to the waiter again.

'Whoa man. I gotta get back to my table over there,' Donny pointed at a noisy, laughing crowd on the other side of the room.

'C'mon, just one more, for old times' sake.'

He had to talk some more about that time to someone who was there, who had known Samina and him.

'OK, a quick one then. So tell me, how come a Scot like you landed up in Joburg and loved the shebeens and jazz so much?'

How to tell him? Memory flashes of a young man in Edinburgh stumbling across an early record of Dollar Brand's in a second-hand music shop on Princes Street, how that sound dispelled the grimness of life in Auld Reekie, the growing passion for mbaqanga that helped him decide to emigrate.

'Abdullah Ibrahim got me loving African jazz, and, well, a Scotsman never needs to explain his love of a drink. The shebeens were so free, it was easy to make friends there. Everyone was young and warm and enjoying life.'

'Ja, in spite of the terrible things going on around us. Or maybe because of them. The shebeens were the only places where we could be ourselves.'

'I was young and silly enough to think that I was showing how apartheid didn't work. I thought that by spending my time at shebeens, by making friends among the black jazzmen and partying with the fans, I was proving apartheid a lie. What a fool.'

'No bra, you weren't a fool.' Donny's eyes were serious behind the glasses. 'You did that thing against apartheid, and I wish more whites were like you, then maybe we could've all got together sooner, and more people would still be alive today.'

'But I was just ignorant of what was out there, what we were up against. BOSS had me on their books too you know. And I began to see what was happening to people on their list.'

'Well, hey, the good guys won in the end.'

A light-skinned woman in a glistening green dress stood up at Donny's table and waved at him. Donny raised his glass and pointed to the whisky left in it.

Now, he had to tell it now.

'Samina ... you - you know she got pregnant?'

'No ways man! It was bad shit back then. So what did you do?'

'God - I sent her back. To her home. Gave her some money and sent her away. I wanted her to get rid of it, I even found a doctor, but she wouldn't. She wanted the baby. So she went back to Natal to have it.'

'A boy or girl?'

'I don't know. I was so scared that I cut off contact with her.'

'You just left her on her own?'

'I'm not proud of it. But can you remember what it was like at that time? Our relationship was a crime, we were criminals. Sentences were harsh. Remember Ed Shapley and Lottie April? He got seven years and she got five.'

'Yebo, I know.'

'And there was that Dutch Reformed minister who drove his lover and himself out to Hartebeespoort Dam and they gassed themselves before they could be arrested. That worked on my mind. When Samina told me, I was terrified. If we were found out, it would be the end of my life in South Africa. Or anywhere, if I was sent to jail for seven years.'

'You could've gone back to Scotland and married her there.'

'She didn't want to leave South Africa and for me, it would've been worse there. My father was a Presbyterian minister - you don't know what that means. And my mother was even stricter than he was.'

'She's on her own with the baby?'

'Well, I helped financially so she's never been short of money. I opened a bank account for her and arranged for the family trust to pay money into it every month. It's still going, adjusted for inflation.'

'Somewhere in KwaZulu there's a little Findlay running round.'

'Not so little, a young person of twenty five by now. And I just don't know what to do with that. It makes me want to beat my head against a wall. It's been there in my mind every day since then: Samina and my child and what they're doing, what they must be like by now.'

'There's no law against sex across the colour line now. Why don't you find out where she is and go meet your son or daughter?'

'Because there's my wife now, and my children, a girl of thirteen and a boy of nine. I thought that marriage and then children would blot out Samina's memory but of course it didn't. I couldn't now suddenly spring a half-brother or -sister on them. It wouldn't be fair. So I'm caught in a vice. Samina was my first real relationship, my first love and I betrayed her, denied my love for her.' His mouth was taut. 'I told our solicitor it was for a faithful servant who had had an accident.'

'At least you saw to her financial welfare.'

'It didn't clear my conscience though. You are the first person I've really talked to about this but every morning when I wake up, it's there like a dark blot in my mind. Sometimes it takes me a while to remember exactly what the blot is, but then there'll be a flash of memory, her image or voice, and I'll remember.'

'So. Well. Sorry bra, but looks like life dealt you a bad hand.' Donny finished his drink, stood up. 'Good to see you again. I'm with the Department of Arts and Culture these days. Here's my card. If you ever need some culture, give me a call.'

'Hey, don't leave, have another one. I haven't got cards with me but my number ...'

'Sorry bra, must go.'

He watched as Donny's plump figure made its way across the floor and sat down at the far table. In the strobe light, his shirt stood out, a patch of luminous violet next to the green glimmer of his woman.

The waiter leaning against the bar and keeping an eye on his tables, saw the white man sitting alone fold his arms and bend over them, head down, rocking a little. He stayed like that for a few minutes. Then he straightened up, looked round and signalled the waiter.

'A double Johnny Walker - no, make that a triple.'

The Good Life

Gladys was tying back the heavy curtains. Roxy stretched out to her full extent, her skin a rosy caramel against the black satin sheets and pillows.

'Mmmm, yebo Gladys. What time is it?'

'Ten past eight Ma'm.'

She sat up and reached for the mug of coffee on the bedside table, brushing the hair off her face as she drank. After a few mouthfuls, feeling more awake, she put the cup down. Gladys was fiddling with a fold in the curtain.

'What's wrong with the drapes?'

'Nothing Ma'm.'

'So leave them. Go downstairs and get on with your work.'

'Ma'm, when is Ma'm going to pay me for last week?'

'Hawu, last week? I paid you, don't you remember?'

'It was short. Ma'm just gave me three hundred. Is still two hundred rand short, and my money is finish now. Please Ma'm.'

Roxy was frowning as she flopped back onto the pillows. 'Why d'you come and worry me so early on a Monday morning?'

'Sorry Ma'm but I am short for the taxis. Is eleven rand every day to come here and eleven rand to go back home.'

'I'll try and draw some cash today or tomorrow. Go on now, you don't have to wait around. Here, bring me some more coffee.'

As Gladys padded across the deep-pile carpet to fetch the mug, the Blackberry on the bedside table broke into Mandoza's *Indoda*. Roxy snatched it up, saw who was calling and put it down. It was Nandi, from Mnambithi. She picked it up again. This would be about Bonisiwe.

It was. Roxy's older sister had a daughter new to Jozi, and mother was keen to know how her girl was getting on.

'Please call her, ask her to visit you, or even better, go and visit her. I want to know how she's living.'

'Where is she?' Roxy asked.

'She's sharing a flat with some girls in Bramley. That job at the Greek bakery doesn't pay very much, though Boni has her matric. She must look around for something better, a decent job in a call centre or as a receptionist.'

'I'll call her this morning, and take her out to lunch, show her a bit of Jozi life. Let me just first see where I can fit her in this week.'

She ran herself a deep foam-topped bath, and luxuriated in it for an hour, doing nothing to wash because she believed that the foam was active in dissolving body dirt, but spreading a rejuvenating mask over her face. Getting out, she draped a thick bath sheet over herself and waited for it to do its work of mopping up the moisture as she carefully removed the heavy cream of the mask. When it was all off, she turned her face this way and that in the mirror, and smiled. She applied a delicately-scented moisturizer to her legs and arms and torso, and pulled on her purple satin robe and fluffy mules. She brushed her hair carefully (it was getting brittle with all the straightening and colouring) and tried to think of the week's activities.

Sessions with that new personal trainer at the gym on Tuesday and Friday morning. Dineo's lunch at the Country Club on Wednesday. Hair, nails and a wax this afternoon. Andile gets back from Cape Town on Thursday morning, and he'll come over in the afternoon, it's been a week since he was here. I said I'd help Joey look for curtain material but did we make a firm date? I better call her. Today's too soon to arrange lunch, anyway the restaurants are empty on a Monday. That leaves tomorrow or Friday for Bonisiwe.

Gladys appeared with her breakfast on a tray: slices of mango and kiwifruit, and peeled litchis, a hot croissant, butter and marmalade, with a freshly-made mug of coffee. She placed it on a small table in front of the jasmine-framed window, where Roxy could enjoy the scented flowers and watch the sprinklers in the neighbouring townhouse garden as she ate.

'How can I keep track of all my dates, hey Gladys? I must get a diary but I don't like writing. Even at school, the pen always felt like a bewitched broomstick in my hand. And eish, that cellphone diary is too hard. Anyway, my Baba says that a girl doesn't need to be clever, especially if she's pretty.'

'Yes, Ma'm, you are lucky to be so pretty.'

'How old do you think I am Gladys?'

'Maybe ... twenty five Ma'm?'

Roxy laughed. 'Thirty eight, darling.'

When she had finished the croissant and nibbled on the fruit, she called Bonisiwe and made a date for lunch on Friday. She would pick the girl up from the mall where she worked and take her to Melrose Arch.

'We only get one hour for lunch Anti,' the girl warned her.

'Hey girl lighten up, you're not late yet! And you can drop the "Anti". Just call me "Roxy".'

Roxy was uneasy as she got dressed that Friday, pulling on Armani jeans that acted as a corset for her slightly rounded belly and backside, an Italian silk shirt, high-heeled sandals, and as an afterthought, threading the diamond pendants onto her ears. Uneasy because Andile had not called, and she knew that he had got back from Cape Town yesterday. Normally, her bed would be the first place he would want to be, but she had heard nothing from him. Though she tried to call him a couple of times, he wasn't answering his cell and hadn't yet returned her calls. Perhaps he had been held up by business. Anyway, forget Andile! She was looking beautiful and was out to show her niece a good time.

Her little red and black Austin Cooper swung into the pavement where Bonisiwe was waiting, at nearly a quarter past one.

'Hawu, Mamakazi!' Boni hugged her awkwardly behind the wheel. 'Please we mustn't be late. I must be back by two o'clock.'

'Come on baby, I just got here. We're going out to lunch. And remember, don't call me Anti or Mamakazi. My name's Roxy.'

At Melrose Arch, they walked along the cobbled streets to a pavement cafe with wrought-iron tables and brightly-striped green and white umbrellas. Elegantly dressed women and one or two men sat at the tables. Once they were settled, Roxy leaned over and said softly to Boni: 'See that girl over there with the red jacket and pearl studs? That's Mandla Mthetwa's latest. He bought her a yellow Ferrari. I must go and greet her. Here,' – giving her a menu – 'see what you want to eat.' And she went over to the other table, where she stood chatting for some time. They all laughed a good deal at that table and Roxy returned to their table still smiling. She asked what she should order for Boni.

'I want a hamburger and coke.'

'Serious? I always eat a Caesar salad here, they do it well, with crispy bacon. Or you can take the smoked chicken salad, also good. Get with the urban flow, darling.'

She ordered a bottle of champagne with the food, saying that it wasn't every day she could welcome her niece to Jozi and they must celebrate. It was twenty to two when they placed their order. Boni kept stealing glances at her watch, until Roxy said sharply: 'Stop looking at the time. Grow up Boni, it doesn't matter if you're a little late for your boss. Anyway, a job at a bakery is nothing to hang onto. You will never meet anyone there. Why don't you try for a job in a hotel, receptionist or something, or in a bank?'

'But I'm happy at the bakery Ant – Roxy. I've only been there four months. I'm still learning about all the cakes and pastries there.'

‘Where’s your ambition baby? Don’t you want to eat in restaurants like this all the time? Wear lovely clothes and shoes? Jewellery? And you could definitely use a visit to the hairdresser. Dreadlocks are out, O-U-T out, here in Jozi. You need a relaxing job – look how well mine worked,’ and here she ran her fingers with their long purplish nails through her hair to demonstrate how slick it was. ‘And I get it coloured every month too.’

The wine waiter was pouring the champagne into their glasses.

‘But I like my dreads.’

‘Aiyee girl, get with it. Just look at the smart magazines, you don’t see dreads. Or only on the ethnic country types. And it takes forever to keep them in order. Cheers.’

She held her glass out to Boni, who looked at it blankly.

‘Have you never had wine before? You’re supposed to clink glasses when you take the first sip.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s just something you do. C’mon now, tip your glass against mine ... that’s it. Now we drink,’ and she took several deep draughts, nearly finishing the glass. Boni took a small sip and put down her glass with pursed lips.

‘Your hair’s lovely, Roxy. I’d like to straighten mine too but I haven’t got the money for hairdressers. My friend Masontwa does it for me on the weekends. How do you manage the money without working?’

‘I don’t worry, that’s all. It’s like walking on a piece of wood over the river: you just keep your eyes on your feet and don’t look on the side. If you once look at that rushing water, you’re going to fall in.’

There were times, Roxy had to admit, when the sound of the torrent was loud in her ears, and the piece of wood could wobble badly, but today wasn’t one of them. Today, she was her bold and brilliant best as she showed Boni the good life.

‘But you must get money from somewhere.’ Boni was curious.

‘Yebo, the alimony’s not bad, Lungo is very reliable, never misses a month. And if I’m short, I’ve got a generous boyfriend, Andile.’

‘Will you marry him?’

‘No, never! He’s got one wife here in Jozi already and another one in the country somewhere and he doesn’t want a third. And I don’t want another husband – too much trouble. As soon as they marry you, they lose interest. And get mean with you. Andile’s very rich, big businessman, and he gives me everything I want.’

She wondered why had he not called yet. Frowning, she took a slim gold atomizer out of her handbag and sprayed the perfume on her wrists while Boni watched.

'Versace, *Crystal Noir*,' and she showed it to the girl. 'You want to try some? Give me your hands,' and she sprayed it on liberally. 'You like?'

'It's beautiful Roxy.' Boni sniffed at her wrists.

'Here, it's yours,' said her aunt, holding it out to her.

'But, but ...'

'Don't fight with me now, where's your respect? Take it, it's yours,' and Roxy folded Boni's fingers around the little cylinder.

Their food arrived and Boni managed a quick glance at her watch. Nearly five to two. Oh well, maybe she was being too serious about keeping time at work. And maybe she did need to look around for another job. It was delightful to be sitting here in the shade of the striped umbrella, in what people said was the smartest mall in Jozi, sniffing occasionally at her scented wrists, drinking wine and chatting to her beautiful aunt. The chicken salad was very good too: just a light hint of smokiness, with some kind of nut and avocado pear. She could easily get used to this lifestyle. Maybe Roxy was right, you just needed to be bold and do it and everything would follow.

As they ate, Roxy continued to inspire her niece with ideas of the lifestyle that could easily be hers.

'I must come and see where you are living – Bramley is not such a good neighbourhood. You should try and get a garden cottage or something in a good area, it makes a difference to how people see you. And that's what counts – your image. You see how hard I work to keep everything about me perfect? Yebo, you must get a nice garden cottage somewhere smart.'

'But what will it cost?'

'You mustn't keep asking that if you want to live well. You just do it. See this watch? That's diamonds round it. My handbag is genuine snakeskin. Let me see your shoes.'

Bonisiwe held out her flat, slightly worn court shoe and her aunt laughed, extending her own immaculately smooth calf and foot in its high-heeled Italian leather sandal, and holding it up at table level for admiration.

'Now that's what you should be wearing.'

'I can't buy shoes like that.'

'No, not if you're going to keep on working as a bakery girl. You've got to get out of there first, find yourself a rich boyfriend – you're not a bad-looking girl, good figure – and then you can come to Roxy for lessons in how to be with it.'

'Those are beautiful earrings.'

'Yes. Real diamond pendants, from Andile,' and she stretched out her earlobe towards Boni, turning her head to the side. As she did so, the girl caught sight of a circular area of bald scalp

showing on her aunt's head, above and behind one ear where she herself would not be able to see it. A few strands of hair covered it thinly. Should she tell Roxy about it? Boni wondered briefly, and decided to ignore it; let some other friend be the bearer of bad news.

By this time they had finished their food and it was nearly half past two.

'Now we must hurry, Roxy. I am already in big trouble at work.'

'Serious? No dessert, no coffee? I haven't taught you anything here?' She laughed. 'We must have lots more lunches then, so I can train you properly.' She raised a hand for the bill, taking out a credit card to pay when it was brought. The waiter ran the card through the machine a few times, then told her that it had been declined by the bank.

'That one must be finished,' she replied, pulling another card out of her shoulder bag and handing it to him. 'Here, this one isn't used up yet.'

'How do you pay all your cards, Roxy?' Boni was awed.

'Andile's very good, such a sweetheart, always clears them for me when they get too full. That reminds me, I must call him about tonight.' She took out her Blackberry.

'Please do that later - I must get back right now.'

'Such a silly child!' Roxy shook her head at Boni. She dialled Andile's number anyway, got no reply, just his mail box, and left a message asking him to call her.

As they walked down to the parking garage, Boni told her aunt that she had understood the message that Roxy was trying to give her, and she did want to improve herself. She would look round for a new job some day when the time was right. Roxy's face, which had been looking a bit heavy, cleared. She flashed her niece a brilliant smile. And as she raced through the traffic in her sporty little car, her spirits revived so that by the time they arrived at Boni's work, she was her usual buoyant self again. Her parting shot was: 'And don't be too sorry for being late. Remember, it will be a good thing if you are fired!'

Seamstresses of Malimode

When she went to fetch water that Sunday morning, her two forty-litre bottles bouncing and rattling on the wheelbarrow, Rafiloe was surprised to see a new white panel van parked next to the emerald green JoJo tank, and a stranger walking about in front of it. He had a canvas bag slung over one shoulder, he was smiling so hard that his eyes had disappeared into two little slits, and he was giving out printed sheets of paper from the bag. He wasn't baPedi or maKgowa but looked like the maShayina who used to run a fah-fee game in the town long ago. All the women queueing for water (and there were a lot of them this hot August morning) were looking at the papers and talking excitedly.

Everybody had taken a letter even though most of them didn't read too well. But the young man had two helpers who spoke good siPedi, and who explained the papers and answered questions. They were smartly-dressed young city women, with make-up and high heels, quite different from the women who had come for water. Rafiloe guessed that they had driven out from eGoli, which was just over an hour away by car or taxi. You wouldn't think the great city was so close, to look at the town of Malimode which was just a country place. The houses were of breezeblock or corrugated iron, the streets unpaved, with goats wandering about them, the businesses mostly in houses with homemade signs outside them, like 'Ma Violet's Hair Salon' or 'Motor Workshop Themba'.

Rafiloe gathered from the chatter that there was going to be a free two-week sewing course in the school hall. Anyone who wanted to learn how to sew was welcome and certificates would be awarded afterwards. All interested women must kindly come to the hall tomorrow from eight o'clock and places would go to the thirty who arrived first. If the course was a success, it might be run again or even for a third two weeks.

'It depends on all of you, how well you make use of this free chance,' said one of the helpers with shiny red lips and nails, the silver hoops in her ears swaying about.

Of course, everyone wanted to learn and get a sewing certificate afterwards. The next morning, they started gathering at six o'clock and by the time the school gates opened at eight o'clock, there were a good three hundred women jostling one another through the gates and up the hall steps, each determined to be one of the chosen few.

Rafiloe, near the back of the crowd, could just glimpse the interior of that shining hall, beyond her reach before, but now just a few steps away. She had never got further than Grade Seven, when Mr Sekonyana, the Geography teacher, made her his favourite, resulting in her pregnancy. She had to drop out of school, aged fourteen, to give birth and then care for the baby. But she had always

dreamed of going back to some - any - kind of school and getting more education. Now this was her chance. The machines, row upon row, sat gleaming with their many knobs, wheels and levers, all lit up by the unreal fluorescent light, a bit frightening, but these were the friends who would lead her and all the other women of the community into high education and superior skills.

The young man appeared in the doorway and shouted for quiet. He told them that in view of the large number who wanted to learn sewing, they would abandon the old 'first come, first served' idea. Instead, the two assistants would go round with bags containing folded slips of paper. They were each to take one and unfold it. If there was a blue cross on the paper, that woman could come up the steps to show it to him and then take her seat at a table in the hall. If there was nothing on their slip, they would have to go home for now, but he felt sure they would have a second or a third chance when the course was run again, so the disappointment would not be too bad for those who drew a blank.

Still, disappointed murmurs were heard and shoulders sagged as blank papers were opened; those few who drew a lucky slip gave joyful screams, halala-ed, danced about waving their good fortune at the others. Tension mounted as more and more blue crosses entered the hall and the slips in the bag grew fewer.

Rafiloe, near the back, took her folded paper from among those left in the bottom of the Pick 'n Pay bag and held it tight for a moment before unfolding it. And there was the blue cross. She blinked hard - thanks God, it was still there! She was in! And she floated up the steps to show the young man.

Once inside the hall, she looked about, spotted an empty table next to her friend and neighbour Babs Jacobs and went to sit beside her. The scene in the hall was so impressive that they found themselves speaking in whispers. On the stage a banner had been erected.

'That's the American flag isn't it?' Rafiloe asked Babs. 'What does the writing say?'

'It says *The Freemantle Foundation of the USA welcomes you to a countrywoman's empowerment programme.*'

'What does that mean?'

'I think it means that some people in America are giving us some power, we women who are living in the country.'

'Hawu, America is helping us.'

The smiling young man now went up onto the stage. He introduced himself as Bobby Lee and gave them an outline of the course: there would be ten eight-hour days with a half hour for lunch. Food they must supply for themselves. The two teachers, Dudu and Sweetie, would show them everything they needed to know. They must listen carefully to the teachers and do exactly as they

were told; then they would come out top-class seamstresses and be awarded a certificate in a ceremony at the end.

‘Let us thank Mr Lebokgang, the school Principal, who has most kindly agreed to give us use of his hall even though this means that assemblies have to be held on the playing fields . And let us all thank the Freemantle Foundation for funding the programme. Mrs Alison Freemantle has a special interest in rural women and their advancement. She has set up the Foundation for the sole purpose of helping women like you, right across the globe. The Foundation bought all these new machines, it is paying the salaries of the team. It even bought the team a new panel van. You will all have to fill out two forms for the Foundation - don’t worry, the teachers will write for you - one at the beginning of the course and one afterwards to say how you found it. Mrs Freemantle reads each of these reports personally.

‘And now, let us show our thanks to the Foundation,’ said Bobby and started clapping. The women joined in, going on for so long that Bobby had to hold up his hand to silence them.

The forms asked for their names and addresses. Rafiloe turned to her friend.

‘Please fill mine out for me. You know my writing is not so good.’

‘Of course, just let me do mine. What name do you think I should say?’ Babs whispered. ‘Everyone knows me as Babs from when Nolly was alive; that was his name for me, from Babe. But my real name is Samina, Samina Jacobs. Should I put that?’

‘Yes, I think you should use your real name,’ Rafiloe whispered back, remembering that certificates were going to be awarded.

The forms were collected and then they began the business of the course. Each machine had a reel of pale green cotton on it. On a screen at the front, Dudu used diagrams to show them step by step how to fill a bobbin. Even so, she and Sweetie ran around busily as now this woman, now that one, put up her hand for help. Finally every machine had a full bobbin in its case. Next came the threading. Then the trial sewing on pieces of scrap cloth. Finally, when the two teachers thought everyone could sew more or less straight, Dudu pronounced them ready to do some real sewing. Each woman was given a rectangular piece of pale green cloth to make up into a pillowcase. Dudu showed them again and again, with the help of the screen and slides, how it should be sewn.

‘Now, we have almost an hour before the lunch break at half past twelve. When you have finished your pillowcase, put up your hand so Dudu or I can come and check it. If it is alright, you will get more cloth to practise your skills,’ said Sweetie.

At the lunch break, Rafiloe walked out of the hall into fierce sunshine. The school’s playground was deserted but for a couple of donkeys grazing here and there among plastic bags and the rubbish bins; one had got its forelegs onto the bonnet of a rusty car’s shell and was munching the leaves of a

shrub growing up through it. From the classrooms came childish voices chanting some or other multiplication table, or shouting in answer to a question.

'It's easy!' Rafiloe laughed, as the others joined her. 'Much easier than I thought. And the machine goes so fast. Eish, I nearly put the needle through my finger once.'

'I made two pillowcases,' boasted Babs.

'I'm halfway through my second,' said another.

'I want to sew myself a skirt when we've finished pillowcases. My old madam from Jozi gave me a big piece of shweshwe when I came home,' said Motsebudi, an upright grey-haired woman. 'It's blue with little dots in a flower pattern. I've never been able to use it before.'

'There's a pattern for a patchwork quilt in last month's *Bona*. I'm going to make one from all the old clothes that I can't wear any more,' said Rafiloe.

So, still talking about all the lovely things they were going to make for themselves, they returned to the machines. They stayed with pillowcases that day. As soon as they had finished five, they had to take them up to the stage in front, fold them neatly and stack them in piles.

In the late afternoon, groups of chatting women walked home along the sand roads. They told each other what a pleasure sewing was, how they had never expected it. Some had finished eight or nine pillowcases, some a dozen. The teachers had praised them but warned them that they must sew quickly, not sit daydreaming. Every woman was expected to make at least twenty five pillowcases tomorrow.

'I suppose we've got to get really good at just plain sewing first before they let us do our own things.'

'Yes, we mustn't be impatient.'

Rafiloe asked Babs about her daughter.

'How is Lulu getting on now that she's a married woman. Any news of grandchildren yet?'

'No no, too early. They still want to buy a lot of things before they start a family.'

'And how is she settling down with baPotokisi? Aren't they very different from our people?'

'Yes, in many ways they are, but she loves his family. They are very warm people. When I went up to help with the wedding, I was a bit nervous you know, being so different, but I never felt out of place, they made me feel at home. There are people of colour on their side too, from Maputo.'

'That's good to hear.'

'I haven't spoken to Lulu for a while though. My cellphone has gone again, since last Saturday,' Babs replied.

'Hawu, Loki isn't back in town is he?' Rafiloe asked.

'He is. I saw him outside Veejay's the other day,' Motsebudi answered.

'You know his father's locked him out, won't even let him enter the house. He's staying with that no-good friend of his, Thabang, in a mokhukhung behind the clinic.'

'Why don't you make a case against him Babs? He mustn't get away with it, he's a very bad young man and needs some lessons,' Rafiloe said.

'But he's family, remember, my sister's boy. I don't like going to the police with a family matter. I did speak to Manare about his problem son,' Babs replied. 'He told me he had gone to the police after Loki took his radio and TV. Loki must have sold them to people in the big town because after that, he had money again.'

'Why does he have to steal to get money. Let him get a job.'

'But you know how even boys with a matric are without work. And Loki dropped out of school in Grade Nine.'

'I know it's hard but still, the police must teach him a lesson.'

'Manare said the police couldn't arrest Loki because he hadn't broken into the house - he lived there. And the things he took were taken with his father's knowledge. He forced his father with his strength but not enough to make it a crime. That was when Manare started locking his doors.'

'Why didn't you lock yours?'

'I didn't know he was back, I thought he was still in Jozi and I was safe,' said Babs. 'But I'm locking now. Lulu wants me to come and live with them in Jozi so I will be safe from him, but I tell her I would miss my own home and the people here too much'.

The women walking with Babs were sympathetic. They parted, looking forward to tomorrow's sewing, reminding each other to bring food. As she made her way home, Rafiloe wished there was something she could do to protect her friend against this nephew. The women of Malimode had a way of standing together; a trouble for one was a trouble for all of them.

Next day began with a little speech from Sweetie explaining to them all that the sewing of a straight and faultless seam was one of the hardest things to get right and so they would do more pillowcases that day. This time there was pale yellow cloth as well as the green. At the day's end, Rafiloe had done thirty-three, Babs twenty-nine. They agreed they were getting a bit tired of pillowcases so, with another four women for support, they approached Sweetie and Dudu and asked respectfully when they could do their own things.

Dudu coughed a little, as Sweetie said: 'Now don't go thinking you are experts after just two days. We still have to teach you how to sew big things, and how to set elastic onto an edge. We are following a careful programme here, a step-by-step introduction to using the machine.'

So the next day, and the day after that, they sewed flat sheets, with a big fold-over for the top, small seams on the other three sides, all in pale green and yellow. After finishing one, they had to

take it up to the stage where they folded it around a piece of cardboard and laid it on the growing piles.

It was Thursday lunchtime when they approached the teachers again and asked if they might use the machines at night, after class, to make their own pieces. Sweetie said that they must speak to Bobby who, when he came to fetch the teachers, got quite angry at their question.

‘Definitely not,’ he snapped. ‘You want to run before you can walk. You will sew what Dudu and Sweetie tell you to sew and don’t give me any trouble. Anyone who isn’t happy with the course can just get out now and she won’t get a certificate.’

‘But the machines aren’t used at night,’ Babs persisted.

‘This hall must stay closed at night and this is a security issue. I have to lock it when we leave and it only gets unlocked the next morning, and only by me. I am responsible for thirty new sewing machines; do you know what they cost?’

But as they walked home, someone snorted: ‘Has to lock the hall - security issue, hah! There are a lot of people in the town with keys to that door. My son had one when he was a prefect and the Headmaster asked him to open early for the Assembly. That key is still hanging behind my kitchen door; I must take it back some time.’

A young woman added: ‘And there’s a door behind the hall which leads to the space under the stage. That door is never locked. You just have to push up the trapdoor on the stage and you’re in the hall. Everyone who went to school here knows that.’

On the Friday they were shown how to set elastic onto the edge of a fitted sheet. With the overlock machines, it was easy, and the piles of finished pieces grew.

Going home that evening, Babs said to her friends that she felt she wasn’t learning anything and might not go back next week. Rafiloe resisted the suggestion.

‘No, I think we must finish the course. We are not paying anything, and we are learning to sew well, and we will get certificates.’

‘We are only learning to sew bed linen well. I want to learn button holes and zips and pleats, and how to cut a skirt, and how to sew collars,’ said Motsebudi.

‘Maybe we’ll do that next week.’

But Babs said that she wasn’t going to sew pillowcases and sheets all day for another week, that she didn’t care about a silly certificate.

‘And anyhow, what will you do with the certificate when you have it? How will you sew when all the machines are gone? We can’t afford to buy machines for ourselves, so these skills we are learning, are useless.’

But Rafiloe replied that skills were never useless and Babs couldn't be sure they would never have a machine in the town.

When the second Monday proved to be a replica of the first, Babs dropped out along with a few others. Sweetie and Dudu sent messages to them about how they had kept a good learner out of the course, and were a disgrace to Malimode.

The remaining learners did exactly as they had done the first week except that on the Thursday and Friday, they were told to form up into pairs. Then Dudu and Sweetie showed them how to fold the fitted sheets neatly and how to pack them into a plastic bag with a flat sheet and two pillowcases each.

'They look so nice in the packets,' someone whispered. 'Maybe we will each get a set.'

But the piles of plastic packets, each with a bed-set in it, disappeared into the back of the panel van when Bobby came at lunchtime. The women finished packing about three o'clock. Then they had to complete the report forms, with the help of the teachers. Few of them could write easily and the reports had to be done in English for Mrs Freemantle's benefit so they dictated what they had thought of the fortnight to Dudu and Sweetie, who wrote it down.

Rafiloe, who had a good working knowledge of English and some reading skills, dictated her report in that language. She told Babs later that she didn't think Sweetie wrote down exactly what she had said. In fact, Sweetie wrote something much shorter in which she caught sight of the words 'Mr Lee', which she definitely hadn't used.

When the reports were finished, the women stood about wondering when the ceremony would begin. Several had brought cameras or cellphones along, to have photos taken of them receiving their certificates, and many had put on their Sunday best for the occasion. Children, aware that the course had ended and their mothers would be graduating this afternoon, were looking into the hall through windows and door.

'Well, what are you all waiting for?' Sweetie asked. 'You can go home now.'

'But the certificates. When will we get our certificates?' Rafiloe asked.

'There they are', replied Bobby, pointing to a pile of A4 sheets on a table near the exit. 'You can take one as you go out. Off you go now.'

Rafiloe picked one up. It was the same paper for everyone, there were not even individual names on it, and the lines of print were not straight on the page. It stated that the holder had completed a two-week sewing course under the auspices of the Freemantle Foundation. Bobby Lee's name was written at the bottom.

Rafiloe went to show it to her neighbour.

'I think you were right Babs, they didn't really care about us, or teaching us to sew. It was the bed-sets that they were interested in. You know we packed up enough to fill the whole back of the van?'

'Eish, you have been used like donkeys. I feel angry to think of it. Aren't you angry?'

'No. I am just happy that we have learnt to use the machine.'

Psalmen en Gezangen

If Tossie had been on her way to anywhere but church that overcast Sunday morning, she probably wouldn't have done it. If there had been the usual clutter of handouts, empty cold-drink cans, odds and ends lying on the passenger's seat next to her, instead of the hymn book, she definitely would not have done it. Most of all, she might have been saved from that first fatal step if she had been listening to ClassicFM as usual. Instead she was tuning up for the service by singing her favourite hymn out loud:

O Heilig' Seun van God, mag

Ons soos Jy in liefde le - e - ewe;

Ons medemense elke dag

Met vreugde groet, in vre - e - ede ...

She was in church clothes: a tailored green two-piece, a high-necked white cotton blouse, sensible court shoes. In these outfits she was not the same person as when she was wearing jeans and a sweater. Her back was a lot straighter and her head was inclined to dip as if conscious of the Lord's hand upon it.

She always took the old hymn book to church even though a lot of the hymns they sang now weren't in it, or were in modern Afrikaans rather than High Dutch. The leather cover, soft with much handling over the years, bore the words *Psalmen en Gezangen* in faded gold and inside in copperplate script stood her Ouma's name: *Wilhelmina Gertruida Huibregt Louw* and a date: *November 1919*. After Tossie's aanneming, Ouma had arranged with the Fochville predikant to come and give a Nagmaal on the farm for all the family. Her aunts and uncles and cousins had come from all over the land for it. Francois from Wellington had also just been confirmed and the two of them, in their voorstellingsklere, were the first to take communion that night. Francois got the family Bible and she the hymn book. And not long afterwards Ouma died so it was doubly precious.

She turned onto Gibson Drive, one of the only two exits from the suburb. She and Andrew were newcomers here. They had moved in just a few weeks before and she was still getting used to new routes: to church, to friends, her usual shops, the vet's practice where she had a two-day-a-week job.

This Sunday morning, the sky was dark, threatening rain, and just at the bottom of the long hill, she saw one of her medemense struggling along. The woman was large, she had legs without

ankles and from the way she was leaning on a stick and moving them forward, it seemed they were causing her great pain.

'Shame!' thought Tossie and stopped. She would not, of course, have stopped to pick up a male medemens because everyone had heard of the things that could happen to you if you did that. But an old woman was no threat. She transferred the hymn book to below her seat and lowered the passenger window.

'Do you want a lift?'

The old woman turned a tragic face to her.

'Tenks meddem,' she replied in a breathy voice and moved crabwise towards the open door. She laid a hefty holdall and the stick on the seat, leaning on it with both hands as if wondering how she might get herself onto it as well. Tossie took the stick and put it on the back floor and pulled the bag in. The old woman first put her left foot into the car, then realizing that would not do, turned round with many little steps and placed her bottom on the car seat. The springs sank. She worked her right leg up and into the car then lifted her left leg with both hands and placed it next to the right one. She seemed oblivious of the open door so Tossie said, pointing:

'We must close the door.'

She looked at it uncertainly. After a bit, Tossie leaned across to do it, bringing her face into close quarters with the woman's body, and thinking *Hope she's alright in the head, maybe just in from the country.*

'Where are you going?' Tossie asked, feeling a slight list to the left as they drove off.

'Where is meddem going?' her passenger countered.

'Up to the Old Pretoria Road and then over to Morningside.'

'Tenks meddem tenks. No taxis today, is Sunday. My legs - eish meddem - is too sore.'

'Where are you going?'

'To the church in Alex meddem.'

The woman's body odour was pervasive. Tossie felt it creeping into the green two-piece and blouse, into her hair.

'I can put you down on the Old Pretoria Road. I have seen buses on it on a Sunday.'

'Yes meddem.'

'What's your name?'

'Gladys meddem.'

'Hello Gladys, I'm Tossie.'

In two or three minutes, they reached the road, she stopped and Gladys got out as awkwardly as she had got in. Tossie passed the stick and bag over to her, waved and drove off. When she was a

little way on, she lowered all the windows to let fresh air into the car, and to let it blow over her clothes and hair, reminding herself that a good deed, to be worth anything, should entail a bit of discomfort or sacrifice.

Nevertheless, in church, when the men got up to pray and Tossie, along with all the women, bowed her head to her chest, she was unpleasantly reminded of the smell. Could it be that her organic cotton blouse had absorbed the smell when the synthetic material of the suit had shrugged it off? Had she perhaps forgotten to apply her roll-on that morning? She spent the rest of the service and the subsequent friendly chat over tea, with her arms pressed to her sides.

On the Wednesday morning after this, Tossie was going to tennis at a friend's house when she saw Gladys again struggling up Gibson Drive. The crippled gait and stick were unmistakable, though this time she was wearing a brown coat that came to her ankles. Tossie's first impulse was to put her foot down and accelerate past the limping figure but just as she was coming up behind her, the old woman turned and her face broke into a smile of recognition.

Tossie stopped rather more sharply than was necessary and opened the door. Gladys was already lurching off the pavement towards her.

'Hullo, Gladys. Hop in.'

She snorted at her own words; the old woman looked at her quickly and said: 'Sorry meddem.' Tossie now felt guilty as well as angry so she put a welcoming smile on her face and asked how Gladys was.

This time, besides the stick and holdall, she was carrying an umbrella with one broken strut which, once she was finally settled in the passenger seat, she dropped in the gutter.

'No, no, don't get out, I'll get it,' Tossie cried, jumping out and running round the car, as a truck behind her hooted and drivers coming the other way looked curiously at this woman in tennis gear.

This time, Gladys said she would like to be dropped close to the local Pick&Pay, which was on Tossie's route. As they drove, she tried to identify the peculiar odour that was now emanating from her passenger, the same body odour as on Sunday but overlaid with another sweetish yet pungent smell.

'Onions!' she said at last. 'Have you been eating raw onions?'

'No meddem. I'm putting it on my knees. When you rub it there, is good muthi.'

'Ah!'

Tossie turned up the fan. As she glanced down, she noticed that the coat, falling away from the elephantine onion-anointed knees, was streaked with dirt. She considered telling Gladys that if she lost weight her knees would feel great relief but couldn't bring herself to say it.

The supermarket was two blocks off her route but those knees obliged Tossie to take her right to the mall. The robots were out, it took her a lot longer than it should have, which meant she was late at the tennis court and had to sit out the first set.

The reek of onions was still quite strong in the car when she went home.

On Thursday morning Tossie, en route to her job as receptionist in a vets' practice, thoughtlessly headed up Gibson Drive. Too late she remembered that it was about quarter to nine and Gladys would probably be heading up it too. Sure enough, there was the familiar figure limping along.

Nee wragtig! she thought. Why do I have to do this? There is no law saying I must pick up people on the road, is there? I don't owe her anything.

So this time she kept her eyes straight ahead and drove steadily on. When she was well past Gladys, she glanced in the rearview mirror. The old woman had stopped, the bag lay at her feet, and she was waving her stick in the air after the receding car. Tossie felt like screaming. Or turning the car around to fetch her, pretending she hadn't recognized Gladys, saying something like 'Oh I didn't see it was you'. But she was at the top of the road now, she wasn't going back and she felt a dreadful mixture of anger, guilt, pity, relief, shame, so much so that she broke out in a light sweat. Her cheeks were still flushed when she arrived at work; Dr Greenberg asked if she was feeling feverish.

She had to go out next morning at the same time, and took the long way round in case Gladys was on Gibson Drive again. This is ridiculous, she thought. Going an extra three kilometres just so I don't have to give someone a lift.

That night at dinner she spoke to Andrew about it. He was an attorney who could see where justice lay in the difficult cases that came before the courts. She knew that he would understand exactly what her feelings were, would give her problem due consideration and a judicious solution.

'If she didn't smell so bad, I wouldn't mind. Also her clothes are so dirty that the car seats must be getting dirty too. She's very fat and takes so long getting in and out of the car. But I can see it hurts her to walk and Gibson Drive is steep and long. If it's young women or people walking properly, then it doesn't bother me so much, though I still feel a bit bad. But now I feel guilty and ashamed of myself when I just leave her on the road.'

Andrew raised his blond eyebrows in thought, but said nothing as he cut off a neat square of steak, speared a bit of potato, then butternut, then anchored them both with the meat. The forkful was delivered precisely in the centre of Andrew's neat lips. He chewed for a while, swallowed, then spoke.

'You say she's there every day?'

‘Ja, every time I’ve gone out, three times since Sunday, so I even went round by the bridge this morning to avoid her.’

Another nice forkful, ruminative chewing. ‘It is clearly becoming a problem when you have to do that. What made you stop to give her a lift the first time?’

‘Well I could see she was in pain and old. I felt sorry for her.’

‘Was it guilt for apartheid that made you feel you must help her?’

‘Oh no. I would have picked her up if she was an old white woman.’

‘But you would not be angry with her for being smelly and dirty and fat?’

‘Well a white person probably wouldn’t be like that.’

‘Because chances are a white would not be poor.’

‘What’s poor got to do with it?’

‘Just that it’s much easier to be clean and fragrant and slim if you have a nice warm bath and soaps, if you can afford deodorant, if you don’t have to eat cheap carbohydrates all the time.’

‘So what are you telling me - I must just welcome the smell and dirt in my car?’

‘No, not at all. Just understand where they come from. That’s how poor people are. Of course, given the choice, everyone would prefer to be clean and slim and scented.’

‘This is not helping with my problem Andrew.’

‘OK. Look at it this way: you are in a double dilemma. First, you can continue to go up Gibson Drive, the better route, or you can go round by the bridge and avoid the old woman altogether. That’s your first choice. If you decide to keep on with Gibson Drive, then you have two choices again. On the one hand, you can pick her up and feel angry and repelled, but you have a good conscience. On the other hand, you can leave her on the road, and you feel guilty and unchristian but there’s no dirt or smell. You must just decide which are the better options for you.’

‘It’s not so simple. None of those is a better option, they’re all terrible.’

‘We all have to make difficult choices in life, my darling Tossie’. Andrew dabbed the napkin to his lips, then laid it on his side plate. ‘Of course, you could just cancel all your meetings and things, give up your job, and stay at home every day. That way you wouldn’t have to make any decisions at all, or their scope would be limited to what to cook for dinner, or what to plant on the pavement’.

Tossie clenched her teeth. ‘Thank you Andrew, I will think about what you advise.’

She thought about their conversation as she washed up, and realized that of course Andrew couldn’t help, this was not a legal matter but a moral issue. It was the dominee she must speak to. He had asked her on Sunday what day would suit her for a huisbesoek. She hadn’t had her diary with her then but promised she would phone. She would call him tomorrow.

Ds. Venter was a cheerful small man with weak eyes behind thick lenses. He sat in the lounge with a Bible on his lap, and asked her about her religious beliefs and habits, whether she was active in the church, whether she prayed every night. Her answers plainly reassured him that she was the right sort of Christian because he nodded and smiled at her, and told her his gemeente welcomed her into its bosom.

She showed him the old hymn book and he turned it over, leafed through it with reverent interest, told her she was blessed to have such an erfstuk. When they had finished their coffee and melktert, and the dominee had cracked a few jokes to prove he was a normal man who could enjoy some humour, Tossie broached the problematic subject of Gladys.

The dominee listened sympathetically, with a frown of concentration on his brow which showed he was giving her words earnest consideration, and nodding now and then. She was encouraged to try to spell out all the powerful emotions that troubled her whenever she saw the woman. As she spoke, her eyes on the Bible, the answer became clear in her mind even before she asked her visitor what he recommended, and he confirmed her intuitive solution.

‘In a difficulty, even a complicated one like this, there is an easy way for any Christian person to find the right solution. I sum it up for myself with the letters WWJD. Ask yourself: What Would Jesus Do?’

Tossie nodded. ‘I have heard of that method.’

‘And if we call the New Testament stories about Jesus to mind - how he behaved towards the poor, the fallen woman, even towards lepers - then your answer becomes obvious. I surely don’t have to spell it out for you.’

‘Thank you Dominee, you have thrown such light on my dark little problem. I realize now that it’s my Christian duty to be kind and helpful to even the most difficult people.’

‘Remember, the more difficult, the greater is your blessing in helping them. And when you have fully accepted this Christian duty in your heart, then you can make things easier for yourself. Put an old blanket over the passenger seat. Get one of those little blocks of fragrance that you can stick on the dashboard. Give the poor creature a little towel and cake of soap to wash herself with.’

So when she next had to go out, Tossie spread an old rug over the passenger seat and stuck a strongly pine-scented block below her steering wheel. She packed a cake of soap and sponge into a pretty toiletry bag and put it under her seat together with a small hand towel. As she did so, she felt grateful that she had been shown the right thing to do in this difficult situation, grateful that she was a Christian who believed in God. How would Andrew, an atheist, ever find his way in similar circumstances? Mind you, she reflected, the problem would not arise for Andrew, who simply didn’t

see things like people needing lifts. But now she was ready for Gladys, in fact was quite looking forward to picking the old woman up and giving her the little gift.

But she didn't see Gladys on the road that day. She left the things there in the car for next time. But next time again Gladys inexplicably, maddeningly, was nowhere to be seen. Once, as she went to tennis, she saw a large old woman on the sidewalk and her heart jumped, but no, the woman was walking far too quickly for it to be Gladys. She began to wish that the familiar sight would appear on Gibson Drive, but it never did.

Sometimes she thought about where Gladys might be now. She had seemed to be in her late fifties so she might have retired, perhaps gone back to some home in the country, a circular thatched hut on a green hillside with a stand of mielies and pumpkins outside. Or perhaps she had lost her place in Tossie's suburb and moved to another job, to a new township, Diepkloof or Rabie Ridge. Then it occurred to her to wonder what Gladys had been doing in her suburb; surely not working since she was always going out at about eight thirty or nine. Perhaps she had just been lodging in someone's staff quarters. Tossie wished she had thought to ask her about her circumstances.

As the weeks went by, Tossie came to accept that Gladys had moved on and that she would not see that painful figure struggling up Gibson Drive again, that she would never receive the blessing of this particular Christian act of grace. She put the soap, sponge and towel back in the cupboard.

A couple of years later, Andrew and Tossie moved to a better house in a smarter suburb. One of the reasons Tossie had for feeling glad, though she couldn't share it with Andrew, was that she would never again have to drive up that empty Gibson Drive.

A Life Shared

Down the slick marble pavement of the mall, walk an old man and woman. He is grey-haired, his thin body in flannels and blue short-sleeved shirt, still upright and with some elastic in his step. She is bent under a slight dowager's hump, sparse black hair showing white against a naked scalp. Heavy green-tinted lenses tell why she grips his arm as they make their way past the video shop, which pumps heavy metal out past the Latest Release posters, past the Indian restaurant, with scents of jeera and turmeric floating through the open frontage, and towards the Woolworths on the corner.

They emerge half an hour later, stand still for a moment in the sharp sun while he takes the two yellow plastic bags in his right hand, offering his left arm to her at a steady right angle.

When they arrive at their car, an old green Mercedes whose paintwork has worn thin in places from rubbing, he puts the bags down, opens the front passenger door for her, helps her in and stows the bags on the back seat.

The engine clunks into life and he reverses, hauling the steering wheel heavily around.

'Anyway, mind these other cars,' she says, peering at the dim shapes outside that seem far too close.

The car is no longer insured and though they use it as sparingly as possible, she is fearful of the day that their one means of getting about will be knocked out by a speeding taxi. Then how will they get food? - money? Too far to walk to the shops.

He nods, checking the rearview mirror with careful eyes. Then they're off, moving towards the exit, down the slipway and into the rush-hour traffic. She is afraid of the taxis, sometimes just millimetres from them, always travelling too fast, shooting past on the left, hooting all the time.

'Look out for the taxis!' she says. 'These people don't know how to drive. Red robots mean nothing to them.'

They move through the corporate complexes of Sandton's CBD, past headquarters of investment houses whose architecture reflects the company's hoped-for image. She once had money in the glass and steel one, with its electronic display of this minute's foreign exchange rates, its royal palms and zebras intended to suggest cutting-edge African thinking. She still has some money, not much any more, in the place across the road, its size and solid style breathing 'Trust us, trust us' Seeing them, she feels the cold breath of poverty at her back, the guilt of knowing she has managed her inheritance badly.

But she still has her jewellery, her rings. The liver-spotted hands on the dashboard, fingers knotty with age, carry two big precious stones: the blue-white diamond that was a 40th anniversary present from Max on her right hand, and on the left, her engagement ring - a square-cut emerald of

nearly 2 carats. She doesn't wear the necklaces, earrings, pendants, bracelets any more but they are there in the safe as backup in extremity, her last line of defence. Their value should exceed the cost of any few years left to her.

'Never sell your jewels, bubbellah,' her Bobba would say. 'Keep them, keep them till the last. It was my jewels that saved our lives in the war, all the family - your tateh, uncle Abe, auntie Grethe; you wouldn't be here today if I hadn't always kept that box of gold and precious stones. We got out because I could pay with my jewels.'

A red robot halts their progress in the shadow of a looming highrise apartment block: layer piled upon identical layer of khaki walling, broken only by the small dark rectangles that do duty for windows. A billboard proclaims **An Exclusive Enclave of Luxurious Urban Living - units from R2.3m.**

'That was the sort of thing they put up in the East End after the war, when nobody had any money. Council housing, tenements,' she says. 'Anyway, look at the price! They are the slums of the future, not too distant future either. Mark my words, twenty years from now, these will be filthy ratholes for the dregs of humanity. But they aren't selling I'm sure.'

A figure in a torn shirt raps at the window. He's holding up a colourful masonite board depicting disaster: a dead donkey, a grass hut in flames, three starving cows, a wife with many children.

'Tell him we have no money Anyway.' she commands.

He winds down the window, shows empty palms, says softly, 'Asinamali, sorry Baba,' continuing in isiZulu: 'Umlando wahko uyangidabukisa. Yimbongolo inhle.' Your story makes me sad. The donkey is beautiful.

Behind his board, the man shrugs uncomprehendingly. 'Me Congo.'

'Hawu.'

Not much more he can say to this tattered man from so far away. Anyway has seen something of Congo on the TV and knows it is a place of darkness and fear. He has read in *The Sowetan* about the Lord's Resistance Army - men from Uganda who hide in the forests of north-eastern Congo, coming out to attack quiet villages and kill, rape, steal, burn whatever they can. For no reason. Sometimes they tie a whole village together and take the people into the forest. These murderers have been there for twenty years and nobody can stop them.

The Congolan has walked to the kerb, resting his board on the edge and leaning his forearms on it. Anyway wonders where he lives, if he has a woman and children back there or if they were killed and that is why he left. But the robot has turned green.

Now they are leaving the financial area behind, moving out of Sandton's centre and into the suburbs where the pavements have flower beds and trees, and where every home has its wall with

electric fencing and razor wire on top, its automatic gates. The old Merc glides past several corners with a NO ENTRY sign and arrives at the area's single, fortified entrance with a boom and wooden hut for the security guards. Two men in dark uniforms, jackbooted, with handguns at their belts, stand behind the boom to stop any strange car from entering, to ask its business there, take the licence number, make the driver sign a register.

But they know the old Merc well, raise the boom and wave it through. The car slows down as they near home; Anyway is checking entrances and panhandles for men with guns. Their automatic gate is broken. He has to get out of the car, open and remove a padlock and roll the heavy thing back by hand before they can enter, and there have been hijackings many times in their area. That line of Johannesburg Gold cypresses on the pavement next to theirs might look fine but it's a perfect hiding place for izigebengu. He scans it closely then drives on, passing their gate and two more properties, looking up and down on each side of the road.

It was only a few weeks ago that his old friend Albert and Mr Stiles, living across the road a few houses down, were held up by three armed men as they drove in from work. Albert's face was bruised and cut where they hit him with their guns; one of his eyes is still not right. Mr Stiles just gave them the keys and they drove off with the almost-new BMW5. They took his watch, briefcase, both cellphones and everything else that they could - even Mr Stiles's shoes. But hijackers probably wouldn't want a car like this old Mercedes - one good thing!

With a grinding of gears, Anyway gets into reverse and backs up to their entrance, jumps out and gets the gate open, running back as soon as they are inside and stopped, to lock it again.

'Ma'm must get the man for fixing the gate,' he asks, as he has been doing for the past few weeks. 'That machine is too old please. We can get new machine.'

He knows the hopelessness of his request, knows that the madam hasn't got money for things like gate motors, or a new pool pump or lawn-mower. Once, this was a fine house where everything worked, and was all of the best kind, and he was proud of keeping everything right. Now things are running down, everything dying around him: the grass is too long because the lawn mower is broken and he can only use the weed-eater on it; the swimming pool is green with slime because Ma'm can't buy enough chlorine; there are leaks in the roof and water-pipes; he has talked many times about the broken windows.

What will he do when Ma'm dies? The house will be sold to new people, he cannot stay on here where he has lived for the last thirty years. Perhaps he will go back to Mandeni, where he grew up. He stopped going home for winter leave after his wife died and she has been dead for many years, but he surely still has some relatives there and people might remember him. Nobuhle, his

daughter, works here in eGoli, a good job in a big Pick 'n Pay, and lives with her four children in Soweto. They are growing up too. She brings them to visit him now and then.

But the two boys, his sons, are lost to him, lost somewhere in the city; he hardly ever sees them. His firstborn, Wiseman, was very clever. He got a matric certificate from Siyafunda High School but couldn't find work. Then he was a taxi driver for a while but got tired and left it, said he was going back to KwaZulu to try to find a better job. The younger boy Sibusiso, sometimes called by his English name of Blessing, lives here in eGoli; he came to visit Anyway a few weeks ago but it was just to ask for money. Will Ma'm leave him any money? he wonders. In only two years he will be 60 and then he can apply for the old age pension, Mr Stiles tells him: R1050 every month. It's not much but he can live cheap in Mandeni.

As Ma'm walks up to open the kitchen door, there's the sound of shrill barking from inside and a greyish Maltese poodle rushes out. She bends to pat it, then picks it up. It looks at Anyway and growls, lifting its lip to show three solitary yellow teeth.

Anyway carries the bags to the kitchen surface and starts to put their purchases away. Frozen stuff in the top of the fridge, vegetables below.

'Oy veh, Pepe's made a mess over here Anyway.'

She puts the dog down to throw some newspaper over the puddle on the tiles. The dog makes a little rush at Anyway's ankles, snarling. He ignores it.

'Yes Ma'm. What must I cook Ma'm tonight?'

'I don't feel much like anything. Just one of those Woolies chicken pies with a bit of tomato will do. You can take the other two. Don't lay table, a tray in the TV room.'

She feels a twinge of guilt at not taking her small meal at the dining room table. She's letting standards slip, sliding into old age without putting up a fight. But the eight-seater walnut table is a rack. She sits to the left of the head, alone, where she always sat when they were a family, and the chairs around her are all empty. Max's big chair with the carved armrests is the emptiest, he, dead of a stroke on the golf course twelve years ago now; then came Adam, full of a bustling energy, today a plastic surgeon in some hospital in Philadelphia. Sharon sat next to him, her absence felt but tinged with relief, she now a wife and mother of three casting her gloom on some corner of San Francisco. And then there was Benjamin on her left. Her dark-eyed sensitive baby who always knew what she was feeling and thinking, now an inconceivable forty, last heard of two years ago taking photographs in Patagonia.

When the five of them sat at table for dinner, when Adam was studying medicine and Sharon was trying to be a psychologist and Ben was finishing school, Tryphina never served less than three courses. Soups in winter, a salad or something light in hot weather, before the roast and three

vegetables, followed by desserts that she took great pains with, desserts that were famous throughout their circle: crème caramel, rhum babas, cherry bavarois, ice creams. When they had a big dinner party, Anyway would put on his whites and serve at table. Now Ma'm sits alone, hunched over a single chop and some lettuce, or a boiled egg on toast.

In the study which doubles as a TV room, from a dark oak cabinet, she takes out a decanter of whisky, pours a shaky two fingers into a chipped crystal glass, then calls:

'Anyway! Where's the ice and water?'

In a few minutes, he brings an ice bucket and a pitcher of water on a small salver.

'Sorry Ma'm. It was the shopping.'

'Yes. But it's important to keep up our traditions Anyway. You never forgot the ice and water when Mr Levine was still alive.'

Settling into a tilted recliner, prompted by the reference to Mr Levine, she thinks of family again. Adam will be making his weekly call in an hour and a half. Dutiful son, he phones every Friday evening at exactly half past seven, sparing her precisely fifteen minutes halfway through his Friday lunch hour in Philly.

He asks after her health, to which she invariably replies that she is fine. What good would it do to tell him of the arthritis, the macular degeneration, the osteoporosis so advanced that Dr Blumberg said her bones are like fine china. Once, she had told Adam of a head cold and was given the name of an antibiotic that she should ask her doctor for. He had forgotten that she didn't take antibiotics, didn't bother a doctor with a cold.

After health, he asks what she's 'been up to' that week and she replies that there's been bridge, shopping, visits to friends - enough to convince him that she is leading a sociable, active life. Then it's her turn to ask after them. How is he? Adele? How is David doing at college? Does Rael still have that goy boyfriend? Adam then urges her to get someone to install a computer and set up Skype so that they can talk for free, he sends their love, wishes her 'Shabat shalom', and rings off.

Adam is kind. He leaves her in peace, allows her to return to the quiet regions of her solitude after his call, with some faint remembered warmth.

Sharon is different. When she calls, she demands engagement, is never satisfied with less than an emotional response from her mother, even if the emotion is rage or despair or grief. Her calls, thank god, are less frequent than Adam's; the occasion is always some emotional crisis in her own life that she needs to share. Some weeks ago, it was the night when Danny, her nineteen-year-old son, a college student, was held up by gunmen at the pharmacy where he worked part-time for pocket money.

'They could've blown him away. Three hopheads - wired, crazy. Thank god he could give them what they needed and they left. But he's been terribly traumatized, he'll need a lot of counselling. And to think we came here to get away from this sort of violence.'

What could she say? And then the last call, three days ago.

'We're thinking of - no, we're definitely coming home. Alex is winding up the business and as soon as he can get a good offer for the stock that's left, we'll pack up everything. Danny and the twins and I will come on anyway, probably October, that's in five weeks or so. Alex will follow. We'll stay with you while we look around, get used to things again. I need to book our flights - say, some time in mid-October?'

'I hope to be dead by then Sharon.'

There had been a silence, then: 'I can't believe what you've just said! Here we're coming home to be with you in your old age, to look after you and love you, and you "hope to be *dead* by then"? You are a totally unnatural mother! No, no,' - as she tried to soften it - 'you need to think about what you've just said and call me back when you've gotten over it. And when you've got something positive to say.'

She hadn't called back yet, supposed she would have to sometime soon.

In front of the television, whisky to hand, she lifts Pepe onto her lap and switches on the nature channel. She doesn't watch much with people in it. Her eyesight is going so the images are blurred but now she watches the great herds of Etosha surge over the Andoni plains - zebra, giraffe, buffalo, buck of every stripe - until she nods off. Pepe is asleep too.

Anyway comes in quietly. He moves the whisky to one side of the table, puts her supper tray down, with its pie, three red slices of tomato and a sprig of basil. Then he goes back to the kitchen, slices the rest of the tomato for himself, adds it to the two pies he's just heated in the microwave. He makes himself a big mug of milky tea with two spoons of sugar, puts it all on a blue plastic tray. The chef's apron which is his uniform for preparing food, goes on a hook behind the door. He takes the tray and goes out, switching off lights and locking the door behind him.

The kitchen courtyard is full of a luminous pink from the sunset and three hadedas hurry low across the sky, feathers squeaking, calling to each other. In his own room, Anyway changes into an old track suit, slips the grey flannels onto a plastic hanger, the shirt over them, and hangs them in his cupboard. These are his driving clothes, still quite clean. They hang next to the gardening overalls and the white waiter's suit, not used any more.

On the sports channel, Bafana are playing Jamaica in the Vodacom Stadium. Anyway settles down with his food and tea to watch them play their usual elegant soccer, and fail to score.

Heart's Blood

Diana Findlay woke her daughter at a quarter to seven, throwing back the curtains and letting the early sunlight flood the room.

'Come on now, wake up, I've got bridge this morning and Mrs Svenson's doing the lift. She'll be here at quarter to eight.'

Camilla sat slumped on the edge of the bed, yawning, as her mother left the room. A book lay on the bedside table: *A Sending of Dragons*. Camilla put out her hand to it, then changed her mind and stood up. She went through to the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face. When she returned to the bedroom, she thought she would just have a glance at the next chapter to see whether Jakkin and Akki had managed to escape the helicopter, and she was deep in the book when her mother came to check up on her at nearly half past seven.

'What are you doing! Do you know what time it is?' her mother cried.

'Sorry Mom,' she mumbled, closing the book. 'I'll be ready, promise.'

'You can't keep Mrs Svenson waiting when she's coming out of her way to pick you two up,' her mother said as Camilla began to pull on her school dress.

And to her husband, knotting his tie as he came out of the master bedroom, she said: 'That girl's impossible. Thirteen last week and I still have to keep after her like a child.'

'Oh she's alright, don't worry. Just the age.'

'Sebastian's nearly three years younger and much more responsible than she is. I wake him, and he gets up, gets himself dressed and he'll be ready for his lift.'

They went downstairs together, to the breakfast bar in the kitchen. Tryphina was wrapping sandwiches in greaseproof paper on a counter near the scullery; a boy in a school blazer was taking bites from a piece of toast, marmalade dripping off it, and studying the back of the cereal packet. His sister flew in a bit later, pulling a scunci over her black ponytail. She wiped a knifeful of peanut butter over a piece of toast and ran out again eating it.

The buzzer sounded from the bottom of the drive. Diana picked up the intercom, heard Ulla Svenson's voice and opened the gates. Sebastian was already in the car with the Svenson twins when Camilla came out, carrying a backpack, juice bottle, tennis racquet and sports bag, and struggling into her blazer, dropping the backpack in the process, which meant she had to spend a few moments retrieving books and chasing an apple down the drive.

Camilla heard her mother saying something to Mrs Svenson about 'such a daydreamer,' and she was pink and sweating when she finally got herself and all her baggage into the car.

Diana liked to get to the Country Club early for the bridge, so that she could park in the shade. She also preferred to put her car, a small Korean saloon, a little out of the way because it was conspicuously modest among the BMWs, Mercs and SUV's which were the norm here. The parking lot held hundreds of vehicles and it would be full when all the bridge players participating in this popular tournament had arrived. Diana liked to sit in her shady corner for a bit, watching the two hundred and eighty or so women getting out of their cars and converging on the Clubhouse. She studied the passing outfits, for there was a dress code here and most of the women were exemplars of elegant dressing.

Once in the hall everyone settled down with a partner. In the presence of the opponents, attitudes grew combative; spines stiffened, chins lifted, eyes grew steely. Diana was up for this; she loved the cut and thrust of competitive bridge.

Her team was playing a team they knew. One of the players, Felicity Stannard, was a particular friend of hers; her daughter Julia had been at Camilla's birthday party just a few days before. As they waited for the Chairlady's usual little speech, she remembered that the girl had mentioned something interesting.

'Tell me Lissy, what's this about Julia changing schools?'

'Oh we don't know yet that she *will* change, depends on whether she gets in or not.'

'Gets in where?'

'The Bell they call it, short for the Beyoncé Ebon Leadership Lyceum. It's opening up for ordinary girls too. There was an invitation in last Friday's M and G.'

'Oh I didn't see that, tell me more.'

'You know the place was intended to help underprivileged girls, but they've had problems and decided it would be healthier to have a more normal group of girls, including girls from better economic backgrounds. A friend of mine's the doctor there; she told us this was coming up.'

'Isn't it only for black girls?'

'No, Beyoncé was very careful about that. Didn't want to appear racist to all her white fans in the States, so there've always been a couple of token white students, underprivileged whites of course.'

'But do you think it's a better school than Roemead?'

'Better? It's in a different class my dear. The staff are all hand-picked, top teachers, paid in dollars. The buildings and grounds are magnificent, no expense spared. Beyoncé *is* one of the five richest women in America.'

'I wonder what they'll charge the ordinary girls?'

'It's a bit less than we're paying now. The whole move is in the interests of diversity; our girls' - and she gave a little laugh - 'will be sort of reverse affirmatives.'

'And what will they get there that Roemead can't give them?'

'Leadership training, that's what. This is a very select group of girls who will become the CEO's of the big corporations, the Cabinet Ministers, the Top Women of the future. Beyoncé will make sure of that with her enormous public presence.'

'But she's in America, isn't she?'

'Her visits to The Bell are kept quiet for security reasons but I can tell you in confidence she's there every two or three months. She bought a place on the dam, the Ramuphola place, for nine million.'

'How do we apply? When's the deadline?' Diana was whispering now because the Chairlady had ascended the podium and was shuffling her papers, calling for silence and looking severe.

'Look at last Friday's M and G.'

Unhelpful cow, thought Diana, smiling at her friend.

The twelve hands of bridge that had to be played before the tea break had never seemed so long, the game had never seemed so vacuous. She made a couple of bad judgement calls in the bidding, forgot when her opponents were out of a suit, miscounted her own trumps. Rose, the kindest of partners, lifted a quizzical eyebrow and asked if she'd left her usual mental grappling-hook at home that morning.

As soon as they had finished the first half and everyone was making for the tea and sandwiches, she ran into the gardens, took out her cell and called Tryphina.

'Tryphina. You know that newspaper from Friday? It's called *Mail and Guardian*. Don't throw it out. A small newspaper. Don't use it for rubbish. I need it.'

'Yes Ma'm.'

'It's on top of the washing machine I think. Don't throw it away. Don't throw any papers away.'

'Yes Ma'm.'

She called James at the office, told him briefly what she had just heard and asked him to find out what he could.

'Whoa, slow down there. How can I find out anything?' he asked. 'I haven't got time this morning to phone round or look on the net. You'll have to do it this afternoon. And don't sound so frantic, we'll have to look into the whole thing properly, talk to Camilla, see what she wants to do.'

'We're her parents, we make decisions for her.'

‘But she’s thirteen now. We should at least hear her opinion. Tell you what, I’ll come home early this afternoon so we can have a family indaba. Try to keep it to yourself till then.’

‘I’ll at least tell her what the Stannards’ plans for Julia are. And what the school’s all about.’

James snorted. ‘Get in a bit of brainwashing, you mean.’

All morning at school, Camilla kept falling into a daydream of dragons, and of their strange home planet, and of the amazing things that went on there. Whenever there was a gap in the busy school morning, whenever her attention was not being engaged by a teacher or classmate, she returned to the deserts of Austar IV and the Pit and the dragon battles that took place there.

At break she could wander off by herself and dream undisturbed. In maths, when Mrs Price was droning on about some new algorithm or other, her mind could slip away. While the rest of the class were doing a Geography exercise, she dropped into the reverie again and handed in a very poor piece of work. On the tennis court, she imagined that the girls on the other side of the net were her opponents in the Pit, and she played a fiery game. When they went home, she sat in a trance in Mrs Svenson’s car.

Once at home, she sank into the cushioned lounge on the patio with the book on her lap, and gave herself over to that rapturous world completely.

Again it was her mother’s voice that brought her back to reality. Diana was standing at the sliding doors holding a newspaper, handbag under her arm, just returned from bridge.

‘I saw Julia’s mum this morning and she had some exciting news. Has Julia told you anything about her new school?’

‘What new school?’ Camilla knew about The Bell and her friend’s possible defection but sensed that ignorance was a good stance from which to start this discussion.

Diana held up the folded paper.

‘Here we are, listen: *The Board of Governors in consultation with Ms Ebon has decided to open the Lyceum to girls from all walks of life, in the interests of diversity and representativity. It will be to the mutual benefit of all students to interact with their age-group peers from backgrounds unlike their own.* Isn’t that exciting? We can get application forms off the net, only got to be in by end of the month. That’s still ten days off.’

‘Hold on, Mom. I don’t know anything about this place and I don’t want to move. I’ve got all my friends at Roemead, it’s a good school.’

‘Oh, but The Bell is in a different class altogether. It grooms girls for leadership and success. You are assured of a leadership role in life, whatever you choose to do after school.’

‘I don’t want to be a leader.’

Diana's eyes widened. She repeated what Camilla had just said and then told the girl that she didn't know what she was talking about. *Everybody* wanted to be a leader and anyone who didn't, was a weak, sheeplike person, content to be a follower. Camilla retorted that she didn't want to be either a leader or a follower, she just wanted to be herself, at which point her mother told her that she simply didn't know what it meant to be a leader.

'Oh yes I do,' the girl said. 'I've been a leader twice lately, first when Miss Walker made me company leader at Guides and then when I got elected class captain last term. It was horrible.'

'How can you say that? What was horrible about it?'

'Both times everybody stopped being my friends. They sort of turned against me because I had to make them do things and obey the stupid rules. I didn't like making them into followers, into sheep, and they didn't like it either.'

'Yes, there is a price to pay for leadership. It's a lonely position. But it has its rewards too.'

'Why do there have to be any leaders? Why can't we just all do things together?'

'Because the world is not organized that way. You are either a leader, a success in life with all the rewards that brings, or you are a follower, a worker whose job it is to make the leader into a success.'

'Well then I think the world stinks.'

Diana was silent a moment, regrouping. Then she said, with summary crispness: 'What this little chat proves is that you have no grasp of the whole idea and practice of leadership. You need exactly the kind of education The Bell will give you.'

'I don't want to be a leader and if you make me go there, I will do everything I can to - to not be one.'

'Stubborn as well as ignorant! I suppose you just want to dream your life away. Here you have the opportunity of being close to Beyoncé, of taking her as your role model - d'you know she's one of the five richest women in America? - and you turn your nose up at it! Your father will have to talk to you,' and she stalked off the patio.

Camilla threw down her book and jumped up from the recliner. Trust her mother to spoil everything! Trust Mummy to force her to do what she didn't want to do. That was a Leader for you. And now to drag Daddy into it. Of course he would side with her, because Mummy had the knack of making life hell for everyone if she didn't get her way. And Camilla knew that she herself would do whatever Dads asked of her. He just had that way of gently talking her into things, of making her see that resistance wasn't worth the pain it caused everyone.

Diana met her husband at the garage door when he returned from work that afternoon at four o'clock, with the news that he had been right, Camilla wasn't keen on the idea of going to The Bell.

He put his briefcase down with a sigh on the kitchen counter and loosened his tie. 'Don't rush into things with your mind made up, Diana. We must consider that she may not be the right kind of character for such a place.'

'But that's exactly what I'm worried about - her character. She'd prefer to sit reading and dreaming all day, and she must be got out of those habits now, before it's too late. Character's not set in a girl her age and it's up to us to shape her.'

He agreed that she liked to daydream but pointed out that it was very common in girls of her age and nothing to worry about. Their aim should be to ensure she was happy.

'Oh I agree fully,' Diana smirked. 'That means it's our responsibility to see that she doesn't fall into habits that can only result in misery and disappointment, to see that she grows into a strong and well-balanced character.'

James' heavy grey eyebrows drew together in a frown. 'And will this school ensure that? What do we know about it?'

'Simply that it's the best school in the country; the girls are guaranteed success in life. I mean, here you and I are paying a lot of money and going to a lot of trouble, to do this Personal Power course. She will get that kind of training as part of her schooling.'

'Do they have the regular subjects? What about university entrance?'

'That's all taken care of.'

'Maybe we should let our girl develop in her own way, let her dream. Society needs artists and poets too, and they can be successes in their own way.'

But Diana had a low opinion of artists and poets. She pointed out that it was only the top one or two percent who could claim to be successful. For the most part that kind of person was bone idle, avoiding the challenges of a career in business or a profession because they couldn't cut it in the real world. But she thought that Camilla was bright and just had to be trained out of that dreamy nonsense. The girl could always indulge herself in her spare time, writing things for a hobby.

James cast about for a valid objection. 'It may be a critical mistake to send her to a place like this Bell.'

'And it may - no, it *will* be the making of her. You go and talk to her. She's in the dining room. I'm going to get that application form off the web.' Her high heels clicked over the kitchen tiles as she headed for the upstairs office.

James found his daughter sitting at the dining room table, maths books spread out in front of her, doodling on a page of rough work. She looked up.

'Hi Dad. You've heard Mom's latest?'

He sat down and asked her what she thought of the idea.

'It's awful. That school's stuck way out there in the country. It was supposed to be only for poor girls who needed a leg up. You know the scandals and court cases they've had. And worst of all, it's this Hollywood person's idea of a school.'

'What's wrong with that?'

'What's wrong with Hollywood? Have you ever seen a show of hers? It's all make-up and false hair and - and everyone screaming with excitement. She's got this sidekick who helps people with their personal problems, which is just an excuse to get some juicy stories into the show. She's had so many facelifts she looks like Jacko. And this is the school's role model?'

'Come on, be fair now, she does try to help people and do good things for the underprivileged.'

'Yeah, I s'pose. But I'm OK where I am. All my friends're at Roemead, it's close to home, I love the teachers there, I'm going to make first team tennis next year.'

James suggested that maybe she shouldn't mind the prospect of a new school so much, but she replied vehemently.

'Of course I mind it. All my friends are here, you and Tryphy and my room and all my things are here. I might even miss Sebastian.'

He sighed. 'Alright, I'll support you in this but you know your mother, when she gets hold of an idea ...'

As Camilla lay in bed that night waiting for sleep, the dragons of her book rose in her mind. But this time they were not brave beautiful creatures; they were fearful monsters with whom she fought a losing battle.

Lulu wasn't sure that she was ready for this.

'Come with me to my folks on Sunday', Luís had said. 'I want them to see what a beautiful girl I'm dating.'

'Haai, don't get so serious!' she'd replied.

But he was determined about the visit. For a Jozi boy (well, young man really, 26 this month) he was very old-fashioned. When they were walking in town, he always put himself on the street side of her, for instance; he opened doors and pulled out chairs for her. It made her feel delicate and precious, a feeling she would normally scorn but enjoyed with Luís.

He wouldn't go all the way with her, saying it had to do with respect. At first incredulous and a bit resentful, uncertain of his virility and of her attractiveness, she had gradually come to accept his attitude, even appreciate it. Perhaps meeting the family was a necessary preliminary to sex, who could say? She had already realized that Luís' way of life, as far as things like manners, religion, food and drink were concerned, was different from her own and she liked the sense of the exotic that going out with him brought.

He had a rather sketchy idea of her family background, thanks to the form that Sammy asked her to fill out before the interview. Among the *Ethnicity* options she had ticked *Cape Coloured* as the nearest thing to the truth among the limited options. Luís had been on the interviewing panel, so he had obviously seen her fact sheet. She had never told him her full family background. When he asked her to cook Malay dishes and tell him about Islam, she playfully ducked without denying or admitting anything, allowing him to go along with the idea that her family were from the Cape. She looked more white than Coloured anyway; she'd always been the lightest girl in school, and now with her honey-coloured skin and blonde hair courtesy of Wella, she had even once been asked if she was Swedish or Danish.

Now this visit to meet the family. It had to come sooner or later, if they were serious about each other. Lulu knew she just had to be bold and put up a good show for the day. Luís kept reassuring her that his parents and uncles and grandparents - in fact the whole big crowd who gathered in his folks' house every Sunday for lunch - were all friendly, open people who were just waiting to love her.

'Just wear something a little more closed up, OK? Not the pink skirt and midi-top, you know what I mean?'

She knew and was wearing a straight dark skirt that ended just above her knees, a pleated cream blouse with cuffs halfway up her forearm and flat court shoes when they got out of the car

and walked up the paved path, up the polished red steps and between the two pillars to the front door. It was ajar.

'Olá, já chegamos,' he called and immediately people appeared from all sides, calling out greetings, hugging Luís and slapping him on the back. Children clung to his legs. An old woman with grey hair tied back in a bun and a black shawl round her shoulders, took his ears and kissed him on both cheeks. A woman in an apron whom he called Mama clasped him to her in a bear hug, crying 'Meu filho, meu filho' as she did so. When the excitement had died down, the whole company trooped through to the courtyard where a long table was laid for lunch, and Luís introduced Lulu to everyone.

There was his mother Rosita (an ample woman with flushed cheeks in a white apron) and father Fernando Caldeira (small and dark with bright nutbrown eyes; he didn't shake Lulu's outstretched hand but took it in his, bent and kissed it, saying 'Muito prazer'), Granny Jacinta (very lined and humped in the back) and Grandpa Joaquim (a little old man who gave Lulu a toothless smile and shook her hand warmly), Grandma Dona Ana (with her severe bun and shawl, still upright), Uncle Alberto (obviously Mama's brother from their likeness), Uncle Lourenço and Auntie Judite and their three children, Luís' brother Tony, his wife Beatriz and their twins; his sister Amália and her boyfriend André.

Luís pulled out a chair for her and asked her what she would drink. She was going to ask for a glass of white wine when Luís' father called out that she must try a caipirinha; they were going to show her every detail of a good Portuguese-style meal. Luís presently brought her a tall iced glass with a straw, mint garnish on ice, and a sourish drink in it. She began to like the taste after a few sips and after a few more realized from the lame feeling in her legs and arms, that it was to be treated with caution. Luís laughed when she asked how much alcohol was in it, and said it was just one good tot of Brazilian rum with chopped limes and sugar.

The buzzer signalled the arrival of another guest.

'That must be Mandai, he said he might come,' said Mama as Tony went off to greet the newcomer.

Lulu was examining the lace of the vast tablecloth.

'Is this handmade? It's such fine work.'

'It's from Madeira. All done by hand, the poor women there need glasses by the time they're thirty. It takes up to three months to make one like this, and we buy it there for less than a week's wages from South Africa. I tried to give more but the tour guide slapped my hand and made me put it back in my purse.'

Two men came down the steps, Tony and a short strongly-built man with an ebony skin who must be Mandai, Lulu thought. As Papa Fernando hugged him she thought she could see a family resemblance about the eyes and mouth. Lourenço clapped him on the shoulder and asked where Deva was today.

A faint spasm passed over Mandai's face. 'Deva's not with me any more, he's living by himself. But we've stayed good friends.'

Mama put her arms right round him and squeezed, then called out: 'Luís, introduce Lulu, then make Mandai a caipirinha, a strong one.'

Introduction over, the newcomer came and sat down next to Lulu and enquired politely: 'So how do you like our Portuguese ways?'

'Ja, I like what I know. Luís took me to Lusitoland last time it was on, and I loved that.'

'We have the fado, and futebol and Fátima.' Mandai was proud.

'I've heard of fado, though I don't know much about it.'

'Minha querida,' Granny Dona Ana said, 'it's the most beautiful music in the world. The saddest and truest to all the deep human feelings.'

'What would a fado song be like?' Lulu was genuinely interested. 'Luís has never played me any.'

'Here, I'll give you one,' and Dona Ana took a deep breath while groans were heard round the table.

'Espere, Avó!' Tony interjected quickly, 'we'll put on a CD' - too late, for Dona Ana had already launched into a powerful rendition of 'Barco Negro'.

'It's her party piece,' Luís whispered to Lulu. 'A fishing boat's lost at sea and the sailor's lover sings of her pain when she sees the black boat which means death. But this isn't true fado, more of a folk song.'

The song had a rocking rhythm like the motion of a boat on the waves; the old woman sang strongly in a deep contralto, drawing out the wails at the end so that Lulu shivered.

'You should hear it with the proper accompaniment, mandolin and guitar,' Lourenço said. 'Let's put it on.'

'Wait, I'll sing some fado corrido for her.'

'No Avó, let her hear fado properly the first time.'

Dona Ana looked inclined to quarrel but subsided, humming to herself.

'I've got a new CD by Mariza in the car,' someone offered. 'Better Lulu hears modern fado so she likes it.'

'But the best fado is the oldest.' Mama had come out from the kitchen and sat down at the table to hear the song. 'I've got an old LP with Maria Teresa de Noronha, and there's nothing like it, better than anything before or since.'

'But you've got to know some fado before you can appreciate such deep songs.' it was Lourenço. 'Put on something in the middle - how about that CD of yours Rosi, Amália Rodrigues at the Paris Olympia?'

So from speakers on the kitchen steps there soon poured a stream of lilting melodies: a female voice capable of the lightest touches and trills, of powerful sustained notes, and with an amazing flexibility - all underpinned by guitar chords and the tinkling tremolo of the mandolin. One song, 'Nem ás Paredes Confesso', was so striking that Lulu, who was reading the cover, impulsively asked to hear it again, and Mandai said he had it on his iPod and would send it to her.

'What were the other two F's again?' Lulu asked Papa Fernando.

'Fútebol and Fátima. You got some idea of Portuguese soccer in the World Cup last month but we didn't do so great. AF de Lisboa and Ronaldo let us down there so we didn't show the world what we can do. But if you go to a game at Estádio José Alvalade with Sporting Clube playing, or even better, to a Benfica match at Estádio da Luz, then you will see what Portuguese fútebol is all about.'

'And what's Fátima?'

'You haven't heard of Fátima? Where have you been living?' Auntie Judite was astonished. Lulu blushed a little but Alberto came to her aid.

'Better she, no better the whole world doesn't hear about Fátima. For me, the three F's should be fútebol, fado and fútebol.'

And Tony added: 'For me, let's make it fútebol, fútebol, fútebol,' to good-natured laughter.

But Judite was stung. 'Deus nos proteja! How can you say that, you men? When Our Lady of the Immaculate Heart chose Portugal for her home, when she made herself known to the world there?'

'You know my feelings about religion - a lot of crap dressed up in sweet-smelling robes and music to make money for His Holiness and his mates in the Vatican.'

'Alberto, pára pá! Now you go too far!'

'No, he's right Judite.' It was Tony. 'What did the Church, Holy Mother Church, ever do for the poor except take their few escudos, sorry euros, every Sunday, or their meticais here in Moçambique, and send the money back to Rome?'

'But you forget the schools, the hospitals, the mission stations in places nobody else would go!' Judite said with deep vehemence.

Alberto smirked. 'Oh don't get me started on the missionaries who persuaded everyone they were sinners and could only go to heaven if they converted and put on shirts and trousers and paid the Church for their tickets.'

And Dona Ana raised her voice: 'Judite, how can you say *places where nobody else would go*? Who do you think was living there long before any missionaries, before any Portuguese set foot in Manica ...'

Grandpa Joaquim was crossing himself and muttering as Mama broke in:

'Alberto, you are blaspheming! Beware that you are not struck down by the hand of God!'

Grandma Jacinta chirped in with little birdlike twitters of outraged agreement.

Judite, red in the face, took a dog-eared card out of her purse.

'This is from the Pope himself. *Ou çam! May Portugal never forget the heavenly message of Fátima, which, before anybody else she was blessed to hear. Keep Fátima in your heart and translate Fátima into deeds. That is the best guarantee for ever more graces.*'

Grandpa Joaquim's eyes were screwed up, his chin was on his chest and he was shaking with silent laughter or sobs, Lulu couldn't be sure which. The conversation was taking too strange a turn for her, so she stood up and asked Luís if she could go to the bathroom. He took her up the stairs to the kitchen, through a door painted turquoise and surrounded by tiles in a glazed blue pattern. He pointed to the door to the left and told her the bathroom was the last door on the right.

'Don't mind the quarrel out there,' he smiled. 'We have this just about every Sunday and nobody really gets angry.' As if in support of his words, a sudden wave of laughter came from the table under the grapevines. Someone had cracked a joke and good humour had been restored.

The passage smelled of yeast; after the midday sun in the courtyard, it was dark and cool. Behind her in the kitchen Lulu could hear Mama Rosi's molasses voice pouring over the crowd of children who followed her wherever she went, and them responding with small piping notes. Other women had come in and were talking there too; they must be preparing food.

There was an empty bedroom on the left. Lulu paused at the door, then stepped inside. Perhaps this had been his room and this bed with the bright woven throw, the one that he had slept in. Had these cupboards held his clothes - the walls his teenage posters? But the room was bare, nothing now to show who had lived here. It might have been Tony or Amália just as well as Luís.

The bedroom window overlooked the courtyard. From behind the lace curtains she had a clear view of the table and could look at it unobserved. Luís was sitting half in shade, right ankle resting on his left knee. His arm as he raised the glass to drink was dappled with sunlight coming through pinpricks in the catawba vine above. Tony was telling a joke which involved much gesturing; Luís put his head back and laughed at the end of it, and his throat looked so soft in that instant.

She saw Lourenço get up, kiss his wife on the cheek and go to stand at the fire where Fernando, Mandai and Grandpa Joaquim were grilling meat on espetadas. The two old women were occupied in sipping their drinks, nodding and chatting to each other. Children ran down the kitchen steps with baskets of bread and salad bowls. The bigger ones were carrying platters of what looked like chicken and seafood out to the table, running back empty-handed to get more things for the feast. Luís' younger sister Amália was reading her boyfriend's palm, both heads bent close over his hand. And Lulu stood watching, quite still in that empty room.

When she got back to the table, they were ready to start. Mama Rosita insisted on grace being said, over the half-hearted objections of Alberto and Tony, and then the filling of plates began. It was a feast of piri-piri chicken pieces on an enormous platter; lemon and garlic prawns on two more dishes; espetada on long skewers; bolo do caco hot from the oven; vino verde in abundance; leafy green salads.

As she looked round, Lulu felt relaxed. She took Luís' hand under the table and pressed his fingers. The eating was broken only by brief remarks or requests for this or that, the food commanding everyone's attention. Mandai, helping himself to more prawns with his right hand and licking the fingers of his left, said: 'Rosita my darling, you're still the best cook in Africa.'

It was over the coffee and farturas that Papa Fernando said: 'But we've only been talking about us today. Tell us about *you*, Lulu. Where is your family? Who are your mother and father? Tell us everything!'

Lulu's heart jumped against her ribcage. She felt her cheeks flushing and her voice shook slightly as she said:

'My parents were from the Cape but my father Oliver Jacobs died five years ago. He was a businessman. We lived in the country near Malimode and I grew up there and went to college in Polokwane'.

With the words 'lived in the country near Malimode', she had a fleeting image of their house on the outskirts of Malimode: mostly home-made cement blocks with corrugated iron extensions here and there; old wrecks of cars that Nolly was always bringing home to fix up standing in the front garden, the chickens and goats round them. She thought of the real 'Oliver Jacobs, Businessman': Nolly, his mechanic's overalls covered in grease, his woolly moustache stretched over a gap-toothed smile. Always a smile. And she had left Mama out altogether. She took Luís' hand for support and felt his kind brown eyes on her.

Uncle Lourenço was nodding and saying something about a country childhood when she interrupted him.

'That's actually not a good picture of me and my family. It's true my dad Nolly Jacobs was from Cape Town but he wasn't a businessman, he was a garage mechanic who always loved working on cars, even when he owned his own garage in Malimode. But also he just adopted me and my real father was a white man from Joburg, well from Britain really, I've never seen him, he just walked out on my mom but he always paid for me, I don't even know his name, and my mother is a Zulu woman, her name was Samina Ngidi but now everyone calls her Babs Jacobs and she had a Tamil Indian grandmother - that's where she and I get our straight hair from. So you might think that I'm pure Coloured from the Cape but I'm not really, I'm just a m-mix-up.'

Her cheeks were red and the lace of the table cloth was very blurred. Everyone round the table was looking at her, she knew, but no one spoke a word. So she lifted her chin and went on: 'We lived on the edge of Malimode in a place we built ourselves bit by bit and I grew up there. We had chickens and goats. I went to Radikwethe High School and Nolly wasn't my actual father but he was my real *real* father because he was always there for me and he and my mom were really happy and my two little brothers are his children.'

After another brief silence during which nobody moved, Grandmother Dona Ana got up stiffly. She took off her black mohair shawl and wrapped it around Lulu's shoulders, drawing the girl up and hugging her.

'Venha, minha querida. Come, I show you something,' was all she said. Quiet conversation resumed around the table as she led Lulu up the steps and into the kitchen. They went into a passage on the right this time, and into a formal sitting room. On a polished half-moon table stood a crowd of people: young and old; in formal poses and on the beach; in front of cars and on the steps of houses; black, tan, white; laughing, squinting into the sun; in plain wooden frames and ornate silver ones; all looking out at Lulu with a whisper on their lips, a message hovering about those smiling mouths.

Dona Ana picked out one from the back. It was a wedding picture in sepia tint, of a young woman in a long white dress holding the traditional bouquet in her left hand, her right hand tucked through her husband's arm. From her ivory complexion, she seemed to be Portuguese. The groom was a handsome man with proud head-carriage, tall and broad in a dark suit and wing collar, and he was Mozambican.

'See, it's their wedding day', Dona Ana said. 'That's my father and my mother, lovely people both of them'.

'They are beautiful; you can see how happy they are'.

'And look, here is my Mozambican cousin Maria and her baby from a very high-up Portuguese government man. He had to go back to Lisbon. These are my four nephews, the boys of Uncle Sibasa

and Auntie Mwenya, they lived on Catembe and were great fishermen. These people are all our family. Do you have some pictures of yours?’

‘Well, a few.’

‘Please, when you come back here, bring them to show us: your father Nolly and your mother and little brothers. *You* when you were small, and your house with the cars and goats and chickens.’

Ukuhlalisa Umsamo

He was making notes on a writing block and sipping from his mug of tea as he sat at the breakfast table, sun on his back. It was cold in the room. Now and then he glared over his glasses at the open windows above the sink, a khehla with grey salting his hair, face criss-crossed with fine lines, intent when he was writing.

She came up the short stairs from the yard into the kitchen, a tall woman with a basket of eggs in one hand, and turned too late to catch the door as a cold blast slammed it behind her.

‘Haibo, lamaqanda ayaqanda,’ she said, taking his hand and laying it on the eggs. ‘If the eggs are like this, how cold are the hens outside there?’

‘Don’t worry woman, they’ve got their feathers and they sit against each other in the henhouse. But you can close those windows for a cold old man.’

‘Hawu, myeni wami, your legs are finished! They don’t work any more!’ she exclaimed in mock horror, but smiling as she shut the windows. ‘What are you writing there?’

‘What we need for the new classrooms. Mnumzane Mvelase is coming out this afternoon to discuss the money. I hope it won’t go on too long but of course, our Senior District Inspector will want to give us all the benefits of his wisdom, and the Committee - well, everyone has to make a speech’, he said. ‘What time are the children coming?’

‘Irene’s taking them out of school early so they’ll be here about two o’clock, maybe even earlier. What takes us three hours, she drives in two. You know, it’s the first time they’ll be staying here without Donny and Irene.’

‘But they were really too young before. Now they can look after themselves. They can even help you with Mankumbu and the hens, and be useful in the house.’

‘We mustn’t make them work too hard. They must enjoy their time here so they’ll want to come again.’

‘What will you do with them then?’

‘They can help me a little, but doing things they’ll enjoy. We’re going to bake a cake, and they can help me make isidudu for breakfast tomorrow. I want to show them the photo album of their father and auntie Nandi when they were babies, and then growing up. It’ll give them an idea of their family history.’

‘A good chance to show them something of isiZulu too. I don’t think Jason even knows what the umsamo is or what everything on it means, and he’s ten now. It’s time. He’ll be interested in the iklwa and the imbemba when he knows what they are.’

‘And the Gobamakhosi umdlela; you must show him that and tell him about his Mkhulu who beat the English at Isandlwana.’

‘Hawu, that’s a tricky one. His loyalties will probably be with the English. But he needs to know that he’s part Zulu too and he can be proud of Isandlwana. They should both see the pictures of grandfather and your father; we must tell them about their okhokho.’

‘Just be careful. Dondo says that he and Irene don’t want to mix them up with ideas of amadlozi yet. We must leave that to their father when he thinks they’re ready.’

‘But Irene takes them to her church every Sunday for classes, so they’re already being mixed up with ideas of saints and angels.’

‘We must go slowly Dlabela, my dear husband, because they know nothing of isiZulu. Give it to them little bit by little bit as you feed a small flame to make it blaze up. If you dump too much wood on it, it will just die under that weight.’

‘Nembala. Uqinisile Nokuthula.’

He got up, gathering his papers and pens and putting them into the briefcase on the chair next to him.

‘Will you get some books for them from the Media Centre?’ she asked. ‘Whatever Nonhlanhla thinks a boy and girl of their age will like. You could also take out a DVD or two, though I don’t want them watching that box too much this weekend. They do enough of that at home.’

‘One or two films won’t hurt - they’re here quite a long time. And since we’re planning a little cultural education programme, why don’t you tell them some izinganekwane? You were always good with stories.’

‘I’ve forgotten them all. My Gogo now, she knew lots and lots, and told them very well, so that every child was hanging on her skirt to hear more. But - can you tell them in English? It doesn’t seem right. I’ll try and think something up.’

When Dlabela had gone, she got out the little vacuum cleaner and duster, and began to clean, starting as she always did in the front hallway with the umsamo right opposite the front door, because this was the heart of the home where the sacred items were kept, the heirlooms of their family. She vacuumed the polished dung floor briskly then turned to the low claw-and-ball table facing the door.

On a crocheted cloth lay various items passed down through the generations of Ngidis. Some of them were military in character, most venerable among these being an ancient axe, not just an imbazo for chopping roots and branches, but an imbemba which must have been carried into battle by some forefather, perhaps in the time of Tshaka. Babamkhulu, Dlabela’s father, had been vague

about its origins. The twine binding the iron head to its wooden shaft was brittle and powdery with age but Dlabela kept the edge keen. Nokuthula picked it up and dusted it carefully.

Next she dusted the Gobamakhosi umdlela. They knew more about that. The miniature dress-shield, for use when courting or on ceremonial occasions, had belonged to Dlabela's great-grandfather Sigcwelana, who fought in the Gobamakhosi, one of Cetshwayo's regiments at the battle of Isandlwana. Alongside it lay the heavy blade of a stabbing spear, an iklwa, its shaft no more than eighty or ninety centimeters long. It was honed to a keen edge but caked with dried blood, for it could never be washed. It was the family's sacrificial blade for use when a goat or a cow was being offered to the ancestors. As Nokuthula passed the rainbow duster over it, she thought briefly of all the goats and cows who had inscribed it with their lifeblood and silently asked the amadlozi to take note.

There were also two photographs: one of Dlabela's father in traditional dress, holding a full shield, spear and iwisa, standing next to a column topped with a potted fern, the Victorian photographer's idea of an elegant setting; and one of her own father in a suit and tie with a bowler hat on his head, seated on a sort of wicker throne. The beaded apron which Gogo Mankwanani had worn on her wedding day was there too, and of course, there was a decorated beer pot into which small quantities of ingwebu were poured from time to time, to slake the amadlozi's thirst.

When she heard the sound of tyres on the gravel driveway it wasn't even eleven o'clock. They couldn't be here already. She hurriedly put the cleaning equipment away and went to open the front door.

Children's voices sounded as car doors slammed. Then came Irene's bright shout of 'Hallo Gogo', and Nokuthula winced. I am not Gogo but Ninazala to you, she thought. Still, she went out with a smile to greet them.

'Mehlomadala! Hello bantabami, hello, welcome.'

'We left early,' Irene explained as hugs and greetings were exchanged. 'No point in making them go to school for an hour or two. It'll give Donny and me time to pack properly.'

'When does your plane go?' she asked.

'At eight o'clock. We've got to check in at Lanseria by six thirty. I can't wait! The resort looks gorgeous in the pamphlets - my friend Moira stayed next door last Christmas and she says it's a really cool place.'

She was hauling things out of the BMW's boot as she spoke: two well-stuffed sports bags, a large expanding suitcase at full stretch, a cardboard wine box tied with green twine and two bulging backpacks.

'Come on, take your things Jason,' she called. 'You can also help, Melly. Come on.'

Jason, a thin-faced dark boy with wiry black hair in an attempted David Beckham quiff, was leaning his elbows on the bonnet, concentrating on something in his hand and didn't seem to have heard his mother.

'Jason!' she shouted and he looked up.

'Ah gee Ma I've just got to finish this. I'm nearly on sixteen thousand.'

'Now!' she snapped, pointing. 'Bags.' He dragged his hand to his pocket to stow the game, threw his mother a hard look, and picked up a backpack.

'Will they need all that?' Nokuthula looked at the heap of baggage. 'It's just for three nights.'

'I've put clothes for both hot and cold weather in; you never know at this time of year. And there's games and things for them to amuse themselves with. I don't want them bothering you. Oh, you do have a DVD player don't you?'

'Of course.'

'Good, there are DVD's and games for them to play on TV. And there's music for them to listen to, but make sure they get equal time on the iPod. Jason is inclined to be selfish with it, that drives Melinda crazy and then there's a screaming match. Or worse. Just lock them in separate rooms if that happens.'

Irene bent to pick up the bulging cardboard box.

'What's in there?' Nokuthula asked.

'I've put in some of their favourite foods: Nutella, energy bars, flavoured milks, their cereal. Just a few things to help out - all health foods, don't worry. Oh, except for a few sweets and chips, and some cans of coke. But you can ration those. Or use them as bait.'

'It looks as if you have brought the city out with them so they won't have to be in the country at all.'

Irene laughed. She refused the offer of tea, saying she was keen to get back.

The children settled in, helping their Gogo to put clothes away in the cupboard; to stow the games, playstation and DVD's away under the TV; to pack the foods into kitchen cupboards. Jason talked about his best games and highest scores, his friends and teachers at school, his favourite TV shows, while Melinda trailed round after them silently.

'Don't suck your thumb!' he shouted suddenly. 'Mom says you're not a baby any more so stop it!'

Melinda's large blue eyes grew wet, the mouth trembled between her honey-coloured cheeks.

'Don't cry my baby.' Nokuthula knelt down and put her arms round the child.

'But she's six years old. She's not a baby any more. Mom says so.'

'Well she can be a baby for her Gogo.'

As she dried the tears, Jason tried out the toecaps of his trainers on a leg of the kitchen table.

She was cutting sandwiches for lunch when Jason got out a bag of chips and opened it. She let it go. He would probably say that they were not her crisps but his.

When their Mkhulu came home after four o'clock, both children were settled on the sofa in front of the TV playing some game that involved at least six loud explosions a minute. They reluctantly left it to greet their grandfather. Nokuthula took the opportunity of turning off the TV and making them come outside with her. They had to fetch the cow, Mankumbu, from pasture, and bring her down to the shed for the night. She had to be milked too.

The field was some way behind the house and up the gentle slope of a hillside. Melinda took her Gogo's hand as they walked; Jason fell behind, wrestling with some toy or other that he had taken from his pocket. The evening sun lay over the broad valley below the house and shone through the seed-heads of the grasses on the ridge above the field, which was already in shadow. Mankumbu was lying down as they came up and made no move to rise.

'Is she sick Gogo?' the little girl wanted to know.

'No, mntanami, she is just old like your gogo, and feeling tired after a long day in the hot sun. She will be pleased to go down to her straw bed now, and to shed her load of milk.'

Mankumbu had the colouring of an impisishile cow, dark gray with her poll and back covered in an orange mantle.

'Why is she red on her back Gogo?'

'We say she is like a hyena who has run through the fire and got burnt where the flames touched her.'

'Did she go in a fire?'

'No mntanami, it just looks like that.'

The children seemed interested in the cow, she thought, pleased. They would see something anyway of country life. Grasping one of Mankumbu's horns, she told her to 'Come on now, vuka,' and the old beast got reluctantly to her feet. Gogo walked behind to keep her moving, Melinda holding her hand and Jason following quietly.

'We got Mankumbu when your Daddy was just a boy. She is over twenty years old now and I fear her days are numbered.'

'What's that Gogo?'

'She will not be with us for long now. Maybe even when you come again, you will see that her field and her isibaya are empty.'

'But why? Don't you like her? Is she a bad cow?'

'Oh no! She is the best of cows and we love her very much. She gave us many calves which are all over the district now. She has always given the best milk and she is our friend. But when her time comes, and it is so for us all and everything that we love, then she will die.'

'Will you get another cow then Gogo?'

'No, my children. Babamkhulu and I have discussed it and we think the time for a cow is past now. No more cows when Mankumbu goes.'

They arrived at the shed, led Mankumbu in and Gogo tied her head for milking. The children stood watching as their Gogo pulled jets of warm milk from the udders into the aluminium pail with a metallic 'tzzzt, tzzzt, tzzzt.'

But as she carried the frothing pail to the kitchen, Melinda began quarrelling with Jason and when Gogo asked the reason, was told that 'Jason's had the iPod all afternoon, now it's my turn.' That was when she saw the slim black cords hanging out of his ears and realized that his attention had not been on her or Mankumbu.

'Aiye, it's hopeless,' she told Dlabela in the kitchen. The children were once more in front of the TV, this time watching a DVD about strange green and blue creatures who lived in a tree. 'They won't leave their city ways. And their mother brought it all out for them.'

'We'll see,' he said confidently. 'I'm going to take Jason to see the imbemba and indlela now.'

She set about preparing supper. He was back in a minute.

'Their video will finish in an hour and we can go then. I didn't want to antagonize the boy. Forcing it could just turn him against things.'

But when Mkhulu did finally get Jason to the umsamo, showed him the Ngidi heirlooms there and began to tell him their history, he was continually interrupted with Jason's descriptions of flying daggers, lasers, skurois and other miraculous weapons that he knew from movies or his action comics. Though Mkhulu did explain the iklwa to him, and the imbemba, they took on a dilapidated air when compared to Jason's futuristic marvels.

And so the weekend went on. When she asked for their help in making isidudu, explaining that it was a wonderful new kind of porridge, they told her that they had their Cheerios and that was all they ever ate for breakfast. When Mkhulu offered to run the DVD of *Zulu* with Michael Caine that he'd brought from the school library, they said no thank you, they still had four DVD's of their own to watch, Manga movies that they loved.

On the Sunday morning, however, Mkhulu declared that they were not going to sit in front of the TV all day. The family was going for a walk.

'Where to?' asked Jason. 'Is there anywhere to go here?'

'Oh yes,' Mkhulu answered a touch grimly. 'We are going to climb a big hill, or a small mountain if you like. Here is your walking stick.'

'Oh boy.' Jason's eyes opened wide as he took the heavy carved ironwood stick. 'A mountain.'

'Yes, that only the strongest men can climb.'

'Melly'll have to stay home.'

'No, she can walk with us to the bottom of the mountain, and she and Gogo will wait under the trees there, with the lunch, till we come back. Gogo will show her how to plait grass into a mat.'

'Yay, let's go.' Dlabela smiled at his wife. It was the first genuine enthusiasm for any country activity that the boy had shown.

'First, get your hi-top trainers on. There may be snakes on the way.'

'Snakes? Poison snakes?'

'Yes. They love to lie on the warm rocks on a cool day like today. But don't worry too much; just look carefully where you are putting your feet, and knock with your stick on the rocks as you go along, and they will get out of your way.'

'Wow. If we see one, I will just bash it on the head till it dies,' and he swung his stick at the floor.

'No Jason, we don't kill snakes. If we see one, we stand still until it goes away. Or we quietly back away from it. The snakes live on the mountain, it is their home, and we are the visitors there.'

Gogo was busy packing hard-boiled eggs and pieces of cold chicken into a basket, cold sausages and a round container of phuthu, a plastic container of her choc chip cookies and some fruit, a flask of tea for the adults, a flask of milk for the children. She then anointed Melinda's face and arms with sun tan lotion. Irene had explained that the child's tender skin burned very badly if she was outdoors for any length of time. Finally, all was ready and the little party set off.

Gqumangwibi, a steep-sided roundish hill, lay some two kilometres from the house. They arrived at the grove of wattle trees where Gogo and Melinda spread a blanket on the ground and sat down to rest, while the other two went on alone. Jason took a long look at the hill, and said that it looked quite high.

'Yes, it will be a hard climb, mntanami. But from the top, you have a wonderful view of the district, our house, the school, the whole valley. It is worth the effort. It will take us maybe two hours if we climb steadily.'

'OK, Mkhulu, let's go,' and they had soon disappeared round the side of the hill, where the path lay.

After a little rest, Melinda and Gogo set off to pick grasses that they would make into a round mat, something Melly could give her mother when she got back. They soon found a good stand and Gogo used the knife she had brought to cut a thick bundle. They took it back to the rug where Gogo showed the little girl how to cut off the soft bottom of each stalk with scissors. But Melinda preferred to use her teeth, and Gogo noticed that she didn't always spit out the soft bit, but chewed the sweet pulp and swallowed it. Gogo laughed delightedly.

'That is exactly what I always used to do when my mother and I made baskets. My mother called me inkonyana, little calf, because I loved to eat the grass so. Shall we call you little calf too?'

'Yes,' the child nodded gravely. 'I like to be a little calf.'

Time passed pleasantly as they worked the grass into rods which were then rolled round a central point. They secured the rings with string that Gogo had brought and were just doing the final tying off when they heard Jason's triumphant shout.

'Hello, Gogo and Melly. We did it! We climbed the whole hill!'

He was glowing with the pride of their accomplishment, dancing round the edge of the rug and twirling his stick about. 'Mkhulu's going to show me how to be a stick fighter, umbhoki.' He turned to his grandfather, who was lowering himself stiffly onto the ground. 'Is that right Mkhulu? Umbhoki?'

'Yes my boy that's right.' He turned to Nokuthula. 'I needn't have worried about Jason's little legs, he flew up to the top. It was mine that felt like they were giving in. Oh, my old knees are sore, especially from that steep downward path.'

'Did you see any snakes?'

'Nothing, thank goodness. But it was the funniest thing. You know how I always put my top teeth over my bottom lip when I'm concentrating, and d'you remember how Dondo always did the same? Well, inkosiyami, if Jason doesn't do exactly the same thing. Bit his bottom lip whenever the path was steep, or we had to climb up a sheer rock. It just shows you!'

Gogo didn't ask *what* it showed you because the children were clamouring for lunch, but she was smiling as she put out the food on the paper plates.

On their last night there, Gogo offered to tell them a story, a real isiZulu story, she said, that she had heard from her Gogo when she was just a little girl. It was called an 'inganekwane' or little fairy story. She realized her mistake with the word 'fairy' as Jason's lip curled and he told her that boys and even girls like Mel didn't believe in fairies. They were rather going to play their *Crime in the City* game.

In the emptiness after they had gone, Dlabela and Nokuthula sat at their kitchen table and looked at each other, both busy with their own thoughts.

Dlabela shrugged. 'Well, we tried, and we had some good times. Remember the walk on Sunday? But we didn't know how very different they would be, true children of the twenty-first century. And yet our children too, blood of our blood.' He gave a little laugh. 'But they must have found us terribly old-fashioned.'

Nokuthula didn't laugh. He was astonished to see her put her hands over her eyes and to hear her breath catching in her throat.

'What is it mkami? Are you crying?'

'They are our children and I know we had some good times. But they d-didn't want my isidudu. Jason wasn't interested in the milking. The photograph album was not even opened. They never heard the inganekwane I had ready.'

'Oh my woman, I am sorry', he said. 'Hawu, you are right. But I want to hear this inganekwane you have.'

'No, don't joke.'

'Come on', he insisted. 'I want to hear it.'

She was smiling a little.

'Right now.'

She wiped her eyes, blew her nose and smiled properly.

'Alright, but not now, tomorrow evening. I'll have to think about it again if I am to tell it to a man of your education and wit. I'll have to make it into an inganekwane for our times.'

And so the next night, she told him the tale she had prepared, of 'Ingqoza Likazinkawu' or 'The Chief of the Monkeys'.

The Chief of the Monkeys

Kwesukasukela.

When the world was still new, the animals lived in peace and contentment. But then the baboons began to get troublesome. They stole the food and nuts of other animals, not just to stay their hunger but wantonly and for the thrill of stealing. No birds, however high their nest, could feel that their eggs were safe from the baboons' thieving fingers. They carried off and ate any babies who had strayed from their mothers. They raided the villagers' fields so that snares and traps were plentiful and many innocent animals were punished, and the humans organized hunting expeditions against all the animals. Even worse, the baboons began to teach other young creatures their bad ways, promising them untold treats and comforts if they would go along with the baboons on their nefarious outings. Young jackals and hyenas were especially susceptible to the baboons' seductive talk. Soon, crime was rife in the bushveld.

The lions called for a great indaba of every creature who had an interest in a well-ordered civil society. Word of it went out via the birds. Trumpeter hornbills served as heralds, going far and wide to inform every area in the bush that there was soon to be a Great Indaba concerning the baboons, and carrying details of the meeting to every tree, koppie, river bed, krans and vlei.

On the appointed day, the animals, birds, reptiles and even some of the larger insects who had suffered the baboons' depredations - all those who had been elected to represent their kind and even many who thought they should have been elected, came trooping, flying, scampering, crawling and slithering along to the Place of Assembly, a broad valley floor. As the morning wore on, the birds, who had been there before sun-up, got impatient and called for the lions to begin proceedings, but the snakes were still pouring in barely awake so all had to wait. The only animals who were not among that multitude were the baboons and their cohorts of jackals and hyenas. These ranged themselves along the cliffs above the valley, throwing down stones and jeering at the gathering below, until six or seven eagles soared up and put a stop to that.

At last, when the sun was about a third of its way across the sky, the lions roared for order and their speaker, a magnificent black-maned male, stepped forward onto the edge of a rocky outcrop where every delegate could see and hear him.

'We all know what has occasioned this Indaba,' he said in a muted growl. 'The baboons and their criminal activities. We must stop them if we are to live in peace and harmony once more. The solution is not obvious. I call for suggestions from the valley floor.'

The ideas flowed thick and fast. The snakes offered to eradicate the baboons by a concerted drive against them. The elephants pointed out that not all baboons deserved to die and that

indiscriminate killing was not something noble animals like themselves could be party to. Genocide was a crime against animality. At this, the snakes hissed and looked venomously at the elephants so the Chairlion quickly invited the zebras to speak. Their suggestion, that a generous tribute be paid to the baboons so they would have no need of thieving, was howled and snorted down as very silly. Following on the elephants' remarks, the kudu said that what was needed was to distinguish the innocent from the bad baboons. Perhaps some kind souls would undertake the task of observing the baboons. This found general acceptance. But who would do the job?

Eventually, after much diving and dodging and ducking which, as the Spokesleopard pointed out, did not redound to the credit of any species, the lot fell to the monkeys. They were small, quick and clever. They could go anywhere: on open veld, in thick bush, along rivers, and their aerial manoeuvrability was important since many of the baboons' evil deeds were committed in the forest. Monkeys were ideally favoured to hide in the foliage and catch the miscreants in the act. So much was said about the monkeys' excellent surveillance capabilities, that their ambassador was flattered into enthusiasm for the job. He was a vain, ambitious little fellow called Belesi but with a reputation for managing things well. He agreed to the proposal without any conditions, on behalf of the whole local population of *Cercopithecus Aethiops* and so it was that the monkeys became the police force of the bushveld with Belesi as their Ingqoza or Chief.

The snakes offered to act as the executive arm of the judiciary. When a criminal was marked in some way by the monkeys (skunk juice was to be one means, cochineal from the turksvye was another) the snakes would see to its exit from society. The leopards were also eager to help in this task.

At the Great Indaba, there was one small, pale meerkat whom the other meerkats did not recognize. He was, he told them, from a distant but very big colony on the edge of the far forest. In fact, this was Chakijana in disguise. Chakijana, that wicked spirit who delights in wrong-doing and inflicting pain, had come to find out what the animals were planning. He went away from the Indaba full of misgivings about the damper that was about to fall on criminal activities in the bush.

Under Belesi the rough and ready system of criminal control worked quite well. Of course, there were teething problems. Not all monkeys were suited to the task. The attention span of the monkey is slight so that some inducement was needed to get them to keep on following and observing the troops of baboons; extra rations of bananas or berries helped on this score. Belesi ordered that mothers with babies, the young and the very old were all exempt from the work, though expected to keep their eyes about them.

As the organization settled down, the baboons began to feel its effect. Several of the most mischievous, leaders of gangs legendary in their capacity for misdeed, suddenly developed an

offensive smell or a crimson patch somewhere, and then got fatally bitten by snakes, usually mambas, or eaten by leopards. The baboons had not been at the Great Indaba of course, so they were mystified by these frightful happenings. First the mothers with babies began to stay at home, safe in their rocky fortresses, then others joined them, and soon, it was rare to see a troop of baboons, however small, abroad in the bush. The marauding stopped, raids on village fields were few and far between.

It was only when Chakijana came to them one day, in the shape of a very large and fat baboon, to explain things, that they saw the light. He explained how the monkeys were acting as a surveillance force, and the snakes and leopards were the executioners. With his innately evil character, Chakijana felt at one with the baboons and was disposed to help them fight the monkeys.

'Bahwoum, bahwoum!' barked the alpha male of the largest troop in the bushveld, an acknowledged leader of the whole tribe and eloquent to boot, whose name was Brott. 'We must do something about this threat to our pleasant and hitherto successful way of life or we shall all be skin and bones soon, our bleached skulls lying among the krantzes, our children helpless prey of the leopard. Come, let me hear suggestions as to how we might get these monkeys off our backs.'

They scratched their heads and armpits, they combed their navel hairs for fleas (an exercise which is an aid to cogitation in baboons) but no plan was forthcoming. At last, the very large and fat newcomer stepped forward, introduced himself as Glonn, and said to the troop: 'Let me befriend Belesi. He is a fool, vain, greedy and ambitious besides, and now he is also power-drunk, so it will be very easy to guide him, softly softly, into our clutches.'

'But how will you befriend him? He has a great antipathy to baboons.'

'Oh, leave that to me,' said the fat one.

Next morning, as Belesi and his mates swung from the branches of a marula tree, munching on the fruits and scanning for signs of baboons (this was known to be a favourite marauding ground of theirs) they spied a little pale meerkat watching them.

'Hi there meerkat,' called Belesi. 'What news do you bring us from the bush?'

'Oh sir, I have seen some baboons in the mielie fields down there, stealing mielies, one in particular is a huge and strong one.'

'Come friends, let's go get 'em,' Belesi shouted to all his troop, and they scampered off in the direction the meerkat had indicated, carrying their pouches of cochineal and skunk secretion. The meerkat, who was really Chakijana, disappeared into the long grass, changed swiftly into a black mamba, and sailed through the grass towards the distant mielie field far faster than the monkeys could go. He had time to change into the fat baboon and even assemble a tall pile of fresh green mielies before the monkeys arrived.

'Hey you there!' called Belesi. 'What do you think you're doing?'

'Greetings great chief, Ingqoza likazinkawu. I have just picked a few mielies which the people of the village won't miss. See they have so many more on the stalks. It is not fair that they deny us any for after all, the fruits of the earth should be for everyone. We also have to eat in order to live. You and your troop have to eat and you are welcome to share what I have here,' and he held out a fistful of juicy sweet young mielies.

Green mielies were a particular favourite of Belesi's so he listened as the fat baboon spoke on, persuading him that it was no very great crime to take a few when there were so many, and that animals had rights too, and his mouth began to water. In the end, Belesi sent the troop off to check on the back of the field and without any great struggles of conscience, took and ate of the green mielies. In fact he managed to consume three before the others came back. The fat baboon was delighted. He asked if he could call Belesi his friend, and Belesi agreed readily. 'And if anyone asks, I shall say you are my friend too because you are a good baboon. I shall instruct my troops to leave you alone whenever they see you, never mind what you are doing.'

Chakijana promised many more good things for Belesi in the future - they would just have to keep it between themselves or everyone would want. Besides mielies, he could get sugar cane from the villagers, and even eggs from their hen-houses. Soon Belesi was in receipt of an unending stream of delicacies and treats from Chakijana and his baboons, some of which he shared out among certain other monkeys (the cleverer ones who could see what was going on) to keep them sweet. So things went on for many a long month. The immunity the baboons enjoyed, at least Chakijana and his bunch, led to a wave of new crimes, violence and destruction.

There were however, some monkeys who didn't share in the good things the baboons distributed. Belesi knew that their ideas of duty, and their standards of goodness, were higher than his own, and he feared them. They saw Belesi growing fat on the ill-gotten gains of the baboons and they agreed among themselves that he would have to be brought to book and stung for his wrongdoing. It took a long time to gather evidence, and to find monkeys honest enough to speak out against their corrupt boss.

The lions and elephants who had supported Belesi's appointment were reluctant to believe that he could have gone so bad so quickly, that their judgement of him could have been so erroneous, and these highly-placed animals were slow in implementing, or even deliberately impeded, the course of justice. Then too, it was embarrassing for the entire bushveld to have one so prominent, who had even acquired a status far beyond the bush, revealed thus as a baddie.

But at last Belesi was brought before the Council, made up of the wisest animals and birds. Some notable baboons gave their evidence in return for immunity from the snakes and leopards.

Chakijana or Glonn, in the guise of a fat baboon still, did a plea-bargain deal and greatly enjoyed his day in court, chuckling at the thought of his immunity and sanctimoniously damning the monkey whose downfall he had wrought. Of course, as the secretary bird Judge President noted, it was hard to know who was telling the truth and who was lying, since perjury was nothing to criminals as hardened as these and they were all practised liars.

Belesi was found guilty and sentenced. But the tale has a happy ending, on two counts. Firstly, Belesi's lawyers (a team of crows) persuaded the High Court that, in view of his age and ill-health, he should be given a suspended sentence. So he was spared the attentions of the executioners and when the period of suspension ended, he threw a great celebratory party for all his old cronies.

His second triumph came when a film director in Hollywood heard of the extraordinary career of Belesi, Chief of the Monkeys, and realized that here lay the stuff of fiction. Its thrilling highs and heart-rending lows, the dark background of the underworld, the days of glorious plenty - all these were the makings of a box-office hit. So Belesi lived out his days with the lustre of fame and in the glow of plenty.

Coyi! Cosu cosu, yaphela.

Tea and Coffee

The sun was very hot this December morning. She had no hat on and her sensitive eyes, even behind their tinted lenses, were blinded by the strong light, so that when she opened the peeling little door of the letter box and peered inside, she saw nothing but spiralling green afterimages. She had to put her hand in and feel with finger tips. There had been so many stories of spider-bite lately among her friends and she had often found the deadly little button spiders, or the violin spiders with their red markings, in her garden.

A hailstorm had come down the night before, thrashing the trees and shrubs and tossing leaves and twigs, even small branches, about on the lawn and flagstones. Leaves of the lemon-scented verbena over the postbox had been bruised so that its perfume now hung heavy on the air. From childhood, there had always been a lemon-scented verbena in her gardens; its breath was as familiar as memory.

Yes, there was something in the letter box: the usual pamphlets and advertisements, but a letter too. She took it all to the stone bench under the trellis, which bore a tangle of wisteria. Much of the old creeper was dead, its stems exposed in their complex coils, but here and there it was still green and in full flower, with bees at the lilac sacs of nectar. The quiet was overlaid with tiny noises from a flock of white eyes in the viburnum behind her. This secluded corner was her preferred spot in the garden. From here, she couldn't see the slimy green swimming pool, or the overgrown herbaceous borders, or the weed-ridden lawns, and the sundial in front of the bench was as bright as the day it was installed. It was Anyway's self-appointed task to clean and polish it.

The post included the usual things, mainly junk mail: fliers for a nearby pizzeria, for the supplier and installer of razor wire, Casa Woof dog parlour, a security consultant. One letter. She tore it open with stiff fingers and made out that it was from the bank. The cheque book that she had ordered some weeks before had arrived and lay at the bank awaiting collection, 'within ten days of date hereof or it will be returned to depot.'

She frowned. This would mean an excursion. She and Anyway would have to make the trip into Sandton soon, take on the traffic with its taxis and lorries, brave the crowds in the Mall, try to find their way through the labyrinth of shops, escalators, passages and levels. Anyway was better than she about it, he even claimed to enjoy the outing, but he was surely just being positive for her sake.

Where was he now? she wondered. Must be in the garden somewhere because Tuesday wasn't a house day. Though he still lived on the property, he worked only three days a week for her now. Tuesdays and Wednesdays he was in the garden and Thursdays in the house, going to another

garden in the area for the other two days. Now that she was alone, the house and property really didn't need a fulltime manservant. Besides, it meant she could still pay him a decent wage.

She found him at the pool, wielding the long-handled leaf scoop, taking last night's debris off the surface of the water.

'Anyway, we have to go to Sandton City soon, this week, maybe Thursday morning.'

'Yebo Ma'm. Ma'm must please buy some more chlorine and acid, it is finished now from two weeks, you can see this pool is not right.'

'Hmm, maybe we should go tomorrow, get it over with. I don't want something like that hanging over me. Tomorrow then Anyway, we go to town. Leave half past nine so the traffic's not too bad and it's not so crowded.'

She had driven as a young woman, handled the big cars that Max favoured with confidence, even panache, but since her eyes had gone, Anyway took her wherever she needed to go. He treated the old green Mercedes with such reverent care that she had even considered leaving it to him in her will. But he would never sell it, and licence fees, insurance, upkeep, even the cost of petrol would make it a burden rather than a benefit so she had decided against it.

It was ten days to Christmas. The roof parking area was full so they had to drive around hoping to find a spot that someone was leaving, and when they did, it was against the furthest wall from the lifts. The heat on the open roof hit her as she got out, sun beating down from above, the concrete radiating heat from below. She stood holding onto the car for a moment to get her balance and give her eyes a chance to adjust. Then Anyway was there with his arm at the ready to steer her round hazards she would not see, and get her to the right lifts.

'We should go to the Hyper first Anyway. I want to get some cheese, it's the one place where you can get Stilton, and their wines are good. Reasonable. We will get some chlorine too. But no acid, the pool doesn't really need acid. If you get the chlorine right, the pH takes care of itself.'

The mall was decked out for the festive season, ablaze with colour, glitter, sparkle and shine. Every shop had tinsel and fairy lights, snowflakes and *Merry Christmas* in its windows. In the public spaces there were illuminations, glittering Christmas trees with brightly wrapped boxes underneath; in the main forecourt, a red-clad Father Christmas sweated in the midsummer heat beneath a cottonwool beard, taking the line of children one by one onto his knee to hear their Christmas wishes.

Crowds of people - families with children, women in pairs or threes, men on their own with set faces and bags in their hands - were hurrying from shop to shop. It was impossible to move at her preferred gentle pace and they found themselves being hustled along, past the sweet shop with its Christmas canes; through the food area where fried chicken, swamas, fish and chips, pizza,

hamburgers, all vied for the passerby's attention; past Red Square with its perfumes; past the Oriental carpets with their crimson and black silks in arcane patterns; past the bathroom boutique with its proposition that hygiene and cleanliness should be luxurious too; past the bookshop full of the latest knowledge and stories and news.

The Hyper was even fuller than the concourses outside. There was no Stilton. The *Specials* on display had no charm for her, she didn't celebrate Christmas. She enjoyed the general air of peace and quiet that settled over Jozi when the pre-Christmas frenzy had abated, but it was not her religion, not her festival. And since she had been on her own, it had made little sense to celebrate Chanukkah.

They had to wait in a long queue at the checkout even though they had only four items and she was feeling quite giddy when they finally got out.

'Up to the bank now for the cheque book,' she told Anyway, leaning on his left arm while he carried the bag in his right.

At the escalators, she peered down, trying to put her foot on a whole step and not on a division that would shift and unsettle her, but they moved by so fast. Once on, she had to adjust her stance, still holding onto Anyway's firm elbow. Halfway up the long incline, there was a commotion ahead of them and three teenage boys flashing earrings, in baggy pants and hightop sneakers, caps on backwards, came whooping and jumping down the escalator.

Doing it for a dare no doubt, she thought as they rushed past. The last one lurched against her, she pitched forward and went down heavily on hands and knees. She was almost at the top - thank god Anyway managed to get a good grip of her arm and haul her upright just in time to get her off. He helped her to a bench. Though there was no bleeding, her shins were stinging from the sharp edges of the treads and she was shaking violently.

'Those boys, eish! They are tsotsis! Ma'm just sit here and get little bit better.'

'Yes. Thank you, Anyway.'

When she had recovered a bit, they went on to the bank. Again a long queue, but at last she had what she had come for, the cheque book. She signed for it in shaky letters, and they turned to go. She declined to use the escalator again, and Anyway steered her to the lifts.

They went past the tables of the Mugg and Bean, where the smell of roasting coffee beans was on the air. She was suddenly overcome with a desire - no, a sharp *need* - for a cup of coffee. After this trying morning, she needed a strong coffee. Should she send Anyway on to the car with the packages and tell him to come back for her in half an hour? Then he would have to wait in the baking heat of the roof parking lot. No, not fair.

She had just resigned herself to going without the coffee when she saw a black couple at one of the tables, chatting to a white woman, and she was reminded that if she chose, Anyway could also sit and have a cup of coffee. Gone were the days when no black person was allowed to enter a white coffee shop, she must remember that times had changed.

'Anyway, put the bag down over here, at this table. We - you and I - are going to have some coffee,' she said and went to sit down. Anyway stood looking at her with his head to one side for a moment but then he did as she said.

He looks very decent, she thought to herself, scanning the slight figure opposite her in his grey flannels and short-sleeved blue cotton shirt. We could almost be old friends. Nothing wrong with what we are doing and if any of my friends comes past, I will explain about the accident on the escalator and how I just had to have a cup of coffee.

'I'm having a cappuchino. What will you have, Anyway?' she asked him.

'I don't drink coffee Mam, only tea,' he replied.

The waiter came to ask for their order, she gave it, adding with a lift of the chin, 'and two waffles. With cream and syrup.'

Anyway was watching the passing crowds, seemingly quite at ease.

Why do I still feel a bit uncomfortable? she wondered. It's not a race thing, I've never been a racist. It's more of a servant / employer question. Does the Queen sit down to tea with her gardener or driver? Of course not. There's the old British tradition of servants knowing their place and maintaining proper relations with their employer, distant and correct, always remembering that in service, their interests take second place to their madam's. On this view, of course I'd have been justified in sending Anyway up to the roof for half an hour while I had my coffee.

But it doesn't seem right. And I don't think that kind of servant is even so common any more in Britain, not for ordinary people anyway. It's a char once or twice a week, and the chars are quite likely to be on a social par with their employer, students or foreign girls au pairing. The relationship nowadays is more of a business one. The old-style servant is fast disappearing here in Joburg also, and when you hear someone say 'Oh, Tryphina or Constance or Bertha is a gem, one of the old school', you know what to expect: a meek, exploitable woman who looks in return for parental care from you. No, that's a relic of our bad old history and it's time to sweep it away. And there's actually a feeling of relief in not having the responsibility for someone's whole life in your hands. I far prefer the idea that Anyway is an independent contractor who can take care of himself.

The 'independent contractor' opposite her was looking round the coffee shop.

'Ma'm, is the first time I'm coming here in a place like this. To drink some tea.'

'And high time too.'

He looked at the menu. 'Eish, Mam, is too much food here. Sixteen sandwiches! Some people can eat a lot.'

'Well they don't eat them all, Anyway.'

People don't always realize that things have changed. Maisie Rosen got a nasty shock when she was moving to Cape Town and Sarah threatened her with the CCMA because Maisie hadn't known about giving her a severance package or leave pay. She paid up willingly of course but with a red face. Only right too. The law should be far stronger for domestics - ridiculously low amount for severance payments: one week's wages for every year in the job. It would mean R15 000 for Anyway, and the interest on that wouldn't keep a mouse alive.

Of course, Anyway's not just a three-day per week employee. He's been with me for forty-three years, from when he was just a boy of sixteen and under-gardener to old Wilson. I've known him longer than I've known my own son. And I've grown fond of him in that time - he's never given me cause to doubt him. He's a good old fellow. I've done right by him in the will. Adam and Sharon will be furious when they see what I've left him but he deserves it. Who is it that leads this poor blind old duck around the malls, drives her everywhere, saves her from ruffians? Not Adam, not Sharon.

Their order arrived. Anyway tasted his waffle in small bites at first, which got bigger as his enthusiasm for this new food grew, and when she couldn't finish hers, he ate that too. His teapot ran to two cups which he enjoyed in a leisurely way, so that she found herself waiting for him to finish.

'So you are quite at home in the coffee shop, Anyway. Like a duck to water. I'll have to see that you don't go sneaking off for mall visits on your own.'

'Hawu, Mam! You know me, I don't do that!' He was smiling.

Her bruised legs were painful. It took a long time to make their way back to the car and it was blazing hot when they got in. She wound down her window, told Anyway to do the same. As she settled back on the familiar leather seat next to him, she felt them both reverting to their established roles, and yet there was something new about them now. A sense of ease had entered their relationship and she liked it.

The Paid Piper

Conan stood watching as the two waiters manoeuvred the sofa into place at the round table. Everyone in the other chairs had to shift up to make room for it. Things were not going smoothly tonight, and the first session of a course was critically important.

When he arrived at the Reef Club, there was a roped-off area in the foyer where painting was being done, with plastic sheeting on the marble floor and scaffolding on two walls of the double-volume foyer. The antique photographs of the first Committee members with their Victorian wing collars and fob chains, and of founder members like Cecil John Rhodes and Sir Abe Bailey, had been taken down for the work. Flakes of white paint spotted the crimson carpet on the stairs, spoiling their grand sweep. The sense that they were entering the halls of power must have been utterly ruined for the course participants. He had chosen this particular club precisely for its aura of old money - he was paying handsomely for the use of a conference room here - and his people could just as well have been coming into an industrial warehouse.

Then, when all the twenty course participants had assembled in the Darlington Room, a problem arose regarding seating for one of them, a vast man whose head sat on the mound of his body like a stone on an anthill. Conan had to delay his opening speech when the man complained that he could not get into any of the chairs provided; Conan then had to go and find the manager and hunt about with him for an alternative. They eventually found a two-seater sofa in the Ladies' Room. The effect on all the other participants as it was being carried in and set down, was unsettling. And finally, to top it all, instead of being contrite, the obese man went on the offensive.

'So you don't get big bras coming to your course before? No room for big men here, hey?' as if his size were a virtue.

Conan remembered that obesity was thought to be admirable in traditional black cultures so he replied that such heroic size was rare and he had not anticipated the honour of such a giant attending the course. The man grunted in acknowledgement and lowered his bulk to the edge of the sofa, spreading huge thighs that funnelled down to incongruously small shoes.

While all this was going on, the others had sat impatiently clicking pens, looking through the course packs and talking among themselves. Now he had to take them in hand. His irritation was useful. It would facilitate his favoured attitude in this opening session: a studied reserve, a cool distance of manner which established him as the authority in the room, dispelled any thoughts of a chummy atmosphere in the course, and invited respect, even reverence. He shot the cuffs of his shirt with their Bulgari ruby cufflinks, adjusted the Miyaki tie and took his seat. Twenty expectant faces turned to him.

‘Welcome to you all at this introductory session of our course in *Personal Power*. To understand the general approach we’ll be taking, let’s briefly unpack the words ‘personal’ and ‘power’. The *personal* is the essence of each one of us. It’s often left out of account in our daily doings, when we’re busy filling all the roles that a demanding society expects of us: father / mother and the whole suite of family relations; all the roles we have to play at work and in our religious or sporting affiliations and a hundred other ways. But who is it, at the core of all the roles? Who is the person inside them? This course aims to help you answer that question and to teach you how to nurture the core of your identity, your own special personhood.

‘The second term is *power*. In our context, if you have power, it means that you are psychologically strong with minimal weaknesses. A strong personality is a powerful one. On this course, you will be moulded to become the best person that you can; you will develop a strong, defect-free character. The people who do that are able to achieve whatever other goals they choose to set for themselves - recognition, wealth, love, happiness. And over the next eight weeks, you will see that these claims are not wild dreams. They will be realized in each and every one of you who follows this programme, which is based on both ancient and modern wisdom.

‘We’re going to be travelling together on the road to personal success, helping each other along where necessary, so we’ll start by going round the table for introductions. Just your name, what you do, and what inspired you to come along on this journey.’

In the course of this short speech, Conan had looked deep into the eyes of every one of the people around the table, holding each one’s gaze for a fraction of a second.

‘Let’s start with this gentleman whom we already know slightly.’ He smiled at the man on the sofa who straightened up a little, aware that his head was lower than everyone else’s.

‘My name is Wellington Mphumuza. I am a businessman, an owner of retail outlets, and now I am a director of companies too.’

‘Can you say a few words about why you’ve signed up for the course?’

What can I tell them, this tableful of white people with only two other black faces? My English isn’t good enough, I’m not even sure I could explain it in isiZulu, though that would be much easier. But of course I never need to say it to my fellow amaZulu, I’m usually quite comfortable among them. Now I don’t want to admit to this roomful of whites what I feel, the mixture of weakness and fear and awkwardness that comes over me when I sit down in a boardroom with men who have been doing this for years and whose fathers were doing this for years before them. My father is still living in an umuzi next to his cattle; his only work is to look after them. My mother, never mind the gas stove and oven I had put in for them, still prefers cooking on her wood fire under the buffalo thorn tree.

I can admit it to myself, this feeling that makes me sweat when I have to attend yet another directors' meeting, have to raise my voice and tell them how this or that business should go. Because I can do business alright - from the first small spazas to my string of supermarkets to the conglomerate that includes garages, real estate, dry-cleaners, newspaper and TV interests. Yet all these commercial achievements haven't helped with the feelings of shame and awkwardness. Something is gnawing at my heart. I'm not sure what it is but it's the same thing that makes me eat and drink till I get sick. That's really what made me phone the number on the advert promising personal success, happiness, fulfilment. And I am hopeful after what the man said about a powerful personality - that's exactly what I need.

But dikila labelungu! I'm not going to whine to them when I'm twice as smart as any of them. Where are the black men? The advert had isiZulu on it too so I thought this course was meant mainly for us but I find so many women and nearly everyone's white.

Conan prompted him gently with 'Your reason?' so he said briefly:

'I've got a lot of business success but I want to be more happy. And fulfilled.'

They were all looking down at him with kind smiles but he felt the awkwardness again and thought that he must get up and find some cushions to make him the same height as everyone else. But getting up wasn't so easy, so he stayed as he was.

'Thank you Wellington,' Conan said, making notes on his class list. Behind Wellington's name, he wrote *image, def. SOPE*. Oh yes, Wellington would definitely be one of the graduates to go on to higher things in Conan's Sacred Order of Power Eternal.

'Now.' The high-lighted blonde across the table looked articulate, the latest cut of clothes, big diamonds on two fingers. 'Let's have a feminine voice. Madam?'

Diana started a little as Conan's eyes met hers. 'Well. My name is Diana Findlay and I'm a mother of two and a wife - here's my husband,' and she patted James' arm. 'And I'm a housekeeper of course and a taxi driver in the afternoons, so' - she gave a little laugh - 'you'll agree I work very hard.'

Damn them, making me justify the fact that I don't have a job in any formal workplace. Don't they know that only the lower classes think it's anything out of the ordinary; the whole of the northern suburbs takes it for granted that a wife and mother can't be expected to work. I am out of my element here, these aren't my kind of people: three blacks, an Indian woman, some labourer types. James has even brought along the young Portuguese who works for him - a clerk or storeman or something. But I like the look of Conan. He's well dressed, and he has an aura of something I want - sophistication perhaps? self-assuredness? some inner strength? During the introduction, our eyes

met, locked for an instant, and I felt he was seeing into my very soul. Whatever it is that he has, I want it for myself, and I'm sure that over the next eight weeks I'll get it.

Now I must say what prompted me to join up. I don't think of myself as needy or unfulfilled, no it wasn't that ... more that I wanted an edge on the competition. The good things of life are reserved for those who have the drive and determination to go out and grab them, and I intend to be one of them. I liked what Conan said in the introduction. It makes sense: if you have a stainless-steel character, nothing can stand in the way of your intentions. James is totally lacking in ambition, he seems to have no concept of success or how to achieve it. His business runs along by itself quite profitably but he resists any talk of expansion or diversification. He won't even buy us a holiday home in Plett or a bushveld place, when all my friends have one or the other, often both. So some of my motivation for the course was to get James here, to see if this will light a fire under him where I've failed. I said I needed him to come because I couldn't drive myself at night all the way downtown to the Reef Club, so would he please, please, pretty please, just come along with me - he might even enjoy some of it, who could say? So chivalrous old James signed up too. And got his Portuguese clerk along, probably to escort me when he starts cutting class.

'Why did I enrol?' she asked, looking up at the ceiling. 'I liked the sound of *Personal Power* - so different from what everyone goes after these days. I want to make the most of myself, develop myself fully. Aren't we told not to hide our light under a bushel or bury our talents or something?'

She felt pleased with this invoking of religious duty. It made her seem pure and high-minded but not so preachy as to know the exact quotation. Conan found her name on his list of participants, put a large tick behind it and wrote *SOPE*.

'That's a good start Diana. Mr Findlay?'

'Oh, call me James or Jim if you prefer. Yes, I'm James Findlay and I have an importing business, do a little exporting but mainly imports from the East.'

Dear heavens, 'your own special personhood'! Diana's whims have cost me dear in the past and this one's going to be no exception. 'A strong personality is a powerful one.' How vacuous! Either Conan takes us all for fools, or he's a fool himself. And 'moulded to become the best you can', a 'strong, defect-free character'. Does the man imagine that the psyche is like a clay pot? That he can turn out perfect personalities in just twenty-four hours, eight three-hour sessions? That he can smooth over the cracks laid down in infancy, childhood, youth by the vicissitudes of life? The most he might realistically hope to do is create an image, somehow temporarily fill up the defects and lacunae and paint a fair surface on them. Strength of character, which Conan is claiming the course will confer on everyone, is surely a function of a sound upbringing, a solid education, mental and emotional maturity and much more. The fellow's idea that the perfect character must be

omnipotent is equally ludicrous, discounting the obstacles and difficulties, sometimes absolute barriers, that life throws up in one's path.

But James didn't want to drag his old habitual scepticism into this company of eager novitiates, so to the question of why he had joined the class, he answered, simply and honestly.

'I joined up because my wife said I must.'

This caused laughter around the table and James smiled at himself too while Diana hissed: 'Not *must*. You said it was a good idea.'

Conan looked carefully at this self-assured and well-spoken man who had no reason of his own for being there, and who didn't mind appearing uxorious to the class. He put a small question mark behind the name on the list and wrote - *unmotivated*. There might be a critical mind under that silvery thatch; this one would bear watching.

Next to James Findlay sat a young man with an olive skin and tender eyes, who ducked his head as everyone around the table turned to look at him. He was not good at public speaking. The speech he had to make as Head Boy of his old high school had been a nightmare involving weeks of sleepless nights, stomach cramps, palpitations. He had got through it with the help of his mother's homeopathic anxiety remedy and his father's advice to fix his eyes on the door at the back of the hall and speak to that. So now he fixed his eyes on the striped wallpaper on the wall opposite him, and spoke to that.

'I'm Luis Caldeira, I work for Mr Findlay, for *Serica Trading*, doing logistics. And I came to the course because I want to get better.'

No you dummy, that sounds as though you're sick with something.

'Because it's going to help me be a better person.'

Now it sounds like I'm really horrible, a criminal or something, recovering from a bad past. Now I'm blushing too, they'll all think I'm a real idiot.

He turned to Conan who stepped in with a smooth 'Very well put Luis, well said,' and made a note on the list - *unlikely 4 SOPE, no money, needs confidence*. 'Right, let's hear from you sir,' and he indicated the short, well-dressed black man next to Luis.

'I'm Mandai Kabenda, an economist by training, and I work in the investment banking sector.'

That bit was easy. But now, why do I want to do the course? Luis told me about it and it sounded like something different, and when he saw I was interested, he pressed me to come. I liked the advert from the Sunday paper and the mention of the Reef Club as the venue, though if I said that to everyone, it would make me sound like a petty snob. So why did the ad hook me? Fact is, I've got time on my hands at the moment. And I'm hungry for something - don't quite know what it is. All my education so far has been strictly factual, I've studied stats and economics and maths and

finance, but never psychology. I want to know something about what makes people act the way they do, what makes for personality, how different characters result in different kinds of behaviour.

So he said: 'I feel I need to think about what personality is, I want to study human beings.'

'That's an interesting reason Mandai,' said Conan as he wrote *thinker, poss. 4 SOPE??*

As the introductions went on around the table, it emerged that this was a diverse group with people from all kinds of background, some obviously wealthy, some successful in their careers, some not so. One man's father had paid for his course in order to groom him for promotion within the family firm and he was sullen and resentful. A young woman shared with them that she was in recovery from severe neurasthenia and the course was like a lifebelt on a stormy sea for her. Some people struggled to say what their reasons were for attending, while Conan had to curb the loquacity of others. He made notes of his first impressions, marking those who might go on to a higher level, with *SOPE*.

The last person to introduce himself was a blond man of about forty. He had been sitting forward in his seat taking a keen interest in the proceedings; once or twice he had seemed to snort at things said by the others. Conan identified him as a difficult customer, one that he would have to treat with care. He had deliberately left the man till last, had subjected him to the frustration of being made to wait, as an exercise in dominance. And the blond man had been growing progressively more impatient.

Can't see what's wrong with me, why everyone else has to go first. Is this chap deliberately avoiding my eye? Am I just a gap in the table? It's as if I don't exist here. Well, so much for participation. This course had better be worth it - nine thousand five hundred rand isn't peanuts and if we've got a monkey running the course, I'm going to demand my money back. Before it goes on too long. I'll listen patiently for two sessions, then see. And I'll go through the pack of material he's given us - looks as if it's for all eight sessions. Wonder what reading we'll do - we'd better get some ideas other than just Conan's. Wasn't too impressed by his introduction - not directed, not focussed enough. Still, let's give him a chance. He's probably recognized me as his equal and is afraid of what I might say, scared of introducing a personality as powerful as his own into the group. He has to be head honcho of course, I wouldn't challenge that, but I have some ideas of my own on this power thing and I'm not too shy to let everyone know about them.

Now Conan nodded at the man who raised his eyebrows in mock surprise.

'Me? Why thank you. I'm Andrew Taylor and I'm a partner in the law firm of Wentzel Gilfillan. My special area of expertise is litigation. And my reasons for joining up here: I've always taken an interest in the exercise of power and studied how it is that some people just naturally have authority over others. If any of you have read Machiavelli you'll know that he considers this the conundrum

underlying the whole human condition: why it is that some people are princes and some just servants. So when I read Conan's full page ad in the *Sunday Times*, and saw that he was going to address this very same question, naturally I was keen to hear what he had to say on the subject, to see how it lined up with the ...'

'Thank you Andrew, let's keep it short. We still want to get into our introductory section tonight.'

Conan spoke firmly. Andrew subsided, though with a frown, and Conan wrote behind his name *bigger, one every time*.

A Good Day for Loki

Mampoloki woke with a bump. The mattress he was sleeping on had been tipped up to a sharp angle and Kwasi was standing over it, holding the edge and glaring down at him with bloodshot eyes.

'Twenty past nine. You know I come at nine o'clock. You must get out, out, out,' he squealed, kicking the mattress against Loki's backside with each 'out'.

There were four mattresses on the bare floor, the other three all in use with humped shapes beneath piles of blankets and rugs for it was cold. One of the figures stirred, half sat up and growled 'Kgomola wena!'

Loki got to his feet, dull with sleep and angry but awake enough to know he must just keep his mouth shut for now. He would get Kwasi for this later. Kwasi was right of course, the mattress belonged to him and Loki gave him R40 a week to use it from nine at night to nine next morning. But that Lagos hutswa mustn't treat him like a dog and make him look stupid in front of everyone. Anyway, R40 was too much and that was on top of the R140 rent he paid over to Bra Zee every week. He wasn't short of money - he still had lots of sewing-machine nyuku left, a fat roll in the front pocket of his hoodie - but it wasn't fair that he had to give so much of it over to those kreditsotsi.

In the bathroom the toilet was full of stinking shit and someone had vomited on the seat and floor behind it. The bucket was empty again; there was never any fucking water in this place. It was Bra Zee's job to fill it from the tap downstairs and keep it full but he said they used it too fast. They must fill it themselves if they wanted more.

Some majitas were in the kitchen talking like Kwasi, so he walked through to the big room. Bra Zee was sitting on a pile of newspapers against a sunlit wall, knees up, cradling a bottle-neck skyf in some rags. The knitted bag on his head hung over one eye as he looked sleepily at Loki and said 'Arie'. The smoke made Loki's empty stomach clench, but immediately he wanted it. The room was thick with fumes. Bra Zee had been smoking for a while but he wasn't really tripping yet because he'd recognized Loki and greeted him.

Loki sat down in the same patch of sunlight. He breathed deeply and felt the slow sweetness beginning to seep through his arms and legs. There was a half-eaten dikota on the newspapers between them. Zee picked it up, looked at it and put it down again, pushed it over towards Loki who ignored it. It wasn't what he needed now.

'Hey, mphe dipatse.'

'Ganja bra, ganja,' Zee murmured. He took another long pull, inhaled and let the smoke trickle slowly out of his nostrils. Then he passed the bottle neck over to Loki. There wasn't much left in it and Loki hadn't had enough when it was finished.

'Where's the stuff, bra?' he asked, holding out the joint to Zee but Zee's eyes were closed. As Loki watched, his head sank down onto his chest and Loki knew he wouldn't get an answer.

He dropped the dead bottle-neck in its bundle of rags next to the bunny chow, got up and walked about the room. There was no furniture except for the three unequal piles of newspaper which everyone used as seats. More newspapers lay about on the gappy parquet floor along with chewed chicken bones and empty beer cans. There was an old pilchard tin in a corner and its fishy stench rose above even the dagga fumes. Next to it, the wall and floor were black where someone had made a fire on the parquet. Loki kicked a crumpled can at the wall, saw one that was still whole and stomped it flat with his heavy Cats boot.

Hands in the pouches of his hoodie, he went over to the window where two broken panes let in the cold air. It was the same old view. This flat was in the sixth row of ten back from the front of Arista Mansions. All the windows except the number one row's looked onto the back passages of the block in front of them. He watched two doves strutting along a fourth-floor ledge; some small children were playing with cardboard boxes on the fire-escape; a greyish dog was trying to lift the lid on a dustbin below.

Loki saw a pink purse lying on the windowsill. He pulled it open. Nothing in the coin-pocket or the notes folder. Nothing but two useless cards in the holder: a Fourways Clinic outpatient card and one for the Goduka Kahle Stokvel, both in the name of someone called Busiswe Nhlapo. He tore them up. But people sometimes hid things in the lining.

He got out his knife and pressed the button; the blade shot out smoothly. A second push and it was fixed. He worked the razor-sharp point into the purse's seams, opening them up enough to get his fingers in and tear the thing apart. But there was nothing in the lining. He sat down on the windowsill and began stabbing the blade into the white rabbit-thing on the outside.

'Basopa, that's Shorty's.' Bra Zee's voice made him jump.

'Ag it's nothing man, empty. Shorty threw it away. I din' find even one zuka.'

'Watcha for Shorty. If he see that he'll give you grief bra.'

Loki stood up. He needed to get away from Zee, out of that stinking room, away from that crowd in the flat. He didn't like any of them, they wouldn't help him if he asked. He needed to get some spaikos and stuff. Why was he wasting his time here in this place anyway?

He knew why of course: he had come to Jozi to find Lulu. Her mother was his mamokgolo, his own mother's older sister. That made Lulu his sister and she had gone off to Jozi without him and then she had got married. He didn't know where she lived or what her new cell number was, and when he asked Mma Babs, she pretended not to know either. But he heard that mokgekolwana talking to his father, saying that Lulu had married a rich Potokisi businessman, and they had a smart house in

Rozitville. Babs had gone to Jozi to help with the wedding and she was away from Malimode for a long time.

His heart was hurting with the way his sister treated him. But when he found her here in Jozi, she would help him. Her rich husband must give him a decent job and a new car and then he will wear a suit and sit in his own office and eat in the restaurants. He will get a striped suit and a black hat with a white band. And white shoes with black toecaps. Then he will be a real swanka.

Lulu and Babs were the women of his family and they had to help him. When he was just a mosemanyana and his own mother was working in the city, he went to them and got food. When he got older and needed money he went to them, especially after his father started locking the door against him, his own son. Sometimes he had to be strong with Babs because she was a selfish old woman. She got more difficult after Lulu left the house, but in the end he always got what he wanted. And it was Lulu, on a weekend visit home just two months ago, who helped him with his last and best score, who told him where to find thirty new-new sewing machines, no security, easy job. He and his bra went to the school hall that night, just loaded up those machines in a friendly taxi and took them to a bra in Polokwane. He asked no questions. Loki's share of the nyuku was four stina, much more than he would have got for Lulu's purse, her jewellery and cellphone so it was a good exchange.

Then she slipped out of Malimode without giving him, her own brother, any address or phone number. But he would find her. This place where he was staying was close to Rozitville; he was watching.

At a fast-food caravan just outside Arista Mansions, he bought pap, wors and sous and ate it in big handfuls as he walked down to the shopping centre. He sat on some steps to finish the food. The bra who worked in the bottle store sold four zolls of good Durban gold for two tigers. He also picked up a halfjack of klippies and a two-litre Coke and walked out into the sunshine.

In the playpark, he sat down on a bench and drank enough of the coke so he could empty the brandy into it, chucking the empty bottle over his shoulder where it shattered on the walkway. Then he had five or six pulls of good polisiekkoffie, as they said in Malimode, burped loudly and lit a zoll.

The only other people in the park were two little girls on the swings, and their nanny, a plump young nywana. She was pushing them. Her derries bulged against the pink overall every time she bent to push. He watched them for a while, taking drinks from the bottle, drawing on the skyf. Not a good one, too loosely packed and it burnt down too quickly. When it was finished he flicked the stompie into the bushes, stood up and sauntered over to the rubbish bin - a green 40-gallon drum - in front of the swings. Standing sideways on so that she would see it, he pulled down his tracksuit pants and pissed against the bin, watching her reaction. She walked round to stand in front of the children, looking straight at him as she took something out of her pocket.

'You want some of this Sesi?' he called, shaking his thing. 'Good meat, all the girls love it.'

The shrill blast of a police whistle made him wince. A security guard appeared on the path at the far end of the park, the nywana was pointing at him, and Loki could hardly get his pants up before the dude in uniform came running at him waving a heavy stick. He had to batshaba there. From the pavement outside the park railings, he shouted at her.

'Stupid magosha, you too ugly for me. Nexttime I'm coming and jackrola you there in the bushes.'

There was more he wanted to say but the guard was coming in his direction and talking into his radio so Loki went on briskly, down South Reef Road towards the Mall. He liked to spend time there; it was warm, the people were rich and smart and it was just the sort of place where he would find Lulu one day.

The robot was red at the intersection. Standing a short way into the road, he waited for the cars coming through on the green arrow. A black BMW passed close in front of him, the passenger looked out, and Lulu's eyes met his. In that kanako enyane he saw her eyes go wide and her mouth open - she knew him. He didn't even have time to shout or raise his hand, then the car was gone. He yelled her name and ran after it but it kitimile up the empty road and disappeared into a side street far up the hill.

She recognized him, foshu; the quick fright on her face told him so. That wa sefefe, pretending not to know her own buti who had grown up with her, making like they were strangers. So she drove round in a G-string now, the stories of the rich monna wa lehowa must be true. He hadn't had time to get the number plates but he felt very pleased that he had seen her and made contact. Now she would know he was looking for her. She and the Potokisi must live somewhere close. He would spend more time on this road and in the mall.

He felt in his pockets for the roll of skyfs and lit one. Should he go to the street that they'd turned into, try to find them? Too far for now, he decided, maybe tomorrow. The polisiekoffie and stuff were catching up with him. He badly wanted to go to a safe place where he could find a patch of sun and tipa undisturbed. Even Arista Mansions began to seem attractive.

But when he got back to the flat he found something going on in the big room.

'E'itha. Di'ntshang?' he greeted Zee.

'Fede bra.' Shorty, who was sometimes called Blessing from his isiZulu name Sibusiso, was friendly. Zee, however, stared mutely at the window while Kwasi sat on a newspaper stack with his face in his hands.

'So whatsa kinga?' Loki looked from one to the other. It was Zee who answered.

'We in shit here bra, we gotta get some nyuku.'

'Ya we do howzahowza,' came Kwasi's high-pitched voice.

Loki felt nervous. Housebreaking here in Jozi could be dangerous. Even in Malimode they heard the new police chief was being very hard, if you carry a gun and the police see that, they can shoot you, even kill you. Loki didn't want to be in on this job.

'Hey anginenkinga, I just koka the rent, just leboda here.'

Zee looked at him as if seeing him for the first time.

'You kgonji here with us bra, our kinga is your kinga. You help us, you get some nyuku too. Blessing got a good place to hit.'

'Yebo, it's only one old woman who's blind, small old dog sleeps inside. Gate's easy, no alarm. We cut the phone lines, she probly hasn't even got a cell.'

'No cell? That's poor people' said Loki. 'What's the dullas?'

'Jewels, she's got a lot of jewels - gold, diamonds.'

'Jewellery's not so good like TV's and cameras and laptops bra.'

'This is good jewels, domkop, real class. Kwasi's got a contact, we'll get lotsa nyuku.'

'Also a OK TV. Car's too old,' Shorty added.

'Where you know this from?'

'I know that place, my baba's the driver, he lives there in the back room. The maid there kudala kudala, Tryphina, she tells me about that salukaz's jewels in a safe in the bedroom.'

'Will your baba help us?'

'Nyeke nyeke! And I'm not going in there. Be careful, you can kill the salukaz' but not my baba. Maybe he won't even hear you. Go in the front side of the house, by the swimming pool, there's big sliding doors and you can lift those off the track kalula. Jus' be quiet.'

'Ya ya we quiet.' Kwasi was impatient.

'Shorty'll drive tonight. We go in. You, Loki, you stolling?' Zee asked.

He could use some more nyuku and it sounded like an easy job. Also, the way Zee had looked at him when he tried to get out of it, made him scared. So he replied:

'Fosho bra. What time?'

'When we ready man. Chila'

So they chilled. Loki got a blanket from Kwasi and lay down against the wall. When the sun began to go down, he woke cold and hungry, and lit a zoll wishing he had some klippies left.

Kwasi and Shorty came in later carrying a plastic bag each. From one, Shorty brought out a brown paper bag in which were six big magwinya. Next to them he put down two bottles of Black Horse vodka.

'Where's Zee? Here's food for everybody.'

'Ya first eat, drink. Then we get ready,' Kwasi said.

'What we gotta do to get ready bra?'

Kwasi and Shorty looked at each other and snorted.

'Hey chizboy,' said Shorty. 'We gufa man, gufa.'

Loki watched Kwasi take two light bulbs from his bag, and some paper straws, thicker than a drinking straw and about as long as a finger. With a slim file, he began to saw at the metal base of the bulbs, tapping these off against the window sill when they were nearly through.

Shorty was pulling a vetkoek apart with his fingers and eating it when Bra Zee came in and took one too, handing another to Loki with the brief instruction: 'Eat.'

They passed round the bottles of vodka.

Then Kwasi opened a paper straw and poured a white powder into one of the open-necked glass bulbs. Shorty, seeing Loki's interest, said 'That's tik, chizboy, meth. Don' you know it?'

Kwasi lit a stub of candle, held the bulb over it and the white stuff began to bubble with a small crackling and popping sound. White fumes snaked out. He held it up to his face for a while, breathing deeply. Then he passed it on to Loki.

In a couple of seconds, Loki's world turned inside out. Hidden colours and shapes jumped out suddenly. Everything in the room - cans, rubbish, even the stain on the wall - was sharply outlined. Loki felt he was seeing truly for the first time, was seeing the secret insides of things. He turned to Bra Zee, busy using the second bulb, and saw that he was a beautiful man. Everything was beautiful.

'It's beautiful bra,' Loki breathed to nobody in particular.

He didn't want to give up the bulb but Kwasi took it out of his hand.

'Slow it bra, more jus' now.'

'Hey this is better than patse!' Loki stood up, bending his head so it didn't bang into the ceiling. His legs were so strong he wanted to run up the walls for fun, but putting one boot on the wall told him it wouldn't work. Still, he felt that he was strong as a lion, clever as the crocodile.

Blessing was holding his silver gun and loading it like a mama feeding a little baby. Zee's piece was black, he was screwing a pipe onto the front of it. But Loki's goni with its mamba-fast blade was a better way to kill than any gun. He got it out to try it and the others looked on as he shot the blade out a few times then hurled it into the floor where it stood, tip buried in the wood and quivering like a live thing. He tugged it out and closed it, it felt snug in his palm.

Loki led the way down the iron stairs at the back, holding the rails to swing down five, six steps at a time. They all got into Shorty's skorokoro, Loki keeping his head clear of the roof. It was hard for him to sit still in the small space next to Kwasi in the back, his legs were dancing by themselves. The other three were talking fast in high voices, he didn't listen to what they were saying; they sounded like a hok of pigs squealing before the knife. The old car went fast on the highway. There were lights, red-orange, on high poles down the middle, each one an open gash on the black night sky. Loki had the strange

feeling that they were moving through a thick liquid in which the other cars, the houses, everything was pushed out of shape.

At the security gate, Bra Zee showed the guards his gun, told them he didn't want any trouble or any police and if that happened, he would know where to find these guys. They melted into the dark.

It was Loki with his big hands who worked the pliers and the old padlock snapped like a dry twig. The glass door on the patio was light as paper; he helped Kwasi lift it off the rails and lay it gently on the lawn.

Inside, he picked up a small dog that was screaming, held it close to his chest and squeezed the button that slid the blade into its heart. It kicked a few times then went slack and soft, the warm blood ran over his hand. The old woman stood trying to put on her glasses but Zee knocked them off her face. She fell over, screaming in a soft hoarse voice 'Anyway, Anyway'. The safe in the cupboard was open. Kwasi pulled a pillowcase off a pillow on the bed. Zee scooped everything from inside the safe into it.

The old woman was lying on the carpet. She stared up at Loki standing over her, squinting as if she was trying to remember him. He lifted his boot and stamped hard on that face. It felt like a melon bursting under his foot, and he was again a little boy running through a lephotse garden popping all Mma Dineo's melons. He laughed.

Kwasi was pulling his arm, they went out there, following Bra Zee down a passage. Someone was standing in front of them and he was shouting in isiZulu. Zee's gun coughed softly twice. Then again. They went on past the small heap against the wall. Loki looked back. He saw the trail of beautiful red footprints that his Cats were leaving on the beige carpet.

Running the Gauntlet

He ran through the canyons of dead flesh all night. High walls glistened red and pink, displaying all the infinite variety of once-living bodies: slabs of tissue shot through with white sinews and edged with yellow fat; cross-sections of bone surrounded by rosettes of pink muscle; ribs curved like pan-pipes sounding an unheard dirge. The rumps, the flanks, the legs, still had something of the form of the living animal and he had the mad fantasy that they were herds imprisoned in that icy enclosure, huddling there until they would break out in ghastly nakedness, legs clumping along without bodies, rumps heaving themselves along the floor, to freedom.

It was cold in the corridors. He tried not to breathe as he ran through them because the stain of death was on that chill air. The others claimed not to notice anything. They said the fridge doors shut out any odours, that he was imagining a smell. But if he took breath there, his head, his whole being, felt the shock of an invasion and he knew that he was assimilating corruption. Sometimes he would say a mantra there so that he could move through with a little grace: 'May their souls find peace. May those who have done this find light.'

Those who had done this, or at least set up the display, meant to whet the appetites and thus increase the bills, of customers at *The Meat Saloon*. They meant by this lascivious show of flesh to suggest that any thought of health risks, any ethical objections must be ridiculous. The fridges were set in an overall decor that breathed class, tradition, quality. In the bar area, upholstered leather sofas lined the walls, fittings were of polished brass. The restaurant itself was enclosed by mirrors and dark wood panelling, lights were subdued, table appointments of the very best. At every turn, diners were assured that they were in the right sort of place and in consequence must be doing the right sort of thing.

Deva had chosen to work here at least partly because the bills invariably ran to four figures - sometimes five with French champagne - and the waiters benefitted accordingly. But he had also chosen this place quite deliberately as a test of his strength and as a daily opportunity to steel himself against the world. After the loss of his beloved cat Anna Purrna, when after weeks of racking search he had to face the possibility (presented to him as probability by Jonas the gardener) that she had been eaten by vagrants, he had suffered a deep revulsion against all that passed as normal in the life of the city, so that he had been quite mad for a time. Or so a psychologist would have said. He felt he had been coming to sanity, painfully gaining the insights that he now lived by, at least tried to live by. He had not eaten meat since that time.

This night was to present him with several tests of strength. Lordwick, the maitre d', had opened their briefing with the news that two bar stewards and three waiters had called in sick.

'This strange World Cup sickness takes many forms. Wilson and Oliver have stomach cramps, Dean and Thabo have got headaches and joint pains, Lenny can't walk because of pinched nerves in his back. So we're very short-handed tonight. And fully booked.'

He had distributed the load as best he could, giving Deva only three tables ('because you're still young here') but telling him he would have to do bar orders for his tables as well as food, which meant that he had to pass through not only the fridges leading to the kitchens but also those leading to the bar. Of his three tables, two ordered a round of drinks beforehand and then thankfully settled down for the most part with wine as they ate. But the last table, four black diamonds and their girls, kept ordering from the bar - whiskies, gin-and-tonics, cocktails - so that he was constantly running through those corridors of meat.

There were different kinds of trial too, that he had come to realize went with the job.

Trial by insult was one of the most familiar and it soon became obvious that this was the preferred method of two youngish professionals at his one table. The man who seemed to be acting as host was particularly offensive and one of the others followed his lead. The third man was much younger, less outspoken and seemed to be a subordinate. The host, whose name was Andrew, laid down the parameters for the evening early on, by refusing the table they were placed at.

'No no, it's too near the kitchens. We can't talk or eat with that clatter right behind us.'

Deva pointed out politely that they were some distance from the kitchen, and that anyway, it had double doors so that noise levels were minimized. Andrew then demanded to speak to the manager and when another table was found for them, he shot Deva a triumphant look.

They ordered whiskies as they sat down, the two wives had soft drinks. When the drinks were brought, Andrew looked up in surprise and said: 'But where's the ice? Surely you know to bring an ice bucket with whiskies?'

Deva was on the point of explaining that he wasn't fully versed in bar service but something told him not to give this man an opening for more dissatisfaction. He just apologized, ran back to get it and as he placed it on the table, heard that the talk was about how standards of service in every sector, from restaurants to the Home Office, had nose-dived over the past decade or so. Andrew's wife, a curly-headed brunette, caught Deva's eye and turned her head away from the table.

From their conversation as he waited for them to study the menu, Deva gathered that they were a team of lawyers celebrating their success in some recent trial where it had taken great legal acumen to win the case for the clients and save them from millions of rands in health-compensation pay-outs. The two wives were subdued, soft-spoken; the two older men talked loudly, interrupting each other in what was plainly a struggle for dominance between them; the subordinate gazed admiringly at each in turn.

When the starters came it was the second man's turn to complain. After one mouthful, and before Deva had even served everyone, he said:

'Well you can return these chicken livers to your chef with my compliments. I like my chilli as well as the next man but there's far too much in these - totally inedible. Bring me the prosciutto and melon.'

'Of course sir. Our apologies.' Deva was soothing.

For the main course, Andrew ordered oxtail stew. He informed the table that this was the best oxtail in town.

'Tossie, you must have it too,' he told his wife. She looked surprised and said that she'd been planning to take fillets of chicken Florentine.

'Don't be silly, you don't eat *chicken* here woman! You'll thank me for this oxtail.'

But when it came, the oxtail was judged to be too fatty and cold besides.

'What's happened to this place?' Andrew asked Deva. 'I can't eat this cold greasy dish. At least take these plates of food away and heat them up to the right temperature.'

His wife insisted, however, that her oxtail was fine and quite hot enough as it was, she would keep it, thank you. Andrew glared at her but she ate with calm enjoyment, giving Deva a small smile. The men were onto their third bottle of shiraz when the main courses were finished and complaints were becoming weaker and more slurred.

After a decent pause, Deva asked the table whether anyone would like to see the dessert menu but Andrew said that nobody wanted dessert and he could bring the bill. When it was presented, Andrew looked it over carefully, worked out the totals on his calculator, then sat back and looked up at Deva.

'Don't know if you deserve much of a tip. Can't say it's been a memorable meal in spite of the price, and your service was distinctly sub-standard. I'd say three percent accurately reflects a proper degree of gratitude.'

As they got up to go, Deva held the women's chairs and wished them goodnight. On the way out, Andrew stopped to talk to someone at the table of black businessmen and Deva was surprised to see his wife coming back to the table, which he was busy clearing.

'I may have dropped my comb,' she said, looking about on the floor. 'No, it's not here. But here's something for you.' She slipped a folded R100 note into Deva's hand, whispering 'Your service was lovely. Thank you,' and then she was gone, after her husband.

The table of four black businessmen was also on Deva's list that night. They were all well dressed, flashing rings, cufflinks and tiepins, all seemingly wealthy, with two girls who were not wives but rather lap-sitters. The men were talking business - mergers, preferential shares, leverage,

buyouts - and drinking freely. Two rounds of whisky for the men and cocktails for the girls had gone down before they looked at the menu and even then it was a desultory look. When Deva came back later to take their orders, they were absorbed in a conversation about traditional ways of life and how these were fading. He would have to hustle them into making up their minds.

'Haaibo!' It was the graved voice of a man so fat he seemed to be sitting in the vat of his own girth. 'Young people today, they don't know anything. Even the country people are forgetting our customs.'

The man he addressed, plump and with little round glasses, objected. 'Not my family. My father and mother keep the traditional ways, they honour the ancestors all the time.'

'Even with sacrifice? Does your father have his own herd?'

'No, they still keep a cow and chickens, but if a sacrifice needs to be made, then we buy a cow or a goat. My father does the whole proper ceremony, with an address to the ancestors and everything. He's a teacher you know, a headmaster, and he could've been an imbongi. I remember the time we sacrificed for my grandfather and he did a wonderful praise piece, beginning *Hamba kahle Hlamuka* ... Hlamuka is our takazelo of course.'

'And does he still make sacrifices?'

'Of course. I've often done it too. We've got a family blade for such times, a very old iklwa.'

The fat man dipped his head at the other. 'Then you are still a traditional Zulu, and the brave blood of our forefathers still runs in your veins.'

He was fretting with his menu but not really reading it. Deva was about to ask him what he would like to order, when the man looked up at him. His eyes were bloodshot.

'So what's your name?'

'Mahadevan, sir.'

'OK. I'm called Wellington and over there ... over there is Ndo-nda-ku-su-ka.' Enunciating with the exaggerated care of the drunk, he pointed to the plump man. 'See, my name is a famous English soldier. But what does his name means? Tell him what your name is Donny,' and he chuckled.

Through his glasses the other squinted at Wellington, then looked at Deva. 'It is the name of a great battle between Mbulazi and Cetshwayo, sons of Mpande, to see who would be King of the Zulus. Yes, I am a battle.'

'Warriors and battles, that's us. Umshini wami! We know how to fight, we Zulus. Give us a good war and we're happy.'

Suddenly the fat man stabbed a finger into Deva's waist, making him double over.

'D'you know any history? D'you know what happened in 1906, pretty little Indian boy? Do - you - know?' and he poked Deva repeatedly. 'I will tell you. The Zulu people got tired of having to

pay taxes to whites and buy everything from Indians in their own land. The great chief Bambatha led them. We rose up and killed the invaders. 1906. The streets of Durban were wet with blood, the beaches were red ...'

'Hawu! Wells, thula bra.' It was Donny. 'Have some food. Let go of the past, we are the same nation now.' He lifted his shoulders in apologetic resignation at Deva, as the other man turned to his menu with low growls of 'Usuthu, uthu uthu!'

Deva bent his head slightly and left the table with as much calm as he could muster.

At another table, a different kind of trial was awaiting him. The Whittard family were celebrating Jane's twenty-first birthday: father and mother Whittard, Jane and boyfriend, a granny, a sister and brother. They were a good-looking family; even granny had an upswept silver coiffure; father had smooth pink cheeks and a little moustache; brother had the brooding beauty of the boy in *Death in Venice*. Deva had learnt to keep any such observations to himself and in his professional hours, he was a combination of brisk efficiency and gracefulness of manner. He served with panache; diners felt kingly when he placed a dish in front of them.

He had delivered their starters and was busy pouring a little wine for the host to taste when he felt a hand patting his calf. He stepped back to await the nod that told him he could pour for everyone, thinking it might have been a casual gesture. But a bit later, as he came round to fill Mr Whittard's glass, the hand returned and this time, it was higher up his leg, unmistakably squeezing his hamstrings. He laid the bottle in its ice-bucket at the host's elbow and asked if they were ready to order main courses. By now the hand was fondling his buttocks. Patiently he noted what each one wished to eat, and how they wished it done. It came at last to the father's order. Deva bent down, put his lips close to the man's ear and with a pleasant smile on his face whispered:

'If you don't take your hand off my butt right now I shall scream for the manager and make a huge scene in front of your wife and kids.'

The hand swiftly disappeared, and Mr Whittard smiled weakly as if at some joke.

The evening wound down till the last bill had been settled and the last customers had gone, the last table cleared and the lights dimmed. In the washroom, Deva stuck his head under the cold tap to clear it. He let the icy water run through his hair and around his neck for a long time, drying off under the hot air jet. Then he took his corduroy jacket, said goodnight to the few others who were still around, and stepped out onto the empty Square.

His car was in the employees' parking area across from *The Meat Saloon* and two levels down. As he approached the statue of Madiba, his heart spun a little. A familiar stocky figure was sitting on the stairs next to it, watching his approach, and it got up as he drew near.

'Hullo Deva. How are you?'

'I'm OK, alright. How're things with you?'

'Good, good thanks. Still missing you of course, still wishing you'd come home.'

'Mandy. We've talked this out so often.'

'I know, I know. But I still don't get it - how you can say you love me, that there's no one else, but you don't want to see me.'

Deva sat down on the step, pulling his jacket cloak-style over his shoulders against the cold wind that had sprung up and was swirling papers around.

'I love you Mandai, more than anyone or anything else. But in our relationship, I was always the weak, the nervous one, who looked to you as my sheet-anchor whenever something bad blew up. That made you stronger but it made me weaker. I want to be strong too.'

'But you never get two people perfectly matched in strength in a relationship; one is always the stronger and one the weaker. That's actually what makes for good bonding, the ability to fill each other's needs.'

'But what if my need is to be strong? And does this mean you need my weakness? - for what? - your own ego?'

A quick smile passed over Mandai's face. 'You're stronger already - you'd never have challenged me like that before.'

Deva smiled too. 'Yes, I am getting stronger. And when, or if ever, I feel myself strong enough, I'm going to come looking for you, Mr Kabenda. But no waiting around, remember? You're free to find someone new.'

'Sure. Don't think I loved your weakness though. It was part of you, yes, but I loved your gentleness and grace, your sensitivity towards every kind of living thing too.'

'Thank you for that.' Deva stood up.

'Deva, I know there's a ban on seeing each other, but I've emailed you an invitation to a party next Saturday night. It's going to be a great party - a guy in our Personal Success class who's made a killing with some share issue, is celebrating. You can come alone if you like, I'll be there in case you want a date. But I won't hassle you, you have my word.'

'You make it hard for me. I'll see. No promises. I'd have to swap leaves, and that's difficult.'

'Sure, no promises, you don't even have to let me know. See how you feel.'

Deva got up, pulled his jacket on. Mandai restrained a hug, cuffing Deva lightly on the shoulder instead.

'So long then.'

They made their way in opposite directions across the Square, two small figures in the wide, deserted piazza. The gigantic bronze figure of Madiba in simple labourer's clothes smiled vacantly at

the five-star restaurants and shops around the perimeter. Banks of windows rose over them in serried rows, and above all, a small patch of the night sky gleamed palely, its stars obscured by the floodlights.

The Immaculate Character

Something Conan said last night really hit home with me. If you want to change some weak spot in your character, the first thing is to Identify it, the second is to Objectify, the third to Analyse it, and there's more but this is the initial phase: I O A was what he put up on the whiteboard. Then you can go on to do something about it. Remembering that this whole topic of change comes up in the context of Conan's idea that Personal Power is maintaining an immaculate character.

OK, stage 1, Identify. There's not too much wrong with me but I know I'm a little inclined to be irritable. The team at work are always going on at me not to get angry, especially when the goddamn admin people mess things up. There I go again. So, anger is what I want to change. And Tossie sometimes gives me a hard time about getting angry for nothing. I tell her that standards have to be maintained. Naturally if I let things slide, I wouldn't give a damn about burnt rice or a badly-ironed shirt or dust on things. Well I'm not about to let my standards go. But I'm getting off the theme here. OK, so I've Identified. Anger is what I want to change in my character.

Next, O for **O**bjectify. You've got to get the negative character trait out there, sort of hold it up for inspection. Conan suggested several ways we could do this. Talk to someone about it or write it down or talk it into a tape recorder or video yourself talking it out. But not just vague and abstract. You've got to do it with real situations where the negative character trait is triggered. He used the example of a shy person objectifying the big-party situation. Just sitting and thinking about it isn't enough he said; you've got to pin it down with concrete details so you can look at it for a good A-for-Analysis after the trigger event.

He gave it to the group as a project for the week. There will be a feedback session next time in which anyone who wants to communicate their experience of the I O A process may do so.

So what I'm going to do today is catch myself every time I get angry and describe the situation on my phone. Making it as accurate and neutral as possible. And detailed. Then I can play it back later to myself and analyse it.

It's Saturday 14 August 09h11 and I'm in my car about to leave home and go to the office which is a situation with plenty of anger-triggers. It's Saturday though, which means the traffic's not going to be so bad. So, here goes.

Nine fourteen and here we are at the robot on Fifth and Central, and a snot-nosed kid with bare feet has just come and begged at my window. I'm angry. Not at him, he's just a kid, but at the big fat lump of a supposed *mother* sitting on the traffic island on a blanket eating vetkoek. She's not hungry going by her size. She's not even standing up to beg herself, she's using a child to do it,

probably not her own. On the news the other night they said that these beggars rent kids by the day to go stand at the robots and make money for them. She's probably dressed him up in those rags and taken his shoes away to make him more pathetic. The fact that this is against the law makes no difference of course. What's the law these days? Ha ha, when our revered President has four hundred and eighty seven untested counts of fraud against him? But I'm not being neutral here. Just record, Andrew, record impartially and analyse later.

Nine hours sixteen: we're on Grayston Drive now. I'm in the left-hand lane behind a taxi which has stopped to let passengers off and pick up some others who are sauntering down the pavement towards it. There's a stream of cars in the right-hand lane. Fast cars, so I can't even squeeze in. The taxi *could* have gone another fifty metres or so and found a pull-off bay, but no, he stops just wherever the fancy takes him. I have hooted to point out to him that he is infringing my right as a motorist to proceed down the road. I shall hoot again.

Christ! The bastard has just had the nerve to pull a zap sign at me. Now he's going off, but very slowly on purpose to make me mad. Wait, here's a gap in the right hand lane, and I'm out.

Don't you know the rules of the road you troglodyte?

Whewee! That'll be a good one to analyse. They never know what 'troglodyte' means so they don't know if I'm swearing at them or not.

Nine hours twenty-one: I should start numbering these. I think this is the third entry and I'm just ten minutes away from home. I'm not actually in a rage situation yet but there's one coming up soon. Approaching a red robot at the entry point to the M1 South - the intersection is swarming with men holding squeegees and buckets - they will want to wash my windscreen and I will not want ...

No, NO thank you! I do NOT want my windscreen washed. Put that thing away! Get your filthy rag off my car - this is my car goddammit take your hands off it!

Ah, robot's green! And now I'm on the highway and I can barely see for the muck he's left on my windscreen. I'm going to have to stop on the yellow line, get out of my vehicle into freeway traffic, in order to put the wipers down again. And then I'll have to auto-wash it myself. So a perfectly good windscreen is filthied up and they expect to be given money for the service, never mind that they do it in the teeth of the owner's strong refusal.

This one doesn't involve me directly but it's so typical and so criminal that it makes me boil anyway. Going up Glenhove towards Rosebank, there's a cardboard-and-bottle man behind a trolley coming in the opposite direction. I say 'behind' because he wasn't pushing it or controlling it in any

way, the thing was running away with him, swerving all over the road and he was trying to brake it. It was overloaded as usual, piled high with flat cardboard boxes, sacks, god alone knows what else, so that he couldn't even see where he was going. A little Fiat behind him was too nervous to overtake with the result that a long string of cars had built up. I suppose they were going to follow the rubbish man all the way to Alex at a walking pace. The point is there was a perfectly good wide pavement at the side of the road, intended for people pushing prams and carts and things, but did he use it? No of course not! Why do things the proper way when you can have fun obstructing the traffic?

Five anger triggers for the morning, before ten o'clock - it's nine hours fifty two - and I can't even say today is unusually irritating. In fact, traffic was quite mild compared with weekdays. I'm at my desk now but I must record what happened at the entrance to the basement parking. The usual guy who knows me very well is off duty today. I don't normally come in on a Saturday but I wanted to finalize the arguments for Sappi in the pollution case we're fighting for them. So here's this new guard who looks suspiciously at me. Then he comes round and asks me what I want. I politely tell him that I do not want to swim the Midmar Mile just now, or make a parachute jump, I want to park. I mention that I work for Wentzel Gilfillan and have a bay here. He goes round and examines my slightly-out-of-date disc, then tells me I cannot use this garage. Aware that I am monitoring my anger situations, I laugh and ask him what I should do then. He shrugs and turns away *while I am still speaking to him* and goes back in his glass-fronted box. I jump out and tell him that even for a ulotrchan, he is being very silly. I call our offices on my cell and the security man recognizes my voice. I tell him what's going on down here and he instructs the guard to let me in. And I tell the guard that his job is to facilitate use of the garage for those who work here, not to obstruct them, and that I shall certainly have a word with the building's management about the kind of people they are hiring.

Yes, I handled that one with calm efficiency, hardly raised my blood pressure at all. This objectifying thing is helping already. Good old Conan, he's worth the money. I'll share these voice clips with him and the group when I've analysed them.

Number six: Quite a serious one this time [note for the analysis phase: rank the situations in order of severity on a 1 to 10 scale from minor irritation like no. 5, to a rampant red rage, code RRR]. This is a complicated one so I'd better detail all the relevant facts. Tossie's mother sold her townhouse in Glenvista in March - this being August - and has bought a unit in a retirement home in Rivonia to be closer to Tossie. (Can't say I'm thrilled at the idea.) Anyway, point is she has still not

got the clearance certificate from the Joburg City Council though she paid all moneys due plus the extortionate guarantee funds in March. Transfer cannot take place until the clearance certificate is issued. Our firm is handling the transfer so she asked me as a partner in the firm and her son-in-law to phone the Council and see what I could do.

The Council have a 24/7 call centre but first, there's the usual pinball-type switcheroo before you can get hold of a human being. After many buttons had been pressed and a lot of muzak fed into my unwilling ear, a voice came on the line that may or may not have been a live human voice. I assumed it was. I laid out the facts and asked when the clearance certificate would arrive, what was the delay? The voice said that a clearance certificate was not usually issued in under six months. There was no delay, the Council's admin departments were working smoothly.

This blatant lie caused me to lose my temper slightly. I asked the voice how it was that such certificates had been issued in a matter of days, not even weeks, under the previous regime. Where did the difference lie? If six months was the norm then the whole real estate business would grind to a halt. The delay cost people money, never mind the inconvenience.

I had a lot more to say but became aware that I was talking into a dead line. The bastard had hung up on me. I would have tried to get hold of him again but the phone appeared to be broken when I picked it up - rubbishy plastic casings - and I wasn't about to waste cellphone minutes on this. I'd have to rate this an RRR.

Number six (or is it seven?): Ten thirty already and I am still sitting waiting for my cappuccino, the beverage that is essential to my efficient performance here at work. Valerie brought me something that looked almost like it but one sip told me it was instant coffee. I asked her if she thought the deception would pass unnoticed and with commendable restraint, just asked her to make me a cup of genuine coffee, cappuccino with foam on it. She gave a sickly smile, sort of bowed against the doorpost and said she didn't know how to use the machine, Lerato always did it and she wasn't here today, it being Saturday.

Build confidence, I thought, a good boss always builds confidence.

'No sweat, my girl. The machine she is a puppy-dog. Look on the back. There is a silver label with detailed instructions, so simple that only an imbecile would fail to understand them. Now, you are not an imbecile are you Valerie?'

'No sir,' and off she went to make it.

Number seven: The cappuccino turned out to be weak and cool, tasting more of dishwashing liquid than coffee. With grounds in it. Lying beneath a thin scum pretending to be foam.

Number eight:

[Note for analysis - the ten-point scale is organized as follows: $i^1 - i^5$ and $r^1 - r^5$ where i = mild anger (irritation) and r = severe anger (rage)]

I said nothing to Valerie about the coffee though she must have seen the still-full mug on my desk when she came to take the memorandum for typing. Admittedly, there were a lot of changes to the original memo but I handed it to her at eleven hours seventeen, and by twelve hundred hours, the moment at which I had planned to lock up and go home, the new version was still not on my desk.

Alright, so I take a deep breath and go into the typing room, find Valerie in her corner, and I see she's trying to work the keyboard with a handkerchief tied round her right hand. I point out to her that the keyboard is designed for use with ten fingers so she should try using all of hers.

'Take the hankie off,' I tell her, 'use both hands and maybe we'll get to go home before midnight.'

'I c-can't use this one,' she quavers, waving the hankie. 'I burnt it on the es-esspresso machine - the steam nozzle ...'

It was nearly one o'clock before I could finally leave. Though I am describing the incident in a calm, objective way, when I recall my feelings at the time, I must rate it as an r^4 .

Number nine: Johannesburg Water have been laying a water pipe along our street, close to where the old conduit is. The path of raw earth on the pavement that marks the position of the new pipe is punctuated here and there with a greater or smaller patch of churned up mud where a worker has put his pick through the old pipe. When that happens, the workers switch off the nearest mains stopcock, quite unjustifiably down tools and sit about smoking and chatting as they wait for the repair crew. There is thus no incentive to miss the old pipe, rather the reverse.

We have had three interruptions of the water supply to our townhouse complex in the past week, the longest lasting twenty eight hours. I had hoped that the stoppages were over since the new pipe has crept past our property (doing, incidentally, an average of 7m per 8hr day. There are more or less 6 men on the team. Each one thus contributes just over 14.5cm, the length of half a ruler, per *hour* to the advance of the pipe). But my fond hope was disappointed, for when I got home after a trying morning, Tossie greeted me with the news that the water had gone off again.

Having tried the Water Helpline and found it wanting - no, 'wanting' is too weak a word: found it unhelpful, truculent, ignorant, ill-mannered, abusive - I got in my car and went to see the damage for myself. Yes, there was the happy crew sitting on the grass verge, smoking, while the surrounding mud told of a recent leak. I enquired politely why they weren't doing anything about it and was told by a cheeky little man in baggy overalls, who seemed to be their induna, that it had been reported.

'And how long will it take to fix it this time?' I asked.

The Charlie Chaplin figure said in an offhand way that he couldn't say, they laid pipes, they didn't mend bursts.

'You just make bursts,' I said, and was rewarded, when he had translated this quip into some black language for the benefit of the rest of them, by their laughter.

Through clenched teeth I tried to bring home to them that this was not a laughing matter, that it was the height of carelessness, incompetence, disregard for others, scorn for the country, for their own pride as workmen, and much more. My heart was pounding and my forehead felt tight, always a sign that my blood pressure is dangerously high. I got back in my car to calm down and left after telling them that their australopithecian ancestors would do a better job.

At home again; no hot lunch, no coffee, no washing of my dirty hands, no flushing of the loo.

Rating: r^1 . More a deep desperation than rage during this event.

Well, I've got objective descriptions of nine situations in which my anger was triggered. I guess that's enough for me to analyse. First, I'll go back and listen to them all carefully again, noting down in my moleskine any common elements, outstanding features, et cetera. And see what comes out of that.

It was actually ten trigger situations. Let me sum them up:

1. fat beggar-by-proxy - i^5
2. taxi stopping on road - r^3
3. windscreen washers - r^4
4. runaway salvage cart - i^4
5. parking garage attendant - r^3
6. clearance certificate situation - r^5
7. non-appearance of cappuccino - r^3
8. appearance of pigswill - r^3
9. delayed memorandum - r^4
10. water stoppage - r^1

One thing jumps out at you immediately: these are all cases in which various people were acting in violation of the law or of some regulation, or breaking with established custom.

They were all acting in some or other *sub-standard* way.

I come back to the point I made in regard to Tossie in the first few minutes of this tape: I will *not* let my standards be eroded by the turpitude or ineptitude of those around me. The question then becomes: How can I express my strong disapproval without getting angry? Anger seems to me

the natural and unavoidable, indeed the *required* reaction to such dereliction of duties. Surely, the angrier one gets at such things, the more one is affirming one's own high standards. Seen in this light, the tendency to get angry becomes not a blemish but a virtue, a point of excellence in one's character and evidence of one's own high standards.

There is a further advantage to the expression of anger in such situations: it brings home to the perpetrators the unacceptable nature of their behaviour, it may even scare them a little and thus have the beneficial result of bringing about change, of helping them to achieve higher standards themselves. I might almost say one has a public duty to show anger when faced with failures of the sort listed above. Were delinquent behaviour never to be met with punitive sanctions, there would be no grounds for critical self-assessment, no reason to change. I always hoot when my rights as a motorist are infringed, and I trust that this enables my fellow motorists to become better drivers - more alert, more careful of others.

If nobody ever bothered to register an objection, by hooting or some other sharp rebuke, well then, standards would very swiftly disappear altogether. Just think of the traffic. If vehicles stopping in the middle of a driving lane, or going through red robots, were not pulled up in any way, then soon everyone would be doing it and chaos would result, the rules of the road would be a thing of the past. We must - those of us who still have standards - take it as our sacred duty to register our protests, to stand firm against the encroaching tide of lawlessness, to throw up a bulwark from behind which we may gradually mount an offensive to reclaim our public spaces.

It is costly though. Here am I, a young man of forty one, obliged to take daily medication for high blood-pressure. Such is the price of living in the society that we presently enjoy.

This whole exercise has been a beneficial one in so far as it has helped me to put a character trait that I initially assumed was a defect, in the proper perspective. I now see my anger for what it is: a burden that I must carry selflessly for the good of those around me, and a definite virtue.

Can't wait to share this with Conan and the class at feedback time.

The piece of land that lay behind their home had never been built on. Someone had bought it and then not had enough money to put up an umkhukhu, or they got sick or died - who could say? - and it remained a piece of waste land. Khakibos grew here and there, and up through the rusting shell of a car. Refuse gathered in the corners. Zondi's mother Gladys climbed over their back fence now and then, while Zondi held her hand and tried not to laugh at her wobbly legs on the corner post, to clean up the plastic bags, papers, empty tins and bottles that had piled up there. The rubbish brought rats to the place, she said. Zondi would cut through there on his way home from school every day. It saved him from going all the way around the block and the fence presented no problem to a nine-year old boy.

If there had been a prize for the best umkhukhu in the Stop 14 Informal Settlement, Zondi knew their house would have won it. It was made of corrugated iron nailed onto a strong wooden framework with a real metal door on the front and a glass window to the left of the door. When he was just a small boy, his mother and father had built it, hammering and sawing for weeks, nailing sheets of iron in place for the walls, fixing sheets on top for the roof, while he played in the sandy space between house and street.

Their piece of ground was exactly the same as all the others in the street but the houses were all different. People put up all sorts of homes for themselves. Right next door, the Makhadini family lived in an arrangement of plastic sheeting with cardboard underneath, hanging on a framework of iron pipes, with string tying it all together. A little further down Zondi's friend Siphos had a house made mostly of big notice boards with some zinc pieces in between. On the front was a green board with 'NESBURG 31' on it, from a traffic sign somewhere, and if you went inside, it said *Peter Stuyvesant* with a picture of the cigarette packet too. Zondi's family was lucky because his father had a good job and could buy proper house stuff. He could also get things from his work to help, like wood and nails. So they had a good house and didn't have to worry when it rained or when the wind blew hard, as it often did here on the open veld.

Coming home from school one day, Zondi had crossed the piece of waste land and was just about to hop over the corner post when he thought he heard something from a broken asbestos pipe lying near the car. Yes, there it was again, a faint mewling. He got down on his knees at the pipe's end and bent his head cautiously to see what was in it. There in the dark were two shining eyes moving about. Putting his hand down to see if he could feel it, he discovered that there was barbed wire in the pipe. He pulled, but it resisted and immediately a shrill howl echoed from the pipe. The thing with the shining eyes must be stuck on the wire. What to do now?

After a moment's thought, he stood, up-ended the pipe and shook it. More howls, some scrabbling. He shook again and a small grey cat entangled in a coiled bit of barbed wire shot out of the pipe's end. It struggled, mewling all the while, but the wire was wrapped round its legs and head and the more it struggled, the more firmly the barbs held. Carefully Zondi approached it and pulled the strands off, prising the barbs out, loosening the furry legs and releasing the cat. There was blood on his hands. As soon as it was free, the cat shot back into the pipe, issuing threatening growls now. Zondi knew from his school reader that cats liked milk, at least the cat on the mat did, so he jumped over to his side of the fence and opened the big brass padlock on the door with the key around his neck.

They had bought the padlock one Saturday morning at the hardware store. It locked the front door when they left in the morning, his mama to go to her various cleaning jobs in the suburbs, and Zondi to go and wait in the school playground until classes began. It was a very strong lock; it made their house safe. When he came home in the afternoon, Zondi would take the key on an orange string around his neck, open the padlock, and go in. Then he would slide the inside bolt and put the padlock on again. He felt safe then. Sometimes he would hear the noisy gangs of teenagers going up and down the streets looking for excitement, and he had heard that they took things off children like himself - food and school bags and jackets. A couple of times when he was inside, the door had rattled as someone was testing it, but the lock held firm.

There was a tin of powdered milk in the cupboard. He put a teaspoonful in a saucer and mixed it with a little water from the bucket in the corner. Then he ran back to the corner post, balanced the saucer on top and climbed over. At the end of the pipe, he set the milk down. The two eyes were still there. He sat very still for a long time, but the cat didn't come out, and he was hungry so he went back into the house to see what his mother had left him for lunch.

She hadn't always worked every day. She used to be at home most days, only working on two days of the week, and he used to go to Gogo Makhatini on those afternoons. But now he was big so he could be by himself in the umkhukhu in the afternoons until she came home. It was because his father had died that she had to work more days now.

Zondi had been sitting on his tomato box next to the door of the umkhukhu that summer evening, doing his reading homework as he waited for supper, which his mama was cooking on their paraffin stove. He could smell cabbage and onions frying, a favourite of his. The sun was gone but the sky still had some light, enough to show heavy purple thunderclouds where lightning flickered like snakes' tongues. His mother came to stand in the doorway above him, watching for Solly to come home. She caught sight of a neighbour who was working on the same building site as his

father, and she called out: 'Sanibonene, Sizwe! Did you come with Solly tonight? He's usually home by now.'

Zondi didn't catch the man's reply, but his Mama turned with an empty look on her face and went inside. She switched on the radio. After a bit, they heard the traffic report. Vehicles were standing on the N14 because an accident had occurred near the Summit Road offramp - their offramp. A taxi had overturned. Drivers were asked to be patient while the fire brigade got trapped passengers out and while ambulances made their way to the scene. Mama sat down opposite him and covered her face with her hands. After a while, she gave a loud cry and put her head on the table, sobbing and moaning. She knew, and so Zondi knew too; they didn't need the policemen who came to tell them.

Those men in uniform took them in the police van to the place where his father lay in a cold room, half his head and face scraped away. His body was twisted like a bundle of crumpled clothing lying in that special drawer for dead people.

The policemen made them come back to the police station to fill out some forms and do all the business of death. They told his mother that because her breadwinner had died, there would be good money for her from something called MVA Fund but it would take a long time, maybe two or three years. That taxi had been riding with tyres 'thin like paper', and it had been overloaded. Six were dead, the driver also, and eleven injured, some of them very bad.

But in the middle of this terrible night, they saw a great thing. There was a TV behind the counter in that office and the news came on while they were there. The policemen all stopped writing and everybody watched. Zondi saw how crowds were cheering for an old man with grey hair who walked down the street holding hands with the woman at his side, waving and smiling. Everyone who was looking at that TV was also shouting and clapping and halala-ing. His mother, through her tears, told him to look and remember, that was Madiba and Winnie, he was out of jail and now things would go well for black people in this country. There would be good schools for the children, good hospitals and real houses and everything would be fine once Madiba and the ANC were in charge.

When they had finished with all the writing and telling of things, Zondi and his mother walked home. It was raining, not hard but steadily, so that they did not need to wipe the tears that ran down their faces.

She had left him peanut butter sandwiches for lunch that day. When he'd finished them, he went to fetch the saucer before his mother got home so he could wash it. He wasn't sure what she would say about him giving milk to a homeless cat, but he suspected she wouldn't like it. And when he bent down to get the saucer, he saw that it was empty - so the little cat had drunk the milk. The

next afternoon, he again mixed a teaspoon of powdered milk and put it down at the end of the pipe. This time the cat was sitting quite near the open end of the pipe; Zondi could see its light grey fur. It seemed quite relaxed but still wouldn't come out to drink until Zondi went and stood on the other side of the fence. It looked as if it had fallen in an ash pit so he thought its name should be Umlotha or Ash. He was reminded of how his gogo had rubbed ashes on her head when they brought his father's body home to her.

It was a long journey to Babanango, his father's town, but of course he had to go home to be buried. Zondi sat on his mother's lap at the back of the taxi. When some people got out at Harrismith, he could sit on his own piece of seat. Sometimes he would turn around, kneeling on the seat, to watch the special long trailer bouncing and swaying along behind them. Inside it was the white coffin with gold decorations in which his father lay.

They had to change taxis at Dundee and his mother had a hard job finding a driver to take the coffin. They kept telling her they needed a special licence to transport a dead body, but in the end she found one who asked double the normal fare, and strapped the coffin on his roof-rack quickly, with sidelong glances, then tied a big sheet of yellow plastic over it so that it looked like just a heap of wood or boxes of groceries.

When they reached Gogo's house on a hillside with long views, she came out weeping, crying out that her baby was dead, the last and best of all her children was coming home to her dead. Her usually grey hair was almost white with the ash she had rubbed into it to show her grief, there was ash on her forehead too. They laid the coffin on trestles in Gogo's main room, where it stood open for people to come and say goodbye. The undertaker had carefully covered up the right side of Solly's head and face with a white cloth so that it looked quite natural, as if he were sleeping and had pulled the blankets up for the cold.

The funeral party was at Gogo's house. The family Mngomezulu was big and well-liked in the district so hundreds of people came during the three days of eating and drinking. A cow was slaughtered and his brothers poured the ingwebu for the ancestors, ensuring Solly a safe passage to them and a warm welcome.

After it all, the coffin was taken to the nearby cemetery and lowered into the freshly opened earth by the brothers. Some friends mixed the concrete at the graveside and the brothers shovelled it in after the coffin. Zondi hated to see that stony grey stuff landing in wet shumps on the beautiful coffin but Gogo explained that it had to be done. Such an expensive coffin would surely get dug up by izigebengu for resale if it weren't concreted in.

When it was all over, Zondi and Gladys had come home to their umkhukhu in Stop 14 where Gladys now slept alone on the mattress behind the curtain made of mieliemeal sacks, and where she and Zondi ate their supper alone at the table every night.

Next afternoon, Zondi took the cat milk again. He had decided she must be a girl cat because she was so light and small, and she drank the milk in many tiny laps of a pink tongue. Umlotha seemed to have made the broken pipe her home; she was always in it when he brought her milk, which he continued to do every afternoon. Every time he came a little closer, until he could sit within touching distance of her as she drank. Then one day, she allowed him to lay a finger on her back and run it down to her tail. So Zondi would stroke her back as she drank. Then her head, and then one afternoon, he picked her up. She struggled a bit but relaxed as he stroked her back and neck.

That night he asked his mother if he could have a cat. She asked where he would get it from and when he told her about Umlotha, she was not happy. 'No, you must not feed a wild cat. These wild cats are diseased. It will make us sick if you bring it inside. Besides, money is too short to buy food for a cat also.'

Then one afternoon Zondi got home from school to find a man sitting on the tomato box outside the umkhukhu, a thin man with a face so narrow and dark that it seemed like a cleft in the daylight. Zondi knew that this was one of his father's older brothers; he had been one of those who poured the beer on the ground for the amadlozi at the funeral. The uncle got up as he approached but said nothing when Zondi greeted him politely. Zondi was a little reluctant to open the door for someone whom he knew so slightly, even though it was an uncle, but as he hesitated, the man told him to open up, he was tired of waiting.

When they entered, Abraham went straight to the food cupboard, took the polony and tomato sauce sandwiches that Gladys had left for Zondi's lunch, sat down and ate them all. Then he told Zondi to make him a mug of tea. He drank it in silence. When he had finished, he took off his shoes and lay down on the bed behind the curtain. After a bit, he began snoring, long rasping snores that set the zinc walls humming.

Zondi waited for his mother's return, going to the corner now and then to see if she was coming yet. When her figure emerged from a taxi, he ran to meet her talking all the time to explain what had happened. Her eyebrows pulled together as she listened, especially at the eating of the sandwiches, and her eyes grew dark, but all she said was: 'Well, he is uyihlo, we must give him food and a place to stay until he can find somewhere to live here in Jozi.'

She was courteous to Abraham, talking to him in a funny way with words for quite ordinary things that Zondi didn't know. When he asked her about it, she explained that this was the special

language of respect. She could not say to him any words which began with syllables of his Zulu name, which was Sikhumbeni, so she was prohibited from using the normal words for bread, and to cut, and a bag, but had to find other words which meant the same thing.

‘Usually, it’s just easier to keep quiet. But this is what a well-behaved young wife must do for her husband’s family.’

Abraham was silent most of the time, ignoring any questions, refusing to be drawn into conversation, speaking only when he wanted something. She served him his plate of dinner in the traditional manner, on her knees, backing away on her knees also from the table with head bowed to honour him, and eating her food with Zondi outside. That night, Gladys came and lay down to sleep with Zondi on his piece of foam rubber so that Abraham could have the bed. Normally a good sleeper, the boy lay awake for a long time that night and when he did sleep, his dreams were full of troubled things.

Zondi was tucking the key under his shirt next morning before setting off for school, when Abraham held out his hand and said: ‘Give.’

‘But Baba I need it to come in after school.’

Without another word, the man pulled it roughly over Zondi’s head, put it in his pocket and continued eating his phuthu. And when Zondi got home that day, the door was locked against him. He sat down on the tomato box feeling tearful, wondering when his uncle would come home to let him in. When Abraham did come back about three hours later, he didn’t say a word to the boy but went inside, took the half loaf of bread from the cupboard and tore it up in big handfuls to eat. Gladys went on Saturday to the hardware store and got a copy of her own key for Zondi.

It was more difficult to get milk for Umlotha now that Abraham was in the umkhukhu. When he was out, Zondi would take three or four spoonfuls and put them in a folded paper for use later. Abraham didn’t work. He spent most of the morning in bed, going out about noon to stroll through the squatter camp and see what there was to be seen. He never offered to help buy food though he ate a lot. Where he got his money from, they didn’t know, but that he had some was clear from his visits to the shebeen over weekends. Then he would come back drunk and angry, crashing about the umkhukhu while Zondi and Gladys lay very quiet on the foam rubber, pretending to be asleep.

He had been with them for a few weeks when Zondi came back one afternoon to find Abraham’s second wife Nobuhle and her two youngest children installed in the umkhukhu. It was very crowded now. The two children - a baby of ten months and a toddler of two - slept on blankets under the table; the baby was often sick and cried every night. Abraham and Nobuhle took Gladys’ bed while she and Zondi still squeezed together on the piece of foam rubber.

Then one day, before they had left for work and school, Zondi heard Abraham telling his mother that she must find another place to live, that his umkhukhu wasn't big enough for all of them. She was very angry.

'How can you call this *your* umkhukhu? This is my home and Zondi's, and these hands of mine helped to build it,' she shouted, forgetting all about the language of respect. 'How can you come and turn us out of our own place?'

'You know the custom.' Abraham did not care that his mother was angry. 'A woman cannot own a house. It belongs only to her husband and if he dies, then his house and things go back to his family, and to the oldest man in his family - me. This umkhukhu is mine now that Solly is dead.'

That Saturday, Gladys put on her best dress; she made Zondi put on school shorts and shoes, the only concession being that he might wear a T-shirt with them. They set off for the shopping centre and Abraham watched them go down the street. But halfway there, when Abraham had gone in again, Gladys turned off into a side street.

'Come quickly now,' she took Zondi's hand. 'We are going to see the Induna.'

She led him to the house of Mnumzane Tshabalala. He was by popular agreement the headman of their section of the settlement, a man of learning who had been umshumayeli once in a church near Umzinto. He also ran the neighbourhood stokvel, of which Gladys was a member, for those who wanted some form of savings account. He was respected as a wise and kind man who would always give good advice on a problem and whose authority in the district was great enough to ensure that the advice was followed.

He received Gladys and Zondi in his front yard where he had a wooden bench under a peach tree. Mother and son sat down at his feet and after the usual leisurely preliminaries - a formal exchange of greetings, some polite chat about this and that - Gladys broached the subject. He knew her situation well, but she reminded him anyway - how they had built their umkhukhu, of Solly's death. Now it was her and Zondi's home but Abraham had just moved in and now he was telling her she must find another place.

The Induna shrugged his shoulders helplessly. 'But you know my daughter, this is our way, for the oldest man in a family to inherit the house and furniture when the owner dies. A woman cannot own a house or take things from her dead husband's family.'

Gladys bowed her head and said the right words: 'Yebo Baba, siyavuma, we agree.'

The Induna rubbed his little white beard. 'Why can this Abraham not let you stay there too?'

'Siyavuma.'

'It is a big umkhukhu if I can remember, big enough for you and Zondi and this brother.'

'Yebo Baba, siyavuma. But he has brought his young wife with two children from kwaZulu.'

‘Of course a man needs to have his woman with him, and the children are probably too small to leave with a gogo.’

‘Yebo Baba, siyavuma.’

But on the way home, Zondi heard his mother’s real opinion of the Induna and how unhelpful he was, and how of course the men always stuck together, why should they change anything that worked so well for them?

But Gladys’ spirits picked up as they neared the umkhukhu. It might not be such a bad thing to move. She had work for five days a week now, all in a suburb far from Stop 14 and the taxis were eating too much of her money. Alex was much nearer to her piece jobs than Stop 14. They would move to Alex, far away from Abraham. Zondi was excited at the thought of a new home in a big township but he dreaded having to leave Umlotha behind.

‘Can I take my cat too? Please, please can I?’

‘Don’t be silly, my child,’ was all his mother would say.

Gladys was lucky and found a new place quite quickly, a room at the back of the house of a friend of hers in Alexandra Township. It was just a short taxi ride from all her places of work. She told Abraham that they would be going as soon as she could arrange for a bakkie to come and pick up all her things: the furniture, clothing, groceries, in fact the entire contents of the umkhukhu.

Abraham’s face soured. ‘No, it is all mine now. You can take your clothes only.’

‘Yebo Baba, siyavuma,’ she said quietly with bowed head.

Abraham spent every Saturday afternoon and evening at the shebeens, so Gladys arranged for the bakkie to come then. She sat in front with her friend Tryphina, with Sam, Tryphina’s husband, driving. Zondi stood in the back, face to the wind, whooping at the thrill of riding in an open vehicle. They turned into their old street. Abraham’s young wife offered no resistance, indeed she seemed eager to give Gladys all her things.

While they packed the furniture onto the bakkie, Zondi ran to the broken pipe and called Umlotha. She was nowhere to be seen. He looked all around the vacant plot, but no Umlotha. Then just as he was climbing back over the fence he saw a quick shadow and there she was. He jumped down again, picked her up and tucked her into his T-shirt above the waistband of his shorts. The bakkie was waiting to go, engine running, when he came back. He kept his arms folded over his chest but his mother was not fooled.

‘What have you got there?’ she asked pulling his arms away and poking the bulge, which moved. ‘Could it be a cat?’

He put his head down and didn’t say anything.

‘Alright then, but jump on quick, we must go now.’

Zondi scrambled onto the bakkie and off they went. As they neared the corner, coming towards them was the dark figure of Abraham. He looked at the bakkie as it approached. Then he caught sight of Gladys in the front, and of Zondi sitting behind, against the cupboard packed under the kitchen table, with the chairs tied on top. Abraham shouted in a hoarse voice for them to stop and bring back the things, but the bakkie picked up speed, and the last Zondi ever saw of his dark uncle was him raging and shaking his fists as they raced away.

Torn Apart

He first noticed the hot itchy feeling around his waist and back in the bath one night, but he could see nothing. The next day, he felt tired and ill, and again in the bath, saw with horror that a rash of little blisters had formed. He could see them on his waist and to his exploring fingers, the skin of his back seemed stretched snugly over a layer of lead shot. What could this rash be?

Irene made him sleep in the spare room.

In Dr Zwande's rooms next morning, he lay on the consulting room bed in his underpants while the doctor examined him. After a few questions, the doctor said:

'You've got a pretty active case of shingles. It's a stress-related condition. The herpes zoster virus lives in your nervous system until you're run down, and then it comes forth to multiply at the nerve endings and set up these pustules. Don't scratch or they may get infected. Come through when you're dressed.'

Dr Zwande was writing a prescription when he went in, but looked up and said: 'When last did you have an HIV test?'

'Oh that's not necessary Doctor. I've never had one as a matter of fact.'

'You should, you know. Nothing wrong with it, no shame in just making sure.'

Donny's mind was racing. Surely he couldn't have got anything like that? True, there had been some careless sex with girls in the Umkhonto camp but that was so long ago. How long could the thing stay undetected in your system? No, he would have had some warning of it before this. Mozambique was thirty years ago now. But that business trip to Durban was only a few years ago and he had been careless then too.

'Is this shingles a symptom of HIV?' he wanted to know.

'Not necessarily, though HIV sufferers do often get it because their immune system is shot. But it can hit anybody, especially if you are stressed.'

'OK, I'll come in for that HIV test soon.'

'Good. Your blood pressure is a bit on the high side, not enough to need medication but you must try to get more rest. Take it easy at work - at least eight hours sleep a night.'

The prescription was for some pills and a soothing ointment that took the hot itchy feeling away. The blisters subsided in a week or so, but never quite went away, flaring up now and again. Donny continued to feel ill. He had no energy, frequent headaches and when he had been without food for a couple of hours, he suffered from a strong feeling of nausea that only subsided when he ate. This meant that he ate far too frequently, got even plumper and began feeling heavy and clogged up with sludge. Stairs like those at work between the canteen and his office, which he had

never noticed before, were now an exhausting trial and his little round glasses fogged up with sweat at the slightest provocation.

This is not just a simple body illness, he thought to himself one day. This feels as if I am the target of ubuthakathi; somebody has put a curse on me.

It was his job to head up a team that examined proposals for movie projects, for TV shows and a host of other artistic enterprises, to determine whether it was worth allotting public money to them. Of course, many proposals had to be rejected and the authors of spurned projects were quite likely to bear him ill-will. The artistic temperament was emotional and flighty; after someone had invested months or even years in something that looked brilliant to them, they were not able to accept rejection calmly. His identity was supposed to be unknown to applicants but of course people talked, his team might well have let his name slip.

And he knew there were people inside the organization too who had reason to hate him. Thanks to his excellent struggle creds, his rise had been swift; there were many who wanted the job he now held, many who probably felt they would do better at it and who resented him. In particular, one of his two immediate subordinates had been in the Department longer than he and had been passed over by his appointment. So there were plenty of people who had cause to hate him.

‘That must be what it is,’ he thought. ‘I am under an evil spell. And such a condition cannot be cured by Dr Zwande’s kind of medicine. I must go to a sangoma.’

He would have to keep it from Irene. She never lost an opportunity to comment on the backwardness - ‘barbaric’ was one of her favourite words - of traditional beliefs and practices and she would ridicule him for wanting to consult a sangoma. But he was sure in his own heart now that this was his problem and of course, you could only fight ubuthakathi with ubuthakathi.

He arranged to go on a working trip to Durban. He sometimes consulted for the Durban office of the Department of Arts and Culture and had been promising for some months to go down. He had just got a new car, a BMW 5-series with a terrific sound system, so he would drive. He would then stop over en route at the home of an old schoolfriend, Shangase Qwabe, who now lived in Mnambithi and who had once told him of a great sangoma there, called Jingela, with a phenomenal success rate. Shangase had called him ‘a one-stop healer’ because he doubled as an inyanga. He could deal with ubuthakathi, communicate with the amadlozi, and give you healing herbal medicines. Donny now phoned Shangase and asked him to make an appointment with the sangoma.

The sangoma consulted in a cave on a hillside near the town, though Shangase told Donny he also owned a modern house in town. They drove through the veld, the low clearance of the Beemer taking a pounding, until the rough track petered out. From there they had to walk. The path ran along the side of a well-wooded valley, gradually leading upward. At the top of the valley was a dark

kloof between rocky sidewalls, down one of which a slim waterfall plunged. Soon they were on a rocky scree, clambering upwards as best they could, sometimes on hands and knees it was so steep. Shangase went first. He stopped so suddenly at one point that Donny bumped into him; he held up his hand for silence and from ahead of them came the sound of a large animal moving through the bush.

‘What is it?’ whispered Donny.

‘Can’t you smell it? It’s Jingela’s hyena. It tells him when someone is approaching.’

And when they mounted the last rocky outcrop in front of the cave, the figure of a tall old man stood in its entrance, watching them. Jingela was wearing a kilt of animals’ tails, mainly monkey with a leopard tail right in front. A leather pouch hung among the tails, while covering his shoulders was a cloak made of various animal skins stitched together. His outfit was topped off with a sort of crown: a ring of hairy hide standing upright on his head in four irregular peaks. The skin of his face was taut over prominent cheekbones giving him a youthfulness that the deeply wrinkled arms and chest belied. But his eyes were what held Donny’s attention, as tawny-yellow as a lion’s, with an odd sidelong gaze that seemed to slip over his high cheeks and pour over the objects of his focus. Then Donny realized he was staring, and dropped his gaze.

‘Sanibonene, Baba.’ The two visitors uttered a courteous greeting as the sangoma turned and led the way into the cave. In a low corner Donny saw a shape moving, greenish eyes glowed as it turned towards them - the hyena. Shangase had told him that R300 was an appropriate sum. He held out the notes which the sangoma took and tucked into the pouch.

Donny had visited a sangoma twice before, once with his father on a family matter and once with a friend in the city, so he knew the protocol. It was never necessary, in fact it was very impolite, to state the nature of your problem. The sangoma was all-seeing. He knew what was wrong with you without being told; to try to tell him your problem would be seriously insulting. Donny knew that all he could correctly say was ‘Siyavuma, I agree’, perhaps helping the sangoma in his diagnosis by the degree of enthusiasm in the ‘Siyavuma’s’.

The old man rested easily on his haunches while his clients sat cross-legged a little way from him; the pain in Donny’s knees told him how long it was since he had sat on the ground like this. With his hands, Jingela swept clean a circular area of the cave’s sandy floor. Then, taking a gourd from behind him, he rattled it and threw a collection of bones into the circle. He studied them in silence for a while.

‘There is woman trouble here in your life. I see a white woman who is against you.’

Donny's mind raced through the possibilities. Woman trouble: he must stop fooling around with his secretary. The white woman could only be his wife, Irene. How could she be against him though? She was a devoted wife.

All he said however, in an enquiring tone designed to elicit more information, was: 'Siyavuma, Baba?'

Jingela threw the bones again and again. Among the things they told him were that Donny had problems at work, there were many there who hated him; Donny's children were going to be great men; Donny had sickness in his body, it was the result of isiqalekiso.

At this, Donny agreed as vehemently as he could within the bounds of politeness.

'Let us see now what the amadlozi have to say,' and Jingela put the bones away in their gourd. He shuffled on his haunches over to where the embers of a wood fire, still live, lay in a circle of stones. To one side lay a branch with many dry leaves on it, and he laid this on the embers where it soon started smouldering, giving off a dense yellow smoke. Donny involuntarily coughed; Shangase frowned at him. Jingela appeared to be inhaling the smoke as he weaved from side to side, eyes closed, over the fire. Presently he began to keen in a high voice, repeating some unknown words in a sing-song cadence, and Donny knew that he was communing with the amadlozi.

When he spoke, it was in the same high voice: 'You are troubled.'

'Siyavuma.'

'It is a matter of ubuthakathi.'

Donny agreed strongly.

'I smell isibhilo, someone has put a curse on you.' The words were long-drawn out, sometimes slipping away, sometimes loud. 'But okhokho of the Nyuswa people are displeased with you, they will not protect you.'

'Why Baba?' Donny burst out, unable to contain himself any more.

'You are not keeping the traditions. You do not pour utshwala obuthelelw' amadlozi, you do not give them sacrifices.'

'Siyavuma.' Donny agreed in a small voice. It was true that since marrying Irene he had taken up the ways of the city and largely forgotten his own customs. It had become more noticeable since his marriage, but even before that, when he left emaphandleni as a young man and came to Jozi with a camera in his hand to work for the newspapers, he had left his traditional way of life behind. Then in the struggle years, at the uMkhonto camp in Mozambique and the college in Moscow, it had been impossible to practise his customs. He hadn't wilfully chosen to neglect tradition.

'The ancestors send you warning, Hlumuka. Unless you return to your true self, you will not heal,' he said, using the Ngidi thakazelo, both to soften the harsh message and to remind him of his clan allegiance.

'Yebo, Baba.'

Jingela was still weaving to and fro in a trance. He opened his mouth to speak again, but just then, from the leather bag sounded the loud tones of *La Cucuracha*. With a frown, he took out his cellphone and spoke briefly into it. He didn't return to the trance state, the spell was broken and Donny would always wonder what more he had been going to say. Still, his message was clear: *Return to your true self and you will heal.*

Before they left, Jingela gave Donny some powder wrapped in an envelope of newspaper, to be taken every morning before eating, to curb his appetite, and a small medicine bottle of greenish liquid for the headaches.

As they walked back to the car, Donny shared his distress with Shangase.

'Gumede, it is a terrible thing if the ancestors turn their back on you, for then you have no protection against evil or accidents or illness. What have I done to deserve this? Do you also think that I have spurned them?'

Shangase was evasive, claiming that he didn't know Donny these days or his way of life in the city.

'But with your white wife, it must be hard to keep the correct traditions,' was all he would venture.

'Yet I come to a sangoma when I am in trouble! Surely that shows belief in tradition?'

'Yes it does, but that's not enough. You can't just turn to your okhokho when you need them to do something for you. You must be thinking of them all the time and doing things for them.'

Donny had to agree and made vows to give them plenty of utshwala, even a sacrifice as soon as he could get away to his parents' place.

The powder and green liquid seemed to help a bit at first but after a week at home, Donny was just as bad as ever, eating far too much, and with an aching head too, his shingles appearing and fading in continual waves. Knowing that his okhokho were angry with him increased his anxiety levels, and probably his blood pressure too, he thought.

As he was sitting in his car at a robot one day, a man pushed a leaflet through the slightly open window at him. He dropped it on the passenger seat. When he got home, however, and picked it up to throw it out, his eye was caught by the bold headline: *SHEIK KRISHNAJEE CURES ANY TROUBLE*. There followed a list of the sheik's skills and powers.

He could, among many other things:

- track down cheaters within 24 hours
- fulfil your life's high purpose and destiny
- enlarge your penis in both length and girth
- bring you supernatural luck to win in lotto, casino, dice, cards, horses
- ensure success in love
- bring you to see your enemies and make demands on them using a mirror.

He did all this through use of his 'born-in mystical and astrological powers' by means of which he talked to the ancestral spirits 'any time'.

This all looked a bit too good to be true to Donny, but he was struck by the reference to 'your enemies'. If the Sheik could really bring him to see his enemies, he might be able to do something about the curse. Via mirrors? Well, you had to have a bit of faith if you went to someone for help.

Donny called the cellphone number and spoke to a brisk-sounding woman. The Sheik charged R350 for a consultation; it might take from thirty to forty minutes, depending on your problem; of course there were no guarantees of success, it all depended on how you received the Sheik's powers.

He worked from a house in Westdene, an unpretentious 1960's cottage with a cement garden, two white pillars on either side of the front door, a polished red stoep with three steps. Donny rang the bell and heard the click of a latch being released. The door opened onto a long central passage, and Donny jumped when he saw a vicious array of teeth bared right in front of his face. From the passage ceiling was slung, in three hoops of plastic rope and facing the front door, a stuffed crocodile. Its mouth was open, it seemed to fix a baleful eye on Donny; the sides were horny and in contrast, its white belly looked tender, between four clawed feet. The air in the passage was musty, with a faintly fishy odour.

The brisk-voiced woman appeared and told him to have a seat in the waiting room, the Sheik would only be a few minutes. Donny ducked under the croc and entered the room she pointed to. There was one other occupant: a thick black snake coiled up in a glass case. Donny watched it for a while but it didn't move. It might be asleep though its eyes seemed to be open. He considered going up and tapping on the glass but thought better of it; the snake might hurl itself at the glass, break it, and come at him. No, best to let the snake alone. He leafed through a magazine of esoterica, with articles on astral travelling, telekinesis, various methods of reading the future (which existed in full detail, in some otherworldly realm for which one simply needed the right scope). Donny thought that if the Sheik were willing, after his problem had been sorted out, he might ask for a reading of his future.

The Sheik sat behind a desk in a darkened room, the curtains being some filmy black stuff which cut out the daylight and created a pale gloom. He was the colour of putty, a small man in a black robe with an outsized turquoise turban on his head. Two peacock feathers were pinned to the turban with a diamante brooch. But he stood and shook hands affably with Donny, giving him a gap-toothed smile. Donny poured out the reasons for his visit, saying he thought 'find your enemies' might be the service he most needed from the Sheik.

'Let's first have a look at your soul', the Sheik suggested, and placed a glass ball in front of Donny, about the size of a football, on a little plinth. It was something like an enormous toy marble, with swirls of milky colour in its depths. 'Spread your hands around this, hold it gently but firmly, and think of what is troubling you.'

Donny did so and the milky swirls took on a reddish colour. They appeared to be moving, twisting around, getting darker and thicker. The Sheik watched intently, murmuring all the while: 'Bad trouble, see how dark, the clouds are staying away from the centre, now they gather there, getting thicker, yes, yes, it is your very soul that is at risk ...'

He left Donny holding the ball for five minutes before he took it off the table and returned it to a cupboard against one wall.

'Now you can tell me what it is you want.'

'What did you see in the ball? Could you see my soul and what is troubling me?'

'Yes, it is a deep trouble, you have suffered from it for some time now. And your trouble gathers in your centre, in the very essence of who you are. There are people who hate you because of this, of who you are. They are jealous of you, maybe one person ... '

'Yes, I feel as if there is a curse on me,' Donny offered. 'Can you tell me what the ancestors feel towards me? And can you show me who my enemies are?'

'Of course. Let's do the enemies by mirror first,' and the Sheik took a wooden box from the cupboard, with two eyepieces let into the side. This he placed on the desk in front of Donny. 'Put your forehead here and look through the lenses.'

Donny did as he was told. In the interior of the box was an arrangement of mirrors in a greenish light and as he looked, a distorted human figure floated into the field, multiplied infinitely by the mirrors. It appeared to move from left to right but before it was gone, a foreshortened face, lit from below, swam into view, with another behind it, and another.

'Look well. Try to identify your enemies,' came the Sheik's voice. The images weren't clear but Donny thought he recognized the skinny subordinate who had been passed over in one of them. Yes, the more he strained his eyes, the more it looked like him. Amazing! So now he knew who his enemy

was! There were also a number of female figures, one of which could easily have been Irene, but he put that thought aside.

The Sheik told him to beware of this man who was jealous of him.

‘And my ancestors? Can you give me news of them?’

This time the Sheik lit a small tablet of incense and inhaled the pungent fumes, fanning some over to Donny and telling him to breathe them in. He began to hum, speaking in unintelligible words just as the sangoma had done. Truly, this was the language of the amadlozi. When the incense had burned out, he opened his eyes.

‘The ancestors are aware of your problem, they see everything in your life. Their message to you is *Think well what you are and act accordingly*. Does that mean something to you?’

‘Oh yes Sheik. I know just what they mean.’

Their message through Jingela had been exactly the same: *Be your true self and you will heal*.

‘But which is my true self?’ he worried as he drove back to the office. ‘The okhokho see me as a traditional umZulu who is bound to observe all the customs of our people. Irene and the kids see me as a modern man living in a Western way, with DSTV and a BMW and all the latest gadgets. I suppose the test of who I am, is the question of who I *want* to be.’

And as soon as he put it to himself like that, Donny felt as if he were being torn in two. He couldn’t give up all the conveniences of a western way of life but neither could he give up his deep love of isiZulu. He had admitted to Jingela that he was not a very good observer of custom; he was far better at a modern lifestyle. But it was not possible to do both and the ancestors had sent him a clear message, through two mediums, that he must return to traditional ways or pay the price of their displeasure. Which meant no protection against the evil curse and consequent depression, shingles, weight gain, headache, etc.

He was in this state of mental turmoil when he got a message from his secretary one morning, to phone his friend Wellington Mphumuza. Wells was a businessman who had put some good things his way, told him what shares to buy when, and how to make use of black empowerment opportunities. Though his background was a humble country one, Wells was a model of the technologically sophisticated umZulu - drove a big waBenzi, had all the latest electronic gadgets in his Hyde Park mansion as well as in his place on the Vaal Dam: piped music and TV in every room, cybernetic lighting, automatic weather shields on all windows. Though he was a hard worker, he was still enormously fat. Donny thought it would be good to talk to Wells about his problem, this mental preoccupation that was fast becoming an obsession for him.

‘Haaibo, Nyandu!’ he said, using the courtesy title of the Mphumuza family. ‘I want to talk to you.’

'Good,' came Wells' deep voice, 'because I want to talk to you. The reason I called is that I'm having a party on Saturday the sixteenth. Have you got the invitation yet? It's to celebrate a small windfall I've just had with some preferential shares - you remember, I told you about the Arkelow offer. Will you and Irene come?'

'Sure, we wouldn't miss it.'

'It's at my Hyde Park place. Party starts at six but I want you there earlier because we're going to sacrifice a cow and you are an expert at that. I feel it's about time I thanked the ancestors for all my good fortune.'

'That's cool. Great idea. I'll be glad to help. Don't know if I'm much of an expert though.'

'But you told me you've done it often.' Wells' voice sharpened.

'Of course bra, no problem. I'm really happy to be doing something so traditional for your okhokho, and maybe mine will be looking on and seeing what a good boy I am.'

'What do you mean?'

Donny laughed. 'I'll explain later. But thanks for asking. Is it going to be a big party? My folks will be with us that weekend and they'd like to meet you.'

'Yes, it's a big party and they're very welcome. Just RSVP for four then. Look forward to meeting them. Will you be there at five to help with the preparation for the sacrifice?'

'Right, and my Baba *is* a real expert at that. Do you have some izibongo of the Mphumuza's for him to use?'

Wells grunted non-committally. 'We don't need to be so fancy, just a simple prayer of praise and gratitude will do.'

Saturday the sixteenth arrived, and with it, Dlabela and Nokuthula Ngidi at Donny and Irene's house, with home-grown vegetables, cream, fresh-laid eggs, and a tub of strawberries nearly as big as the eggs.

'Wow Gogo, these are humungous!' Jason stuffed two into his mouth at once. The juice ran down his chin and Gogo laughed.

'Leave some for the others,' she warned.

They had a cup of tea and chatted for a while, then Gogo and Babamkhulu went off to see old friends in Diepkloof.

'Just make sure you're back by three thirty latest. We have to be there early for the kuhlabela amadlozi,' Donny said. 'I'm going to need help, in fact I think you should do it and I'll be the helper. Wells wants to have the sacrifice over by the time guests start arriving at seven.'

'That doesn't leave enough time for cutting up the meat, does it?' His father was surprised.

‘No, he’s getting the ibongile from a butcher who specializes in this. We won’t eat the meat of the cow that’s sacrificed, the butcher supplies vacuum-packed and matured meat from another cow, then takes the ibongile off to prepare it for the next customer.’

‘Wowu, a bit irregular! I suppose you have to make allowances for this being the city, everyone’s time being limited and so on. It’s good that your friend is doing this at all, it shows he respects tradition. Will he offer some prayers for his ancestors?’

‘He’s not too concerned about that. I got the feeling he doesn’t *know* too many of his family’s izibongo, but I’m sure he’ll say something. He’s feeling very grateful to his okhokho right now because he’s just made millions in some share deal.’

‘We’ll do the best we can to help make it meaningful and beautiful. It’s good that your young arms are there to help my shamefully weak old ones. I hope your friend has a good blade.’

‘Oh yes, Wells has the best of everything.’

The large ivory card bearing the invitation had been printed with embossed gold. At the top of it stood Wellington Mphumuza’s logo: a stylized figure pouring water into the cupped hands of another, also in embossed gold. It symbolized Wells’ isibongo, ‘ukuphumuza’ meaning to bring relief or succour. The invitation had specified: *Dress: formal evening (dark lounge, long dress)*.

‘Do you think my new sharkskin suit is too light to qualify?’ Donny asked Irene as they were getting dressed.

‘Here, zip me up will you?’ she asked. ‘It does say *dark*, and that suit is rather light grey. But then it’s sort of silvery so it’s suitable for evening wear. Yes, I think you can wear it. Not everyone’s going to be in dark suits anyway.’

A thought struck Donny. What if the sacrifice were a messy business - would his suit get soiled? But he could always borrow an apron. Wells had some huge striped aprons that he wore to braai in, that would do for protection. He hadn’t told Irene about the sacrifice, aware of her acid tongue regarding traditional practices. He hoped Wells’s wives would draw her into the kitchen so that she need never know about it, though he suspected that there would be a team of caterers taking care of the food. If he got a chance, he would mention the sacrifice in the car going over there.

Over in Diepkloof, Dlabela and Nokuthula said goodbye to their friends and set off, already a little late because the company had been so good, down the Soweto Highway. Very soon they ran into a massive traffic jam. There was a Jozi derby that afternoon between Chiefs and Bucs, and thousand of fans were converging on the calabash that is Soccer City. They came in taxis, in their own cars, in the boss’s panel van, in lorries and bakkies, the vehicles all decked out in black and white with skull and crossbones, or in yellow with feathered headdresses. People leant out of

windows in an array of different makarapas, the most elaborate ones with a mass of gadgets, spectacles, toy animals and flags crammed onto the plastic helmet. People were shouting their team's praises and hurling insults at the other team, people were blowing vuvuzelas, people were hooting. Into this scene, Gogo and Babamkhulu drove. When it became obvious that they were not going to get through it in time, Gogo suggested trying another route. Babamkhulu didn't know any alternative way, however, and was afraid of getting lost in this huge city.

'No, we must stick to the route we know even if we are late. Here, take my cellphone and call Donny. Tell him we're stuck and must come on later, just leave us a map of how to get to the party. And if we're too late, we must just miss the party.'

Donny took the news with a sinking heart. This meant that he, 'the expert' at ukunikela, would have to do the sacrifice alone. He wished he had never bragged about his skills. Wells would just have to help hold the animal, and he would have to offer up the prayers and praises to his okhokho himself.

He and Irene were already late. Wells phoned them as they were driving, to ask where the hell they were, the cow was getting restless and she had already made two wet green messes on the driveway and lawn. Donny explained his parents' delay.

She was a heifer, not as big as an older cow though her horns, which swept up and back in a defiant abafazi baphika icala pattern, looked very sharp. Her hide was of the zikhala zemithi pattern, a spray of light cream spots and patches against a dark brown background, suggesting light filtering through the foliage of trees. She looked at Donny with alert eyes as he came up to where the butchers' men were holding her, and tossed her head at him as if to say 'Now who is this coming here? And why am I being held in this strange place?'

Wells had assembled some members of his family on the piece of lawn where the sacrifice was to be done. It lay just to one side of the ornamental fountain with its marble pool, positioned in the middle of the circular driveway and in front of the barrel-vaulted porch.

'Come on now, let's do this thing.' Wells was impatient.

No chance of keeping it from Irene now. Her face was a mixture of surprise, disgust, anger at him for not telling her.

'Where's your blade?' he asked Wells.

'Didn't you bring one? I thought you would have a special thing you always use.'

'There's our family iklwa but it's for Ngidi's and anyway it's at my folks' home. Don't you have a family blade?'

'No we don't,' said Wells. 'What now?'

'Just get a good sharp knife then, something with a long blade.'

A young boy was dispatched to fetch one. Donny ran his hand over the cow's poll, down her neck and flanks. Her nose was moist, her eyelashes very long. The boy returned with a knife whose blade Donny tested with his thumb, finding it not as sharp as he would have liked.

'Is this your best knife?'

'Yes. Swiss steel, you don't get any better, now get on with it.'

'Alright. Address your okhokho.'

Wells looked nonplussed, then he uttered a few sentences in which he thanked his ancestors for their great favour to him and his family, for his success in business, and he also managed a few flat words of praise as to their character. He was clearly no imbongi but it would have to do.

'Try to say a bit more as we sacrifice,' he told Wells.

'I don't know how. I'm getting a professional imbongi in later, you should've told me we'd need one now.'

Donny had seen his father take the ibongile cow around the neck, almost lovingly, before he slipped the iklwa deep into the shoulder, to where the lifeblood of the animal lay. The cow would struggle and make a bellowing noise - she had to bellow to announce her arrival to the okhokho. Then she would sink down, fold up and die.

Now Donny took the Swiss steel in his hand and slid his arm around the cow's neck. She smelt of sweet grass, her skin was warm. He placed the knife at a suitable point and with all his strength, hoping that he would find the right place, he drove it into her shoulder. It penetrated only a centimetre or two, a mere prick. The cow bellowed and twisted out of his grasp with surprising agility, one horn grazing his cheek and opening a gash there, and began running down the driveway. The family members scattered. The cow was making a braying sort of howl that shook the eardrums.

'Catch her! Shut her up - the neighbours!' Wells yelled to the butcher's men who ran after her. They struggled to bring her back while she kept up a frightful lowing.

'Help me to hold her,' Donny shouted at Wells. 'Here, take her horns in your hands.'

And Donny tried again to plunge the knife in, this time choosing a place on her neck and getting it in quite far, once, twice, but again she broke free, throwing Wells backwards so that he staggered and nearly fell. This time she galloped up the drive towards the entrance steps, spurting blood and bellowing. It took the two men quite a while to get hold of her and return her to Donny, and all that time she was bellowing and shaking her head about, spraying blood all over the driveway and porch and steps.

Wells was beside himself at this, shouting at Donny and the butcher's men and anyone else who got in his way. The cow stood swaying on her feet. Then she went down with her front knees on the lawn, struggled once or twice to rise, and fell over. Donny felt sick and quite empty. His glasses

were spattered, his suit was covered in blood, his shirt and tie were wet from the cut on his cheek. Irene was nowhere to be seen and he wasn't even aware of when she had left the proceedings: before or after the fiasco?

'You got it done in the end, my friend, but you are no expert.' Wells had calmed down a bit.

'That knife, it wasn't very sharp. No point, only one edge to it.' Donny's voice was a croak. But Wells wasn't listening, he was talking to his gardeners telling them to get the hoses and wash down the fountain, front stairs and pillars, to sluice the driveway and lawn. The butcher's team had already reversed their truck, got a belt under the cow and were winching her up and into the back.

Donny turned, went to his car, got in, and drove home in a daze, hardly aware of what he was doing.

Spiritual Supremacy

When the Personal Power course ended, after a three-hour session for eight consecutive Friday nights, Diana Findlay felt that her life was suddenly pointless. Friday nights had never seemed so empty before. She missed the trip into town, the subdued glamour of the Reef Club where the seminars were held, and the camaraderie of the group. She missed seeing Conan's quick, sensitive face and hearing his smooth voice giving her positive feedback, for she had undoubtedly been one of the stars of the class. Then, the homework exercises gave the week a purpose it had lacked before, and now lacked again. Most importantly, she had felt during the course that she was on track to something of fundamental significance, and when the course ended, she had not quite achieved it. So that when the phone call came, she was eager to take up the invitation.

It was her turn to host the monthly book club meeting. Ten women (besides herself) would gather at someone's house at three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, to return books borrowed from the common stock, and to see what four or five new books the hostess had bought for them. They were all old friends and the chatter was usually more about who was doing what, than the books. There was a wide range of tastes among the eleven women and Diana feared that her choices were mostly judged to be too 'literary', when the majority preferred block-busters or thrillers. But she continued to buy the Booker and Pulitzer Prize winners, confident in the knowledge that these were uncontestedly good books and if the book club didn't like them, well, they should.

Diana usually enjoyed these book club meetings, but today it felt like a chore. She resented having to set everything out - the books, the tea things, glasses, the cakes and eats she had bought - and do the hundred and one small tasks the occasion demanded.

'What a drag!' she thought as she polished the cake forks. 'I'm sure I told Tryphina to clean these.'

But it was an afternoon brimming with brightness. She went into the garden to pick some roses for the big silver bowl on the hall table (at least Tryphina hadn't missed that) when from her basket the opening bars of Mozart's 41st Symphony sounded their warning notes. She picked up the cellphone, scratching her right hand on the thorns of the plucked stems, and uttered a *sotto voce* 'Damn!' She half expected it to be one of the book club ladies calling to say she couldn't come, or would be late. But what greeted her was Conan's cool, well-modulated voice. Her heart picked up a little speed.

'Diana. My dear. I have a proposition to put to you.'

'Yes Conan.' Her voice sounded breathless. 'What is it?'

'I must explain first, what will hardly come as a surprise to you, that you were one of the outstanding participants in the recent Personal Power course. It is rare for me to come across someone who is so sensitively attuned to the basic concepts of the programme or who so fully achieves its ultimate aim. For someone like yourself, the elementary course is usually not enough, and then there is the possibility of going on to a more advanced level.'

'Yes? I must say that I would like some more of what we were doing.'

'Precisely. That feeling of needing something more is a mark of the advanced soul, of a higher spirituality than the norm. The basic course is enough for the average person. I imagine that your husband found it quite sufficient.'

'Oh yes, more than enough.' Diana flushed slightly as she thought of what her husband had said about Conan and his programme. But of course, if James had a limited soul, that would explain his inability to appreciate it; his engrained scepticism was confirmation that he was a spiritual retard.

'If he is interested in accompanying you, he would still be welcome at this higher level. I would not want to jeopardize your participation by barring James.'

'Thank you Conan. But tell me more.'

'I can't explain it all over the phone. You will get an email with the details of an introductory meeting at my home, together with another eight or so people from the previous course, next Friday night. No obligations, come along to listen and decide if you want to take this further. I should sound a note of warning. The advanced level is categorically different from the basic course in so far as it accesses quite a different kind of power from merely personal power, and it is only when you are truly powerful in yourself that you may be ready for this.'

Diana felt herself growing taller, her shoulders opening, as she thought of her personal power. Since the course, she had taken to waking up and stretching - something she had never done before - just to feel her muscles and bones flexing then relaxing, at the ready until she called on them. Her routines at the gym became a thrilling exercise of her strength, both muscular and mental. Sometimes, when she was driving the car, she saw herself cutting an inexorable path through the traffic and she revelled in the power she had. It was a heady feeling, this new awareness of her own strength.

'I feel I'm ready for it Conan, my power makes itself felt in me frequently these days.'

'Good. We'll see you next Friday then, with or without James.'

Diana strode back to the house with the roses and the day was full of promise.

When James Findlay got home from golf that evening, Diana was at her charming best. She had put on James' favourite blue and white dress and her best perfume. She took his bag of clubs as he came in from the garage, kissed him on the cheek and asked what he would like to drink.

'I'll have a large Scotch and water, my beauty,' he replied, circling her waist with his arm and giving her a squeeze.

'Go and relax outside. There are some snacks on the patio, darling.'

James raised his eyebrows, but Diana, busy getting ice for his drink, didn't see it so he went off to stow his golfing gear.

When he came out again, Diana was lying on the chaise longue with the garden behind her, soft in the late afternoon sunshine. It was Christmas weather in Joburg, the days brilliant with sunshine, clouds sometimes coming up for a short, late-afternoon burst. The whole northern part of the city was a nosegay of syringa, roses, brunfelsia, may, orange and lemon blossom; the lawns were green expanses of striped velvet.

'There's your scotch on the table, and some biltong and cheese straws. Come sit down here for a bit' - she patted the cushion next to her - 'my poor weary golfer.'

'Well thanks. To what do we owe the celebration?'

'Oh, nothing in particular. I just got to thinking how lucky we are to have everything that we do have: two wonderful children, a lovely home and garden, each other ...'

'Celebration is appropriate this evening - it was a great golfing day for me. We were on the old course. I shot a seventy-one and amazingly, an eagle at the third! It's a shortish par four and I struck a really magnificent drive to within eighty metres of the pin. My pitching wedge overshot, landed well past the pin, but the backspin on it reversed it into the hole. Dickie and Steve couldn't believe their eyes.'

She raised her glass of gin and tonic in silent congratulation. James asked her about the book club meeting and she arched her eyebrows.

'Oh fine, I suppose. There wasn't much enthusiasm for the books I'd bought. But then there never is, or only from two or three of the others. Well, I'm not going to buy potboilers just for the sake of pleasing everyone, clutter up my bookshelves with things I'll never read.'

'Of course not. That's your right.'

'Anyway, there was plenty of juicy news. Did you know that the de Villiers are having marriage counselling? And that Anthony Everitt was made redundant? when he's been with that firm for his whole life - it's not fair.'

'Times are tough in the business world.'

After a little silence during which James chewed on some biltong, Diana announced that she had had a call from Conan that morning.

'He's running a follow-up course to the one we did, and has invited a few of the better participants to join it. It sounds very exciting.'

'Aha. Is this the real reason for the celebration, or rather, the softening up of the old man?'

'James, don't be so cynical, my darling. I feel flattered that he has asked us because it's on an advanced level. Only people who have done well in the first course will be able to handle it.'

'Well that rules me out. I was conspicuously inept at personal power flexing. But you said he invited *us*?'

'Yes of course. He knows that I don't drive about by myself at night, so if you won't go, I won't be able to go either.'

'Surely great personal power means you can get about by yourself at night?'

'Don't get sarcastic James, it doesn't suit you. And you know that with all the hijacking and mugging, no woman alone is safe at night.'

'Hmm.'

'There's to be an introductory talk at Conan's own home, no obligations. Shall we just go along and hear what he has to say? It'll be interesting to see what his house is like too.'

James' mouth turned down; he told her that he could contain his curiosity about Conan's home, and his courses for that matter.

'But this new course is not like the first one, it's about quite a different kind of power,' she urged.

'Diana, you know I'm not keen on what Conan does. The man's a charlatan in my opinion. Those courses, for you and Luis and me, set me back nearly thirty thousand rand and at the end of the day what did we get for it? A lot of hot air nicely packaged to make us all feel important.'

'I can't believe you're so spiritually defective! Can you tell me you really felt no benefits from the course? That there was no change in the way you felt about yourself and the world?'

'The mere fact that we attended eight sessions on consecutive Friday nights set up a habit in us, and being exposed to Conan's jargon for twenty four hours meant that it got into our minds. But for me there are no effects other than those. And I guarantee that in two weeks you will have forgotten the whole bag of tricks and what a strong woman you are.'

'You say that as if it's a triumph for you. Well, let me tell you I intend to keep the principles of the course always before me and I will not forget everything in two weeks. I will never forget it. And if you won't come with me to this talk, then I'll go alone and if I get hijacked and shot it will be your fault.' Her cheeks flushed pink as she said this.

James felt himself trapped. He couldn't bear the thought of more Conan-style lecturing; on the other hand, he felt responsible for Diana's safety. He held out for a while, trying to persuade Diana to see things his way, but in the end, 'as usual', he thought to himself with a grim sort of patience, he conceded defeat and agreed to go to the introductory session at least.

So on the appointed evening, James and Diana, as well as Wellington Mphumuza, Mandai and another half dozen people from the first course, converged on Conan's townhouse in the exclusive Tuilleries Park complex. The entrance was a model to scale of the of Arc de Triomphe, a massive pile where wrought iron gates, spotlights, cctv and security guards made sure no unwanted elements entered. The houses that lined the avenues as they drove along to Conan's house, were on the same scale and loomed over the roadway; their gardens were on the other side of the house. Each one was in a different style: Spanish mission next to Tudor plaster-and-lathe, alongside Tuscan tiled towers, right by Frank Lloyd Wright glass-over-steel, cheek-by-jowl with Renaissance balconies and urns.

'I'm getting giddy from all these styles,' James declared.

'Yes, but just look at their size,' Diana was enthusiastic. 'They're all enormous.'

James reminded Diana that he wasn't hopeful of a positive response to what Conan was going to offer them, and warned her that she shouldn't expect him to be too polite about it either.

'But you won't be rude, will you? We are guests here.'

'I intend to be honest, and to call things as I see them. When courtesy means dishonesty, then I prefer discourtesy.'

'Just don't embarrass me. And respect the fact that people may hold views different from your own. You don't have a corner on the truth you know, so be tolerant.'

Conan himself greeted the arrivals under a cantilevered glass-and-steel roof over the front door and led them into an atrium where a tall blonde girl who reminded James of an Afghan hound was pouring sherry or fruit juice for those who wanted it. When everyone had assembled, Conan asked them all to follow him to the library upstairs, where the meeting would be held.

It was a room with one wall panelled in dark oak, concealed lighting, bound volumes going up to the ceiling on two sides, while drapes of green velvet covered the remaining wall. Chairs and one small sofa (which Wellington took) had been set out in a semi-circle around a desk with a laptop on it, and behind these stood a screen.

When everyone was settled, Conan took up his seat next to the laptop and began in a conversational tone: 'What we'll be talking about tonight is a natural follow-on to the programme you've all just completed. It's a step up to a different level and in this programme you will be accessing quite a different kind of power to your own personal power. You will be shown how to tap into the power of the universe, of the cosmos if you like, by using the power you developed in the first course. Think of your personal power as the tool that you will use to access cosmic power.'

He was speaking quite casually, without notes, which enabled him to maintain eye contact with the audience. Each person sitting in front of him (with the exception of James) felt that he or

she was the one that Conan was really interested in, and he was gratified to see the expressions of keen interest in everyone's eyes. He continued:

'Power of the universe - isn't that God? you may well be thinking. And it is the same - with certain careful qualifications and caveats. The churches had a hazy idea of what lay behind the reaches of the physical world and the early church fathers expressed it as clearly as they were able to, given the state of science and intellectual development in those times. But the paraphernalia in which they dressed the core idea up was misleading, superstitious, just plain crazy sometimes, for instance, a virgin birth announced by an angel. Most religions see God as a caring father-figure who knows what each of us is up to and what is best for us, with a consciousness just like our own; well, that's scarcely credible either. Then there's the whole heavenly host of angels, saints, seraphim and cherubim - even less credible. The fatal problem for all these religious personae is of course that of existence. Where are they to be found? In some suprasensible realm? If so, then how do they communicate with us or observe us? This problem of angelic or divine existence has been argued about for centuries and I think most people have come to see that the answer is, simply, that these beings do not exist in any real sense. They can only exist as fictional entities.'

Conan paused to ask how many of the group would consider themselves deeply religious. Of the ten present there were only three hands raised, and those a bit tentatively. He invited some discussion of what it meant to be deeply religious before continuing.

'Then the question arises of the purpose of all these fictional creations. If someone invents a fiction we have an interest in knowing why. The tooth mouse is a good way of softening the pain of losing a small tooth; Superman gives children an idea of altruistic heroism; the Devil scares people into being good and paying their tithes. In fact, the purpose of all religious entities from angels and the Trinity, to the prophets and Allah, to Krishna and his avatars, was to serve organized religion. The hierarchies of the churches grew too heavy, too overstaffed for their own good. To maintain it all, religion turned its attention away from the original insight of cosmic power, to the question of how to present it to the masses in a way that would serve religion's own internal needs and ensure unthinking devotion to its dogmas. And we all know the disastrous results of zealotry: crusades, auto da fe's, the Israel-Palestine conflict, 9/11.'

Conan asked whether anyone had another example of the kind of madness that issued from religious fanaticism, and the group was quick to respond. Diana referred to the Salem witch hunts; another person gave the example of suicide bombings; another cited the Catholic/Protestant hatred in Ulster. Conan let them talk on for a while before drawing them back to himself.

'This course that I've invited you all to look into tonight, aims to get back to the original insight of what cosmic power is, and of how an individual might access it. It aims to lift that "vast moth-

eaten musical brocade” that is religion to see what lies behind it. If you feel nostalgic about the church, think of the power we shall be studying as a God for our times, stripped of the mumbo-jumbo, the imperative of worship, the fanaticism, in short, of all the negative baggage that the church attached to it.

‘What exactly is this power? It is the alpha force that keeps the machinery of the cosmos, including ourselves, ticking over. How do we relate to it? That is the burden of the programme on offer.’

Conan leaned over and switched on the powerpoint presentation outlining the four-month course. The first screen announced the title: The Sacred Order of Power Eternal.

‘That’s not quite the name of the programme,’ Conan explained, ‘but rather of the group you will be invited, and entitled, to join when you’ve successfully completed the course. “Sacred” because these things are not in the realm of the mundane; a special kind of care and respect is required in dealing with power of the sort we shall be encountering. “Order” because we will always be a select group of initiates with esoteric knowledge which distinguishes us from ordinary people, and binds us as an order.’

Conan switched to a series of slides in which the programme was set out. He talked to these, explaining the divisions of the course: the two introductory sessions in which the nature of cosmic power was revealed to participants; four medial sessions preparing participants for direct engagement; the methods of engagement and their dangers in four evenings; four sessions of advanced engagement; and two winding-down evenings preparing participants to go out on their own.

When the last slide had been explained, Conan turned and looked at each of the ten people in his audience. Some were plainly absorbed by what he had said. Diana Findlay’s eyes were shining and her lips were slightly parted; Wellington Mphumuza was sitting well forward on the sofa, hands on his knees with his mouth pursed; Mandais fingers played thoughtfully about his lips; James Findlay was loosening his collar and looking at the books.

‘Here’s a little booklet which sets out in brief what we’ve talked about tonight. Take it home with you,’ said Conan, handing them out. ‘Anything you’d like to ask me?’

After a short silence, James said: ‘You’ve been quite clear, though it was mainly definition by negation and we still don’t know exactly what this cosmic power is. Still, one question occurs to me: how much does it cost?’

‘Thirty thousand per person,’ Conan answered. James whistled. ‘You may wonder why the first course of eight weeks was only nine and a half thousand when this one, of sixteen weeks, is more than three times that. It’s because the subject matter is categorically different. Knowledge of cosmic

power is a rare and esoteric phenomenon, and there is a duty on those of us who are familiar with it, to safeguard it from falling into unworthy hands. That is why the personal power course serves as a gatekeeper to this one, and why the price may seem disproportionate to some.'

'What happens if a person doesn't make it?' Wells wanted to know. 'Can you guarantee me that I will get this power if I do the course?'

'Of course not. No absolute guarantees. But I can promise you all, that, given your demonstrated spiritual competency, if you apply yourselves here, you will be successful. In fact, "successful" is putting it too mildly; you will be blown away by the results.'

'Where will the course be held?' It was Diana. 'When do we start?'

Conan smiled. 'No, I'm not taking enrolments tonight. Go home, read the leaflet and think about what you have heard here tonight. Then, if you are still interested, give me a call on my cell, but not before Monday. On the advanced course, we can accommodate only seven people, so the first seven who commit, will be accepted.'

As they got into their car and set off for home, James realized that Diana was on an adrenalin high. She chattered incessantly, laughed at her own quips, and spoke of the wonderful experience in store for them.

'I'm just sorry that Conan wouldn't take our names tonight. We must be first on the list on Monday. Imagine how terrible if people got in ahead of us and we couldn't do it.'

There was no response from James.

'It's the chance of a lifetime. How lucky that we did the personal power course - and to think you nearly didn't! Oh James, this will be the making of you. Energized by cosmic power, there'll be no stopping you, because you're not stupid you know, it's always just been a lack of energy and drive.'

James was silent.

'Conan is a wonderfully unselfish man to be sharing this with us. I mean, he could just have kept all that knowledge and power to himself.'

'I am not going to do this course, Diana.' James' voice was quiet but something in it told Diana she had hit bedrock. 'And what's more, I am not going to throw away thirty thousand rand for you to do it.'

'I can't believe you, James! You of all people need something like this, so, so badly, but you can't see it. And it's because you're spiritually defective that you can't see the value of the course. Can't you just trust me on this one, darling?'

They turned into their own tree-lined road.

'No trust is needed. I can see very clearly what Conan is doing, how he plays on people's vanity and lust for easy power, and the whole thing is just a scam. Well, I'm not paying him all that money to con me, and you too, with some claptrap about cosmic power.'

'Claptrap! James, I must do this course, it's an imperative for me. My whole soul cries out for it. If you won't go then I'll drive myself every time, and if you won't pay, I'll get the money from Granny's trust.'

James glanced at the woman at his side. Her face was bluish under the neon lights, her mouth was a thin line and the expression in her eyes, which were fixed on him, was steely.

'I'm sorry I can't accommodate you this time Diana. It's just too foreign to my nature.'

She turned away and looked out of the window.

'You've never accommodated me, y'know, never really been the sort of man I could admire. I don't want Sebastian taking you for a role model. And you're always encouraging Camilla to daydream and ignore the proper goals for a girl her age. Maybe we should just admit irreconcilable differences and go our separate ways. Then at least I could bring the children up as I see fit.'

'Diana, for God's sake, you're taking this too far. Threatening divorce!'

'It's not a threat, it's a very real possibility. I'm tired of being held back by you, tired of being a mediocre housewife in a middle-class house with no prospects of ever being anything else. I would do better on my own.'

And for the first time in their married life, James admitted to himself the rift that had always been there between them. At some deep level beyond the everyday interactions of marriage, in their essential selves, they were different. Her phrase 'irreconcilable differences' had triggered something, had caused in him a dark sense of impending crisis but had also opened the door on a vista of life without Diana. It was not without its charm.

But now was not the time to start a serious discussion; Diana was crying softly, She started to say something through catches in her breath. James cut her off.

'No, we can't talk about this now. You're overwrought by the whole evening. We'll talk again when you're calmer.'

They drove into the garage. They walked into the house in silence. After a shower, in his pyjamas, James took his pillows and a rug from their bed. Diana regarded him with pursed lips. As he left their bedroom and headed for the sofa in the study, she called out: 'Don't think I spoke hastily. I meant every word I said.'

He couldn't sleep, couldn't find a position for his tense body that felt comfortable for more than a few minutes. The new word 'divorce' filled his mind. He vacillated between telling himself that their marriage wasn't so bad, no worse than their friends' marriages, and that he should try to

mend things for the sake of the children (but would Diana play her part in that scenario?); and telling himself that a break was for the best, he was still young enough to make a new life for himself and he and Diana would never be truly happy together. Rather now than in ten, fifteen years' time.

As sleep hovered over him, involuntary images slipped into and out of his mind: a saxophone shining in a spotlight, rising and falling as the player moved up and down; a woman swaying to its sound. His last coherent thought was: 'Maybe I will find my lost child.'

Homesick

There had been a thunderstorm in the early hours of the morning. It was as if the heavens were a huge tank and someone had whipped the bottom off so that a solid mass of water crashed down on Alexandra Township. Gladys, Zondi and Dushi were in a breeze-block garage with a fairly watertight roof, so they were alright. It was only against the one side wall that the water ran down and from there it was easy to sweep it out of the door, as she had done during the storm. Gladys looked out now on the wet scene outside. Rivulets were finding a way for themselves past small-scale sandbanks, splitting around a rock to flow together again below it. Everywhere water was running in twists and turns through the rubbish and down the slope: rivers in miniature all making their way to the big Jukskei River below.

There wasn't a tarred road or even a street in any strict sense, but a bare earth passage-way between the houses. Plastic bags, polystyrene containers, cooldrink cans, papers, old mielie cobs - every imaginable kind of refuse lay about there, all wet through from the rain. A sour stench rose off it as the sun warmed things up but beneath that Gladys sniffed the rain-wet earth, and she breathed in a good lungful. It was a patchy sun though, with coal-grey shreds of cloud running over it, and there would be more rain soon.

People were moving down the track between the houses, on their way to the station and taxi-rank, to get to work, hopping from one dry patch to the next in an effort to keep good work shoes clean. Zondi had left a little earlier to report to the security company who would send him out on a job somewhere or other; she never knew exactly where he would be working. It was bad that he had to do such dangerous work when he had a certificate in computers from the Good Progress College in Midrand. He had studied for a year to get that piece of paper and it had cost almost a third of Gladys' money from the Road Accident Fund for Solly's death - four thousand, five hundred rand. But it hadn't helped him to get a decent job. All the places he applied to said he needed experience and more than one year's training if he wanted to work in computers. At least he had got in with Castle Security and didn't have to hang about the streets of Alex all day like a lot of other young men. Dushi was in the room behind her, probably still asleep. She would wake him at ten o'clock to get ready for his job as a waiter, from twelve o'clock till late.

Now she watched a straggling group of about twenty people coming up the track the other way, carrying all their possessions with them, or as many as they could manage, in outsize shopping bags and boxes, the children holding onto their mothers' skirts and crying, running at the nose, coughing, the mothers trying to comfort them without tipping the boxes off their heads. The men led the way, carrying bundles on their backs. She knew where they came from; it was like this every

time it rained hard. Their tin-and-cardboard shacks were on the edge of the Jukskei, and when its waters rose too high, they had to move or they could be swept away. Once last year it happened that the river suddenly grew so full and strong, it took the houses with it. Some people, mainly children, had died that night. When the river went down again, people had followed it to find their homes, collecting and often fighting over pieces of corrugated iron and weatherboard, to put them back again. In the same spot. There was no other free space in Alex.

Now two of the men were pausing and looking at her in the doorway, or rather, were casting careful eyes over the small piece of grass and yard to the left of her garage.

‘Sisi, siyakuncenga, we beg you to let us sleep here, just till the river goes down a little. It will not be more than two nights, maybe just one.’

‘It is not my yard Baba, and I cannot say yes, come stay here. Mnumzane Dlamini is the owner here and you must ask him. He is at work now but I can give you his cellphone number.’

While the call was being made, the whole group came slowly into the bit of garden and laid down their things, the women sitting blank-eyed on the concrete with the children now on their laps or leaning up against them. Gladys went inside, shutting the door. When she looked out again, the women were getting to their feet, heaving the boxes onto their heads again and going out into the walkway. Mnumzane Dlamini must have refused. She could understand that, for squatters’ rights were protected by the law and once they had been allowed to settle, even for a couple of nights, it might be hard to get them to leave.

That afternoon, she thought of the wanderers again and hoped they had found a place, as clouds grew dark and thunder rumbled. She knew that Zondi and she, and now their friend Dushi too, were lucky to have this place. They paid R950 a month for it. It was a single garage with a corrugated iron roof so that when it rained hard or hailed, you couldn’t hear yourself speak.

Near the door were the kitchen table and chairs that she had brought on the bakkie from Stop 14, when Abraham had taken over her umkhukhu and wanted to steal all her furniture too. On the wall above them, with proper glass and a yellow, green and black ANC frame, was a picture of Madiba. Even when food was a bit short, a meal was always good with that fatherly face smiling down on them all. She felt he watched always over them and they were blessed by his gaze. Next to the table stood a wooden crate with the paraffin stove on it, and inside, some shelves held dishes. The food cupboard was next to that. Zondi had put up some wires high on the walls so that each one of them had their own sleeping space, divided by curtains hanging from the wires. In the middle of the room stood a sofa, rather lop-sided and with the stuffing showing here and there, that she got from one madam who was moving to Cape Town. In front of that stood a black-and-white television set on a small box. Dushi had fixed it up with a line that ran under the door and out to the robot on

the corner, where a crocodile clamp gave them power. He would go out and take the clamp off and roll the cord up when they switched off at night. And in the corner, behind another curtain, stood the slops bucket and a wash-stand. Yes, they were comfortable and she knew they were among the lucky ones.

She began to prepare the evening meal for Zondi and herself (Dushi ate at the restaurant): phuthu, seshego and a piece of wors. Umlotha, the little grey cat, came rubbing up against her legs as she smelt the sausage frying, confident that she would get her piece when it was done. She put aside a small section of the onion for her knees. Since she had taken the inyanga's advice, and rubbed onion on her arthritic knees whenever she could, they were less painful. As she chopped the onion and tomatoes, set the phuthu pot to steam in a blanket, and fried the wors, she indulged in a favourite daydream, of the house they would one day own.

She knew it well by now. It was among the good houses of South Bank, built of brick, plastered and painted a pale green. Its roof was made of dark green tiles and under the roof, many bright glass windows shone. In her imagination, she walked up the path again, to the front door, enjoying the flowers which grew on either side, the neat cemented front yard, and the peach tree which grew out of a circle in the concrete, with a bench under it. There were grandchildren playing in the front yard, two little boys and a girl, Zondi's children with his wife Nobuhle.

He would be coming home just now, parking his car in the garage to one side of the house, and getting out of it in a smart suit and tie, with the briefcase from his work in a big computer company. She waited at the front door to say hello, and they went in together, to the lounge with its fine suite and big TV, nets on the windows with long curtains. Nobuhle called hello from the kitchen where she was preparing food and Zondi went to greet her, but Gogo felt like a rest and went straight to her own room and lay down on the pink candlewick bedspread, moving Umlotha to one side from her favoured sleeping position right in the middle of the bed. She gazed at the picture of Madiba on the wall opposite her bed where she had placed it so it would be the last thing she saw at night, and so that she knew he was watching over her as she slept. She was a little tired but not much. In that house, her knees gave no problems and her back never hurt either.

The children ran in to beg for a sweetie. She kept a jar of jelly babies in her cupboard and now she gave one to each child, warning them that they must still eat their dinner. The baby, three-year old Masontwa, climbed onto the bed and asked for a story but the two big boys ran out to play again. She told the toddler the very oldest inganekwane, about unwabu and intulo, the chameleon and the lizard, and how it came about that people, who had been immortal before then, now had to die.

But before she could get to the dinner table in her daydream, there was a knocking on the real door and she went to open for Zondi.

'Hawu, your eyes are looking at a far mountain this afternoon, Mama,' he said, and she admitted she had been dreaming about their one-day house. Zondi was familiar with this house, and his reaction when it came up in conversation was always the same.

'We must do something to make this happen. When did you last go to ask about how long we must still wait for an RDP house here in Alex?'

'It must be almost a year now since I was last there, at the new offices.'

She didn't tell him that though she had been there, she hadn't managed to speak to any official. She had waited first outside the Housing Department in a long queue, then on benches in the waiting area inside. The people at the three windows often took a long time to help someone, so that she was still seven people from the end of the queue when half past three struck, and blinds were pulled down inside the windows. The security man told them all to go home and come back the next day but she had not been back since.

'How long is it since we made our application, Mama?'

'It was when we moved here from Merapa Street, and that was two - no, nearly three years ago.'

'We must go back to the housing offices and ask where our name is on the list now. I will try to get some leave to go myself.'

'No, I can go. The new offices are better. I will find out for us. Perhaps we are near the top, perhaps they are already waiting for us to come and claim our house.'

'Well, we must find out,' was Zondi's cautious reply.

So the next day, she was up early and at the offices by half past seven, to find herself only tenth in the queue. This was good, she would get to a window quickly. Once the doors opened, she went inside and sat on a bench, with a ticket in her hand saying '10'. There were three more windows now, so within just a quarter of an hour, her number came up on the red-scrolling screen and she went up to the window.

'Yebo Baba, sanibonene. I have come to ask about my house here in Alex. I have applied a long time ago.'

'Yes, just give me your ID book.'

She handed over the small green book with her special number in it, first removing a folded piece of paper from it.

The housing officer typed her ID number into the computer, looked at the screen for a moment, then said: 'But your name is not on the list here. Not for Alex anyway. Are you sure it was Alex you applied for?'

'Yes, it was Alex, not here but at the old offices in Seventh Street. Look, there's the receipt for the listing money,' she said, unfolding the piece of paper and passing it to him. He looked at it with raised eyebrows.

'What's this listing money? You don't have to pay anything to apply for a house.'

'The man at that office said I must. I had to pay R100 to put my name on the list for houses.'

'Hawu, sorry Sisi, this is not a proper receipt, it's just a page from a note book.'

'Yes, he said the machine was not working that day so he would give me an office receipt. And he wrote it while I was watching him, and put the stamp on it. Look, it says *Received from Gladys Mngomezulu the sum of R100* and it's signed and stamped. With the stamp that says City of Johannesburg, Housing.'

'Yes, it's our stamp alright. But that signature could be anything. And the date is not clear. Can you say exactly what day it was when you paid this money? Would you be able to recognize the man you paid it to?'

No, of course she could not say exactly what day it was when she paid the money, of course she would not be able to recognize the man she paid it to.

'Then I can do nothing to help you. Eish, M'ma, I am sorry but it looks like someone has cheated you. I cannot even put your name on the lists for Alex now because we already have too many names for the houses which are being built in the next six years. An order came that the lists must be closed, no more applications for Alex.'

'So what can we do now?'

'The office in Thembisa is still taking applications. You can put your name down there.'

'But it is so far away, it takes so long to get into town, the taxi money will kill us.'

'It is the only thing you can still do, if you want a house.'

Gladys went outside. She tore up the false receipt and threw it into a bin whose shape was wavy from the tears in her eyes. Then she walked home, feeling that she did not want a house any more and that her dream had just been foolish nonsense. She told herself that of course houses were not for people like Zondi and her.

When she told Zondi about it that night, her throat was tight and speaking was difficult. She blamed the man who had cheated her, saying that now they would never have their own house. But Zondi would not agree with her.

'No, don't give up hope, Mama. I am working at Boulders Shopping Centre this week, and there is a Community Service Centre just near there, where we can apply for a house at Tembisa. Isn't that good luck? Maybe we are meant to have a house at Tembisa. It is a bit far from town, but there is more space out there.'

So for Zondi's sake, Gladys picked up her dream again, hoisted it onto her head, and began to think of their house in Tembisa.

Gifts of Fortune

Wellington Mphumuza's home in Hyde Park was modelled on a French chateau. It had round dormer windows let into mansard roofs of blue slate with turrets here and there. The walls enclosing the garden were three metres high. Wrought-iron gates spanned the driveway between square pillars and they were monitored with cctv and intercom from the guardhouse inside. In the centre of each gate was a copper outline of Wells' business and personal logo: a man pouring water into the cupped hands of a kneeling figure. The cobbled driveway curved through the gates, over lawns, past shrubberies, and up to the house. There it rounded a circular pond with a fountain in the middle: Venus rising from a shell with tritons and dolphins supporting it, water shooting straight up from the lip of the shell in seven jets.

The house with its outbuildings and courtyards covered nearly half an acre and it stood in another few acres of landscaped gardens. At twilight, cobalt blue floodlights came on, and stayed on all night, casting an alien glow over facade and fountain, trees and lawns. The architect had objected that the lights were wrong but Wells insisted.

'What, I must have candles and grass torches to go with the house?' he asked. 'I must forget modern lighting just because the style of the house is old?'

He found the plain blue a little monotonous, so for his celebratory party after a preferential share deal had netted him a few million, Wells called in his lighting man and had him arrange a rainbow sequence of lights to be playing over the front facade all evening. Each colour held for thirty seconds and cast a different character over the house; under the cobalt, it was a Transylvanian castle; the pink made it a Hollywood extravaganza; in green, forests and grottoes of mossy shadow appeared; yellow transformed it into the Sun King's golden palace.

It was towards this ever-changing display that James and Diana Findlay drove, after the uniformed man on the gate had waved them in and told them they could still park inside. There was a stiff formality between them, and had been ever since Diana raised the possibility of divorce. James was content to let the thing be for the moment and see where Diana went with it. He knew that she had been having unusually long phone conversations with her brother, a lawyer, and he suspected that she was assessing the financial implications of a divorce. But the invitation to this party was something they had accepted jointly some time before, and by tacit agreement, they were attending it as a couple, with the cracks papered over for the evening.

'Beautiful house,' said Diana. 'Who would've thought someone like Wells was so successful? And those coloured lights are gorgeous!'

'A bit much,' James replied.

'You're not going to be your usual dog-in-the-manger self are you, James? Just because you're not as rich as Wells?'

'No, no. I'm here for a party.'

He recognized two familiar figures mounting the steps as they drove up. 'Look, there's Luis and Lulu. At least we'll know one other couple here.'

'We'll know plenty of people. I think everybody from the course will be here.'

'He certainly invited everyone. Very generous.'

The two of them made their way up the broad steps. Diana snorted at the strange appearance of James' face under the lights.

'When the green is shining on your face, you look exactly like a frog.'

But James had paused, sniffing the air.

'Do you smell blood?' he asked. 'That metallic smell, like iron really - that's blood.'

'Yes, it's quite strong. Hope this isn't going to be a vampire feast with us as victims.'

'Look, the steps are wet and it hasn't been raining. Maybe there was an accident ...'

In the barrel-vaulted front porch, a major domo in white gloves and a dark gold-braided uniform greeted them and asked for their names, then swivelled through ninety degrees and announced towards the next flight of stairs:

'MR AND MRS JAMES FINDLAY.'

The stairs ended above eye-level; beyond them, they could see nothing but tall pillars and a transparent ceiling with a slim crescent moon hanging above it.

'Oh this is divine,' breathed Diana as they went up the stairs. 'I could be happy if I had a place like this.'

The next level opened out into a large room beneath the heavens. A crystal chandelier with a myriad pendants tinkling in the breeze, was suspended from struts across the perspex ceiling. Three of the walls were clad in mirrors, while the fourth was open, giving onto a patio with tropical plants and the blue trapezium of a pool in the distance. Beyond that, something like a huge lateen-rigged sail was visible against the night sky.

In the centre of this room was a raised circular dais on which was placed an outsized and ornate ormolu chair with rococo carving on the arms, legs and top, upholstered in scarlet. It was placed on a zebra skin. In it sat Wellington Mphumuza, filling it completely and even bulging out a bit below the armrests. He was dressed in a white suit. His ruffled shirt was crimson with a white bow tie, and there was a crimson stripe down the trousers. Behind him, on either side of the throne, knelt two large women in traditional Zulu dress: beaded aprons, cloaks tied around their shoulders, neck-, ear- and leg-rings all of the purest white, with only their izicholo or woven hats of crimson.

Guests were standing in line to mount the dais and greet this trio. Wellington, the affable host, spent a few minutes in conversation with each party, introducing the two women as his wives. The women shuffled forward on their knees to shake hands, European-style but with their left hands supporting the right wrist, believing that it was discourteous to extend a single hand at another person.

As they stood in the queue, James looked about the room. He saw several of their Personal Power class. Mandai, Conan himself with the Afghan-hound-type girl at his side, Luis and Lulu, Andrew and Tossie, and others, were chatting with drinks in their hands, either in the room or out on the patio. Waiters were circulating with trays of drinks, caviar canapés, oysters, prawns, crayfish kebabs, parma ham rolled round melon. Everyone was elegant in evening dress, several in black tie, with quite a few guests in kente robes and carrying fly whisks. Through the open side of the room came the sounds of music and singing. Distant strings were playing light classics: Strauss waltzes and favourites from the opera. Then after ten minutes or so, it was the turn of a choir singing traditional isiZulu ihubo choruses accompanied by drums.

After James and Diana had shaken hands and exchanged a few words of greeting with the three on the platform, they moved down to join the others. It was already a sizeable party at only quarter-past seven, probably more than a hundred people, James thought.

'You are looking specially lovely tonight, Lu.' James felt a real affinity with this young secretary of his and she treated him with a sort of mischievous affection.

'Thanks, Boss,' she grinned, knowing that James was uncomfortable with the 'Boss'.

'No, we're not in the office now, please no "Boss",' he pleaded. 'Call me James or Jim.'

'OK, but it might make me too cheeky at work.'

'No chance. If you are, I'll just have to discipline you.'

Luis, her date for the evening, laughed. 'I'd like to see you try that! She's a wild cat!'

Diana was gazing round the room. 'Oh god, this place is magnificent. I want one like it. D'you think we can look over the house?'

'From those firmly shut doors, I'd say Wells wants to restrict the party to the designated areas.'

'Well, then let's go outside, look around the garden.'

'Coming?' James asked the others. Luis and Lulu joined them but Mandai said that there was someone he was expecting, and he wanted to stay near the entrance to greet him.

'He doesn't know anyone else here - well, just Luis, and he's quite a shy type.'

Mandai glanced at his watch as the others moved off. Half past seven. Still plenty of time. He took a glass of champagne off a circulating tray, refusing the snacks with a 'Not hungry thanks'. The

front door, down two flights of steps, wasn't visible from this level, but standing against one mirrored wall, Mandai could see the second set of steps up which guests must come to join the receiving line.

The top of people's heads came into view first. Faces were indistinct because everyone had his or her head down, watching the steps, but as soon as they were at the top, they lifted their heads to look about. Most people were in pairs, man and woman, and Mandai immediately discounted the appearance of two heads of uneven height. A single head appeared quite often though, and then Mandai was alert. On one or two occasions, it was a dark head on a slim body and then his heart raced. In particular, there was one Indian man of middle age whom Mandai was almost ready to rush over to, and hug, but he saw his mistake in time.

Out on the patio, Irene Ngidi, wife of Wellington's good friend Donny, in a glistening green evening dress, was standing with a group of people whom she knew slightly, two mothers of children who were at the same schools as Jason and Melinda. She wasn't talking much, just throwing in the occasional 'Oh yes' and 'Of course' to hold her place in the group, but helping herself freely from the trays waiters kept offering.

She looked round for Donny now and then but he was nowhere to be seen. She had last seen him with that cow, about to perform some ritual which didn't bear thinking about, so she had gone to the library and spent a comfortable couple of hours catching up on the latest fashion magazines and chatting to Wells' teenaged daughters. Wells took subscriptions to every magazine worth having, including plenty for his womenfolk. Then she had come out to the patio and started her party early with some good champers.

But now, she was getting uneasy about Donny's long absence. At last, she took a glass of champagne and went over to a tiled ledge where she rested her evening bag. Taking out her cellphone, she dialled Donny's number, got the wrong person, swore softly and dialled again with more care. He answered.

'Where are you? D'you know it's nearly eight?' A pause. 'A lot of things've been happening here too. You've been gone nearly three hours and not a word to me.' Pause. 'Just get yourself and your parents over here, dinner starts at eight.'

At precisely eight o'clock, the major domo closed the front doors with a resounding boom and mounted the steps. He went over to the dais, conferred with Wells for a minute, then took up a position in front of the throne and bawled: 'Manene naManenekazi, Ladies and Gentlemen, kindly form up to follow Mnumzane Phumuza in to dinner.'

Wells struggled to his feet with the help of his two wives and they each took an elbow to help him down the step. Mandai watched the guests drift after the three Phumuza's, out onto the patio

and past the pool, down the garden to where a Bedouin-style tent had been erected on the lawn. He wondered briefly whether he should tag along at the end of the line but then he turned and ran down to the heavy doors, opened them onto the warm night, fluttering with insects. The pink spotlights blinded him for a moment; he had to shield his eyes till they adjusted and as he waited, he noticed, as he had done coming in, the blood-scent in the porch. Then he made for his car.

But as he turned the key in the ignition, he thought: Deva's inclined to forget the time - what if he's just a bit late? Then he'll arrive and I won't be here to meet him and he'll wander about looking for me, feeling lost and alone.

So he got out of his car and hurried back to join the procession to the tent.

An enormous area of canvas had been hoisted on tall poles with stays and guy ropes; there were tables and seating under its wings. On one side was a platform with the string quintet playing as guests settled down, on another side was a platform with the ihubo choir and three drummers silently watching proceedings, waiting for their cue; in the middle was a dance floor.

'So there's to be dancing.' Conan leant over Tossie to yell at Andrew above the noise in the tent; their table was close to the stringed orchestra.

'Very nice, very nice too. I just hope they don't make us dance to the singing of that lot over there,' Andrew laughed, nodding at the choir. 'I'm no good at Zulu dancing!'

'Oh you may be sure Wells won't expect us to do any tribal dancing. But looking at these guests, they won't have any trouble with a Vienna waltz or a foxtrot. Very sophisticated,' Conan replied. He scanned the others at the table. It seated eight so there were two other couples, both black. The two men looked as if they might be business associates of Wells's with whom he could do a bit of promotional networking. He leaned forward, offering his hand, and introduced himself to both. Soon they were chatting, and presently there was an exchange of business cards.

Andrew remarked *sotto voce* to Tossie that Conan certainly had kissed the Blarney stone. 'Trying to build up new contacts for his courses. Not that I begrudge the guy a marketing opportunity. Maybe I should do the same myself, pass out a few cards.'

But he sat without making a move towards the other couples. Tossie was in easy conversation with the two wives, asking about their families, explaining that they had no children, chattering as if they were close friends, while Andrew studied the tent's construction.

At another table, near the ihubo choir, Irene was sitting, keeping three places, so her table didn't fill up. Eventually, one other couple, speaking Zulu, came to sit there. She felt conspicuous and annoyed. This was not how the party was meant to go. Donny and his parents still hadn't arrived and now he wasn't even answering his cell. She would have some sharp words for him when they

arrived. But when they did finally appear at the entrance, she was just glad to see them. She jumped up and waved; they were soon seated, Donny with a strip of sticking plaster along his cheek.

'Where were you? What's happened to your face? Was it that cow?' Irene asked, touching the plaster with a gentle finger. 'And what happened to your clothes?'

'It's a long story, babe. I'll tell you when we get home. For now, let's enjoy the party.'

From the top table, where he sat flanked by his two wives and members of his large immediate family, all in red and white, Wells got up to make a short welcoming speech, alluding to his recent luck and hoping that everybody present would help him to enjoy it by themselves enjoying the party. Then the lavish hors-d'oeuvres were served. Donny found that he was hungry and as he ate, his mood lifted.

In the break before the main course, an imbongi appeared on the dance floor in traditional dress with a quilled headdress, and recited praises for Wells, ending in a hoarse growl that incited Wells to stamp his feet and roar back. Then the main course: a choice of filet mignon, lobster thermidor, or vegetables en croute. The plates had hardly been cleared when a troupe of spangled dancers appeared on the floor and did a choreographed dance to the 'Toreador's Chorus' from 'Carmen', played by the string quintet. The final entertainment for the evening, after dessert, was a fierce Zulu war dance, to drums and chants from the ihubo choir. Wells, carried away by the act, mimed the warriors' movements from his seat, sweat running down his face, which his wives took turns to wipe away with the crimson napkins. After that, the strings led off with the 'Blue Danube', and couples were invited to dance.

Donny's parents were watching everything wide-eyed. Dlabela raised his voice to tell Donny and Irene that he was amazed at the mixture of English and isiZulu at the party, and at the lavishness of everything.

'How does this man do it? He must be very rich.'

'Oh he is. But do you think he is spoiling our traditions by mixing them up like this?' Donny was concerned that his father would think this cultural miscegenation degrading for isiZulu.

'No, not at all. It's wonderful to see that he makes room for so much that is truly Zulu.'

Wellington was making his way over to their table. He greeted everyone warmly, saying how happy he was to meet his good friend's parents at last. Dlabela complimented him on the splendid party and the fact that he had included Zulu elements in it.

'Of course we must. The best of all worlds. The tent is Arab, the food was French, the music is from Europe and KwaZulu, the dancing too. Did you like the imbongi? You missed our sacrifice earlier Baba, but Donny will tell you it was a good one.'

'You think so?' Donny looked surprised. 'I thought I made bit of a mess of it.'

'No no, you did fine.'

The ihubo choir was singing and Wellington told them all to get on the floor and show their appreciation for the music. They joined the people on the dance floor, swaying and moving in time to the song, a lilting chorus that told of bringing the herd into the byre at evening.

As they returned to their table, Donny gave Irene a sudden hug. A breeze was gently lifting the full-bellied sail over them and from the garden came the night-scent of jasmine. Wellington was right, he thought, as he refilled their glasses from the champagne bottle on the table. Just take the best of all worlds and enjoy it.