Where the Devil Turns

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ABSTRACT

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The dissertation is comprised of two sections—a critical essay titled "Crime Fiction as Political Novel in Postcolonial and Transnational Literature" and a book manuscript titled *Where the Devil Turns*.

In "Crime Fiction as Political Novel in Postcolonial and Transnational Literature" I argue that even though crime fiction is easily dismissed in academia due to its formulaic nature, its mass consumption and rapid response to change gives it the ability to seed new political ideas as well as highlight and expose existing issues within a society. The genre's appropriation by postcolonial and transnational writers to examine identity, hybridity, and the failings of the state, along with providing a sense of catharsis and justice in the wake of instability experienced by both the postcolonial and transnational subject, has given it credibility as a serious form of literature.

Where the Devil Turns is a crime novel set in Cape Town, South Africa, during the imminent approach of Day Zero, the day the city runs out of water. The novel uses the vehicle of crime fiction and intersecting narrative threads to illuminate the failure of the state in delivering on its revolutionary goals. Alet Berg is an ex-police officer that works in the country's booming industry of private security. Her old partner, Johannes Mathebe, tracks her down after years of no contact to help him look for his thirteen-year-old daughter who has gone missing. A second narrative thread follows a young homeless

boy, Fairchance, from 1994 until the present day on his journey of entanglement with violent crime. A third narrative mimics extracts from a work of non-fiction, written by the character Grace Bhuku, in which she writes about her interviews of and experiences with Adriaan Berg, Alet's father and apartheid-era assassin for the state. This narrative raises the question of whether redemption is possible for the perpetrators of apartheid, and whether there is a place in the New South Africa for those who once benefitted from colonial oppression. The three narrative threads intersect to present a multi-dimensional exploration of the postcolonial condition in South Africa.

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CRIME FICTION AS POLITICAL NOVEL IN POSTCOLONIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Crime fiction in the British and American tradition, more specifically detective fiction, takes the chaos that surrounds us and transforms it into neat, logical packages where every problem has a clean linear solution and can therefore be classified as a literature of containment. The postcolonial subject tries to deal with the trauma of colonialism while negotiating their way through issues of crime and corruption, the rise of a new bourgeoisie, and establishing a new identity, while reclaiming older ones amidst the void left by the colonizer. Along with crime fiction's central themes of uncovering the concealed, this deciphering society's codes and laying its disfunction bare, as well as providing a sense of catharsis in the wake of the instability when the colonizer leaves means that many postcolonial societies experience a surge in both the production and consumption of crime fiction.

In transnational literature, themes of crime are also increasingly found due to instability, identity negotiation, and the discrimination the individual experiences when borders are crossed. Central to postcolonialism is the assertion of a non-colonial identity, whereas transnationalism focuses on the political other. What they have in common are issues of hybridity, multiculturalism, race, and the negotiation of identity in unstable circumstances.

Since the 1990s postcolonial fiction has begun to critically examine the society it inhabits, a society that has had time to rebuild itself but has mostly failed in its revolutionary goals. Due to its relationship with the colonizing country, its citizens deal with shifting identities as they cross borders and negotiate identities as the other in a

foreign country. As well as crime fiction that incorporates and explores the transnational condition, postcolonial crime fiction can therefore be viewed as the format of the new political novel through its negotiation of shifting identities, the exploration of social ills, and an examination of the postcolonial society. Otto Penzler, speaking about US black crime and detective writing, states that under repressive regimes detective stories could not flourish, as the police are regarded by much of the citizenry as the villain and not the answer to fear and injustice (ix). This sentiment was echoed by the famous South African crime writer Deon Meyer in a 2006 NPR interview when he stated that under apartheid it would have been impossible for him to write about a policeman as a hero. It is therefore little wonder that South Africa – whose literary soil had been rather barren during apartheid save for censored, state-approved material, and subversive protest literature that confronted the systemic violence of white supremacy – has produced such a rich array of crime fiction after the end of apartheid in 1994.

Sunshine Noir, an appropriation and subversion of the American hard-boiled tradition, has evolved as the new wave of postcolonial literature due to the genre's capacity to document rapidly changing social realities while displaying leftist tendencies in depicting the blurred lines of the criminal/detective relationship and exposing injustice. Even though South African crime fiction in the guise of Sunshine Noir manages to provide escapism and entertainment, it is nevertheless linked to engagement with suffering in a complex multicultural society, in which identities are constantly being negotiated and avenues for societal change are being explored. It can therefore be viewed as the new political novel due to its propensity for socio-political analysis and as a

reaction to the need for fictional fantasies of control, threat negotiation, and anxiety management in an unsure and dangerous reality, therefore making it an ideal vehicle for a new wave of postcolonial writers trying to establish their ownership of place in the post-apartheid reality.

My own creative work, which I categorize under this sub-group of crime fiction, draws from both the postcolonial and transnational literary tradition, and uses the lens of crime fiction to explore the postcolonial condition in South Africa, using the liminal figure of the detective to negotiate cultural borders in an attempt to uncover truths and expose the assumptions of the social constructs of race and gender as well as the state of the postcolonial society.

Although the terms postcolonial and transnational are often used interchangeably in critical discussions of literature that are produced by or have as their subject of people of non-European descent, distinct differences exist between the terms and their expression in literature. Postcolonialism deals not only with colonization and its lingering effects in a decolonized state but with the lingering effect of the colonizer in a decolonized state, but with the effects of Western influence as well. In addition to identity, postcolonial literature labels the literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations whereas transnational literature deals with or is written by individuals who leave their home country and forge an identity in a new culture.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, postcolonialism seeks to examine the experiences, processes, and effects of and reactions to European

colonialism from the sixteenth century up to and including the contemporary responses to neo-colonialism (2000). In other words, the term, postcolonialism, encompasses both the period after colonialism and imperialism as well as in opposition to colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial literature takes as its theme the forging of a distinct cultural and national identity in the wake of independence from the colonial power. Many canonical texts imposed a version of world views, values, perceptions and forms of writing which largely ignored or excluded the experience of the colonized. Postcolonial literatures have in common such themes as nationhood, finding a language, a discourse that is both creative and critical, issues of resistance, relations to the ex-colonial power, renewal and recuperation. It also focuses on the development of writing forms that were marginalized and devalued under colonial rule, thereby questioning and challenging an established literary canon.

> According to Edward Said, colonization does not end when the colonizer leaves:
>
> To have been colonized [is] a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results, especially after national independence had been achieved. Poverty, dependency, underdevelopment, various pathologies of power and corruption, plus of course notable achievement in war, literacy, economic development: this mix of characteristics designated the colonized people who had freed themselves on one level but who remained victims of their past on another. (207)

Freedom is therefore not the end result of the colonizer's departure. The colonized is mired in an oppression as the after-effects of colonization. This idea is echoed in Homi Bhabha's concept of the mimic man, in which people are destined to always reference

their colonial past. Recent trends in postcolonial literature, however, especially that of crime fiction in South Africa, has strived to move into an examination of social ills, and situating the self as a lawful and authoritative occupant in the postcolonial country instead of a subject who is the victim of the legacy that colonialism leaves in its wake.

The transnational subject, on the other hand, is an elusive figure, a person who moves across borders, sometimes transecting them through a delicate political negotiation. Transnationals do not share one nation, experience, language, thought process, culture, class, or ideology. The only common denominator is that they are classified as the other, not a member of the nation state. Transnational literature therefore deals with themes of migration, exile and displacement, and revolves around literary responses to various historical and cultural moments of transition or crisis. Whereas postcolonialism deals with the reclamation of identity by the colonized, transnationalism is about crossing borders, and the negotiation of identity between cultures - that of the home country and the adopted country. In *Transnationalism*, Steve Vertovec identifies the transnational individual as being "marked by dual or multiple identifications" and depictions of the trinational "individual's awareness of de-centered attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home', here and there or, for instance, British and something else" (6).

Transnational literature often deals with othering and difference as the transnational individual deals with dual, or even multiple identifications, race being only one of them. Andre Aciman writes that "exiles see double, feel double, are double. When exiles see one place they're also seeing – or looking for – another behind it." (13). The

transnational individual has de-centered attachments, a consciousness of being and belonging neither here nor there, but in some third liminal space.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha posits the idea of hybridity, which refers to the state of being at the border of two cultures, marked by a sense of double consciousness in the migrant. Hybridity is a subversion of single, unified, purist notions of identity, in favor of multiple cultural positions and a response that destabilizes colonial rigidity:

> The migrant culture of the 'in-between', the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream or the racist's nightmare… and towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference. (321)

According to Bhabha, this hybrid, third space, is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity. Hybridity or third space is an interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative space of new forms of cultural meaning and production. It blurs the limitations of existing boundaries, calling into question the established categorizations of culture and identity. In transnational narratives, rootlessness and migrancy are celebrated, and the myth of purity and homeland are undermined. The process of migration, Bhabha argues, means that it is difficult to clearly identify concepts like nation, peoples, authenticity and tradition, but at the same time this "makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition" (248). This also means that one becomes increasingly aware of the invention of

culture and tradition (248). Due to globalization, Bhabha observes that the hybrid migrant occupies a "third space" where colonial as well as the native identities meet and contest and are simultaneously asserted and subverted.

For the purpose of this essay, I define crime fiction, which boasts a myriad incarnations and subgenres, as a fiction that negotiates a criminal act. The tendency to ascribe cultural and literary inferiority to fictions of crime is still common in academia, even though it is currently the most widely-consumed genre in print, film, and television in the United States and the United Kingdom. This may be due to the formulaic and escapist nature of mainstream fictions of crime. There is, however, a pervasive presence of crime in many novels considered as "literature," for example Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, and the Nobel-winning *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee. Though the earliest recognizable detective story is commonly acknowledged as Edgar Allen Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," featuring proto-detective Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, themes of detection in literature can be traced as far back as *Oedipus*, as well as also being a common theme in the works of Defoe and Dickens. Julian Symon's history of crime fiction, *Bloody Murder*, first published in 1972, is an attempt to assess the literary merit of the genre and indeed the conclusion at which he arrives is that the genre cuts across the so-called highbrow and lowbrow evaluations of artistic merit. Whereas literary fiction is often characterized as character-driven, and genre fiction as plot-driven, the boundaries between the forms are becoming increasingly blurred. Character-driven crime novels, such as Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and more recently, the three childhood friends, Jimmy, Dave, and Sean, in Dennis LeHane's *Mystic*

River, as well as the connected cast of detectives in Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad series, are becoming the norm of the crime fiction genre and are considered to be works of literature. In the same vein, works of high literature, such as Coetzee's *Disgrace,* are increasingly employing crime as a vehicle to comment on society. The genre also often subverts formulaic expectations by crossing genre boundaries like Peter Høeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, which combines crime fiction with a historical perspective, as well as speculative elements, to provide comment on Danish colonialism in Greenland.

Crime fiction provides a form of escapism while simultaneously managing to engage with social issues on various levels. Ian Rankin, the Scottish crime writer, stated that crime fiction is probably the genre in which you could learn most about another society (Rankin quoted by Meyer NPR). W.H. Auden saw crime fiction as a substitute for religious patterns of certainty (Knight 1). This view is not surprising since the genre has its roots in religion which could be viewed as the earliest form of law, where what constituted sin was defined by the moral tenets of the church and sinners were considered deviants. Crime fiction's preoccupation with the law and what constitutes the violation of the law inevitably leads to a thematic preoccupation with society's views and ills at any given time. Definitions of crime and legality in society are necessary to prevent it from sliding into chaos and anarchy. Crime, criminals, and criminality, are therefore evidence of deviance from cultural and social norms. The genre responds almost immediately to cultural and social shifts and events into its texts and has traditionally been the first narratives to reflect these changes. Examples of this can be found in James Lee Burke's *The Tin Roof Blowdown* which was one of the first texts to respond to Hurricane Katrina

and its aftermath, and Minette Walters's *The Chameleon's Shadow* in its early depiction of the post-traumatic stress of an Iraq war veteran. Crime fiction is also the only fiction genre that deals with fact, that is, the detective ascertains the guilty party through fact, and the definition of what constitutes a crime has to be written into the legislation of the country that produces it. It therefore offers the reader insight to the legal, moral, and social values of its present-day reality as well as the past that created it (Worthington ix-x).

The genre not only serves as a historical record of social beliefs and norms of a society at a specific time, but because of its scope, adaptability, and mass-consumption, is a vehicle for addressing a changing world and tackling issues surrounding human rights, and changing social constructions of gender, race and class. In the words of Stephen Knight, "major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realize and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read, and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction" (2). What constitutes a criminal act, then, is defined in the world of the fiction and the society that produced it, and its value and literary merit lies in the fact that it not only gives us further insight into the social ideologies, norms, and attitudes of that society at a particular point in time, but also has been proven, due to its mass consumption, to influence public opinion and acceptance of new norms and trends, which makes it particularly well-suited for examining shifts in societies and seeding new norms in the postcolonial state and globalized nations. This makes it a

valuable and necessary object of study in the academy, qualifies it as work of literary merit, and, in the more accomplished forms of the genre, a serious and significant art.

Essentially, the detective story features three main characters: the victim, the detective, and the murderer. All three act as "others" to mainstream society as nothing others like being dead, or, as in the tradition of the detective story, being a detective who stands outside of society and events (Kim 1). The criminal may seem to initially be part of society, but is, in the end, unmasked for being a threat to the order of the society he inhabits. It is then no wonder that early crime fiction was used to seed the idea of the racial and colonial other in Britain and the United States. Maureen T. Reddy looks at race in crime fiction: "Whiteness – its boundaries, its value, its meaning and perceived threats to its dominance – has been a primary concern of crime fiction throughout its history in the US (135). Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" establishes the basic shape of the detective form, but also comments on race, even though there are no people of color in the tale. Poe establishes in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" the idea of ratiocination in the genre through his detective Auguste Dupin who is described as a man for whom ordinary men "wore windows in their bosoms" (117). Dupin has such great powers of observation that he seemingly can read the narrator's thoughts through an observation of facial expression and can rationally follow a chain of logic from that expression to the thought. Dupin then uses his almost magical power of analytical thought to solve the closed room murder mystery of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter. Not only is the distinctly western philosophy of reason and linear thought established as a way to restore order from the disorder and threat to society that murder poses, but the least likely

suspect, a sailor's pet orangutan, is identified by Dupin as the murderer. Representation of the other is present throughout the narrative as French, Italian, and Dutch are represented in the French city of Paris and there is no sense of a unified culture in the urban setting, but it is especially the insight into ideas of the racial other through the figure of the orangutan that is of value. Poe is said to have conflated two newspaper accounts, one of a Negro murderer and of an escaped orangutan in creating the story to create the darkly colored ape who viciously kills white women (160) propagating the common racial mythology of the black man's designs on the white woman. The story is a contemplation of the unstable dynamic between white and black, and projects Poe's, a well-known anti-abolitionist "proslavery mind" (Cassuto 160).

Looking at the tradition of mystery writing that developed in the wake of Poe's Dupin stories, the most famous of which are Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories and Agatha Christie's Poirot and Ms. Marple novels, commonly known as "clue puzzle" mysteries in which the reader is invited to solve the case alongside the detective, the mass consumption of these narratives and their function in the society in which they were produced cannot be ignored. If we look at an early example of the genre, Gladys Mitchell's psychiatrist detective, Mrs. Lestrange Bradley, "had advocated birth control, dismissed the idea that pornography was a malign influence, blithely overlooked incest and infidelity, and acknowledged homosexuality" (Bright 78), all by the early 1930s when these topics were a social taboo. Mitchell was an early pioneer towards acceptance and change in societal attitudes. Keeping in mind that Doyle produced work at the height of British Imperialism, and that both Christie and Dorothy Sayers were writing in the late

Victorian and Edwardian periods when the British Empire ruled much of the world, their influence on the propagation of ideologies of empire are visible throughout. Mass culture, as part of the public and social sphere, plays a crucial role in not only the swaying of the population to a specific point of view or narrative, most commonly that of the colonizer, but also in the struggle for the consent of the colonized: "Mass culture becomes one of the crucial arenas for the resistance, acceptance, or incorporation of hegemonic values" (Thompson 6). Christie had a pattern of the murderer being a member of the white Western middle- to upper middle-class, a social group that features in much of her work, however racist and misogynistic references are pervasive throughout, such as the title of her 1939 novel, *Ten Little Niggers*, which was later changed to *And Then There Were None*. Sayers's 1923 novel, *Whose Body*, featuring the aristocrat detective Lord Peter Whimsey, referred to several Jewish characters, including the victim, Levy, in very racist and derogatory terms, reflecting anti-Semitism in Europe at the time. These narratives do not only reflect but endorse and fortify societal attitudes. However, to further make my point, I want to focus on the earlier example of Conan Doyle's influence on society through his extremely popular Sherlock Holmes stories and its influence on mass culture and the acceptance of empirical values in Britain.

Hegemony in the colony is not exclusively secured by brute force, but by instilling a narration of superiority by the colonizer both in the mother country and the colony. Aimee Cèsaire argues that the act of colonization decivilizes and brutalizes the colonizer (35), and quoting Hitler, that the population is prepared for war by instilling a narrative of propaganda that dehumanizes the colonized: "We aspire not to equality but to

domination. The country of a foreign race must become once again a country of serfs, of agricultural laborers, or industrial workers. It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities among men but of widening them and making them into a law" (Hitler quoted in Cèsaire 37). Mass culture began to manifest itself in the second half of the nineteenth century, coinciding with, and playing a role in the dissemination of imperial thought and values in Great Britain and America (Thompson 9). It is therefore not surprising that the Sherlock Holmes stories by Conan Doyle play a significant part in the acceptance of a culture of imperialism at this time. Conan Doyle, a Victorian apologist of empire, used his stories to valorize enlightenment, empirical values, and imperialism. After his involvement in the Boer War in South Africa, he not only wrote an impressionistic history of the war, but also later defended criticism of the English conduct in the war with a work entitled, *The War in South Africa: It's Cause and Conduct*, denying the deplorable conditions in the concentration camps even as 27 000 people, mainly women and children, died from starvation and disease. Doyle's *The Sign of Four* is perhaps the most exemplary of the colonial relations depicted in his Holmes stories. Doyle commonly handles characters designated as "others" through their subordinate class, foreignness, or by simply being women as stereotypes, the assumption clear that they are inferior. Foreigners, especially those with darker skin, as in Tonga, an Andaman aborigine and the native accomplice of Jonathan Small in *The Sign of Four*, are particularly one-dimensional representation:

> They are naturally hideous, having large misshapen heads, small fierce eyes, and distorted features… They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews,

> braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded with a cannibal feast. (28)

These sentiments echo Edward Said's ideas on Orientalism in its attitude toward the other as being exotic and barbaric, aesthetically inferior to Europeans, thereby creating a binary which normalizes and legitimizes Western civilization and imperial designs on other nations. In this way, Doyle's detective fiction, along with a body of literature produced in support of the imperial venture, was part of the "systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said 3). In such a way, the West then propagandizes an image of the other in the East and Africa as being inferior, devoid of culture and religion (as posited by Georg Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*) that needs the uplifting, civilizing influence of the West, to which they may be impervious.

Racism has, and still serves as, an excuse for Western imperialism in which the other is viewed as not fully human. The image of the native other in the novel is set against the Englishman who is motivated by noble aims to suppress savagery. Holmes uses empirical knowledge to solve this and other cases, thereby symbolically vanquishing the violent Orient, represented by the Indian Mutiny and its effect on the characters of the novel, and restores order to the center.

Along with its view of the other, the empirical knowledge in Doyle's fiction negates any societal cause or impact of crime. Holmes's focus is on solving a problem

with the use of knowledge, not the underlying social concerns of that problem. Holmes does make use of a network of underclass characters to hunt down information, but the societal causes of the existence of their poverty and circumstances are never explored. Women get the same treatment. Holmes sees them as "insoluble puzzles" (Doyle quoted in Thompson 73). With the assumption of inferiority, Holmes never explores the domestic oppression of women that might lead to their deviance, only uncovers the fact that they are deviant because of their inherent nature. This sexism, along with racism, is evidence of the imperial nature of the Holmes stories. Doyle's stories worked to produce an ideological image of English superiority "untroubled by sexual, economic or social pressures" (Thompson 75) in opposition to Eastern and African inferiority, which manufactured the consent and complicity of the West in colonization.

Whereas Africans were deemed as simple savages without enough intelligence and sophistication to commit crimes and were therefore not featured as criminals in nineteenth-century fictions of crime, the racial other became a common scapegoat and proliferated as criminal in Golden Age mystery fiction, so much so, that a "moderation in the use of… Chinamen" (Haycraft 198) is prescribed in "The Detective Club Oath." In an increasingly globalized society, representation in Western detective fiction has moved away from the traditionally all-white cast, where minorities primarily occupied the role of perpetrator, or the uncivilized and inferior other as in Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, to an inclusive cast of characters from the periphery that encompasses class-, gender-, race-, sexual orientation-, culture-, and religious otherness. It has then also become a site of resistance for the other in fiction most notably in the trend of postcolonial crime fiction

where crime fiction's "connection with social criticism, documentary fiction, and political reflection" (Vallorani 171) gets appropriated to examine the state of the post colony. Crime fiction's ability to rapidly adapt to changing circumstances not only makes it an effective vehicle to seed ideas of race and gender, but also to examine its oppression in the colony.

The first wave of postcolonial fiction was used to give voice to the colonized and assert their identity by reclaiming their culture and history as well as speak back as equals to the colonial masters (Worthington 171). Crime fiction's production and consumption increases dramatically in most postcolonial societies, perhaps due to the fact that crime fiction's main function is to take a situation of disorder or imbalance in the world, like a crime or murder, and, through detection, solve the puzzle and capture the responsible party, thereby restoring order to society. Crime is also the symptom of a dysfunctional society and it is therefore that we find fictions of crime increasingly more present in the latest wave of postcolonial fiction which has turned introspective, critically looking at the society it inhabits and its ultimate failure in its revolutionary goals. In both crime fiction and postcolonial fiction, we find "a strong tendency to organize content in sharp dichotomies and at the same time the development of forms of resistance restoring interstitial spaces and grey areas" (Vallorani 171). Postcolonial crime fiction is then born out of the experience of imperialism, not only the imperialism of the colonizer, but also deals with the modern-day cultural imperialism of the West over developing nations and its affirmation or resistance to that imperialism.

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the number of crime fiction novels written in and about South Africa had risen significantly. Through the appropriation of Noir, a sub-genre of the hard-boiled tradition in crime fiction, with its morally ambiguous characters and numerous gray spaces, South Africa, and Africa at large, has experienced the rise of the aptly named Sunshine Noir novel as a new wave of postcolonial literature. Crime fiction in a broad sense speculates about "social disorder, threats to property and body, and to imagine responses to them" (Knight 62). By this definition, most of the recent literature produced in South Africa can be categorized as crime fiction. Noir, however, as sub-genre of crime fiction, is particularly characterized by violence, fatalism, cynicism, and moral ambiguity.

Noir, born out of the American hard-boiled tradition, can trace its roots to early pulp fiction, most notably the seminal fiction of John M. Daly in *Black Mask*, one of the most popular pulp magazines of its time. Daly's "Three Gun Terry" has the distinction of being the first tough detective story with its detective, Terry Mack, being the first tough-talking hard-boiled detective. But the hard-boiled genre's development was not exclusively in opposition to the British mystery story. In the work of Hammett, Cain, and Chandler, it also aimed to be considered a form of realist fiction, and as we know, reality does not have a formula. In his famous essay, "The Simple Art of Murder," Raymond Chandler decries the formulaic artificial writing of the murder mystery. In an attempt to validate the American tradition of the hard-boiled detective genre and its fidelity to reality he states:

> Hammet gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare, and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes (234)

This passage not only frames social motivation and verisimilitude (as opposed to British clue-puzzles), but also refers to the fidelity of language and makes a case for Hammet's ability to bridge the gap between pulp and literature with an objective style and social motivation.

Often seen as a successor to Hammet, Chandler's own work in the genre, according to Auden, "should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art" (151). Chandler is also praised by "university graduates of English and people of similar tastes and needs" (Knight 138) because of his resonance with alienated people and the implication of the merits of intellectual superiority of the individual when negotiating threat. Chandler's characteristic writing tendency (in the hard-boiled tradition of unhappy endings) with its problematic denouements and lack of resolution, reflect life. Both Hammett and Chandler's work are products of the social conditions of their time, a time of urban blight, corrupt political machines, and the disenfranchisement of sections of the population through graft and influence peddling. Dennis Porter states that this was a time "ripe for the emergence in popular literary genre of a disabused, anti-authoritarian, muckraking hero, who, instead of fleeing to Europe, like the sophisticates of lost generation fiction, stayed at home to confront crime and corruption on the increasingly

unlovely streets of modern urban America" (96). This disaffection with the political, economic and institutional system of America in the Depression period is reflected in Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep*. It is this ability to present the mood and representation of a period which raises the work to the status of art.

The plot of *The Big Sleep* begins simply enough with an investigation by Marlow on behalf of General Sternwood into the gambling debts of his daughter Carmen and the resulting blackmail, but then spirals into the murder of the blackmailer, Arthur Geiger. The murder is solved half way through the book, but by this time a series of other crimes and issues have taken over Marlow's investigation, which then centers on the disappearance of Rusty Regan, Sternwood's son-in-law. The plot twists and turns until it is revealed that Carmen killed Rusty because he refused her advances, but this is just one murder in four that occur in the book, which points to a wider sense of social malaise. The plot complexity is typical of the hard-boiled genre in representing crime as an ongoing and pervasive fact of everyday life and not a one-off anomaly as in the clue-puzzle tradition. It is therefore in step with the postcolonial condition, especially in South Africa where violent crime is a ubiquitous reality.

The interrogation of identity in Noir is particularly relevant when we look at how the genre has been appropriated by writers of specific national, regional, or local contexts. Most often we find that narratives of crime posit or enforce as well as question national and cultural identity. In many instances, investigating the setting has subsumed the investigation of the crime. In some instances, this has served to enforce stereotypes, but most often questions preconceived ideas about place and occupant. The hard-boiled

tradition privileges the individual in American culture and there is an emphasis on the very masculine lone individual. Chester Himes's *A Rage in Harlem* (1957) takes the genre and appropriates it to become a site of resistance to the lone white male stereotype. Himes told an interviewer that "I had started out to write a detective story… but I couldn't name the white man who was guilty because all white men were guilty." (Himes quoted in Reddy 140) Though Himes is obviously writing in the hard-boiled tradition of the genre, he offers an early example of a text that repeats and inverts the ideological imperatives of the dominant discourse in order to authorize those marginalized by it" (Walton 92). Whereas black detectives were presented in fictions of crime before Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932), commonly accepted as the first American black detective novel, a major change that black writers brought to the hard-boiled genre was to make the detective's blackness "an integral ingredient for the success of the investigation." (Soitos 29) Himes has two detective partners, not the lone individual so characteristic of the hard-boiled genre. Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones are isolated figures because they are seen as the enemy by the rest of the predominantly white police force and by the people of Harlem because they are police. These two characters are placed on the margins of society as black police officers upholding white laws in a black community.

Barbara Neely's *Blanche on the Lam* (1992), though not strictly Noir, gives another example of how the genre was incorporated as a site of resistance to the American colonization of the black body. Like most crime fiction, *Blanche on the Lam* centers on themes of morality, but manages to break most of the so-called rules of

detective fiction. Blanche White is a domestic worker and feminist detective whose race is integral to her solving the crime. Whereas the solution to the case Blanche investigates hinges on money, sex, and power, the novel is particularly about how these elements interact with race and class. The novel focuses on social injustices, race relations, and the position of black women in American society. Blanche's "color and profession" makes her invisible to her white employers (102), and she is frequently privy to information that helps her solve the case because of this invisibility. It also allows her to hide from the law in her own home town after she escapes from a jail sentence for passing fraudulent checks as the result of her white employers paying her late. The novel is also unique in that it writes to a specific audience and doesn't fall prey to acting as a tour guide for white people with insights into and explanations of another culture. Whiteness's normalization is thereby put under scrutiny as far as audience assumptions are concerned. The close third-person point of view also offers access to Blanche's mind and view on the world which frequently ponders social injustice and race, for instance when she ponders Southern law enforcement whom she views as "the descendants of the paddyrollers and overseers who'd made their living grinding her kind into fertilizer in the cotton fields of slavery" (89). Blanche says it like she sees it, her thoughts becoming a device in the novel enabling Neely to talk back to her colonial oppressors.

As an effect of globalization, the American and British production of narratives of crime, be it through real-crime or fictionalized accounts of crime, are exported world-wide, their influence recognized in the texts produced by developing nations. The American and British investment in the imperial enterprise of instilling certain social

(Western) norms through its production of crime fictions has also been used as a site of resistance from postcolonial societies through appropriation and hybridization of the genre to deal with issues of oppression that still plague former colonies. Postcolonial crime fiction is born out of the experience of imperialism, not only the imperialism of the colonizer, but also the modern-day cultural imperialism of the West over developing nations and its affirmation or resistance to that imperialism. Mũkoma wa, Ngũgĩ ‘s 2009 novel, *Nairobi Heat*, is a detective thriller in this postcolonial Sunshine Noir tradition but also functions as a form of transnational literature due to the dual identities of the protagonist. As is the case with the majority of works of crime fiction, it is narrated in the first person from the point of view of Ishmael, a black detective from Madison, Wisconsin, who travels to Kenya to investigate the main suspect, an African male, in the death of a young blond woman. Themes of race and belonging, along with transnationalism in a local and corrupt capitalist sense, are prominent in the novel. Ishmael muses in the opening passages:

> How many times had I thought of Africa? Not many, I’m afraid. Yes, I knew of Africa. After all it was the land of my ancestors; a place I vaguely longed for without really wanting to belong to it. I might as well say it here: coming from the US there was a part of me that had come to believe it was a land of wars, hunger, disease and dirt even as my black skin pulled me towards it. (1)

Not only is detective fiction and the detective as a cultural familiar of American audiences used as a vehicle to introduce Kenya in an exciting and familiarizing way, but also to examine Western misconceptions and stereotypes about Africa and race.

Outward appearance as signifier is often misread in the novel as Ishmael is constantly mistaken by Kenyans as native and is expected to be able to speak Kiswahili and then called a *Mzungu* (3) when he is identified as not from there. The other as black man in America is yet again othered in a society of black people for not belonging. The West's influence on identity is particularly seen in the character of the local detective, O, who "slipped in and out of Americanisms easily – Americanisms that had filtered into Kenyan culture through movies and music videos" (47). O also embodies the idea of a fluid identity through this code switching, whereas Ishmael disdains colloquialisms due to his knowledge that "to make it in the United States black people had to speak proper American English" (47). But as with Himes's detectives in *A Rage in Harlem*, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, who are isolated figures, seen as the enemy by the rest of the predominantly white police force and by the people of Harlem because they are police and therefore placed on the margins of society as black police officers upholding white laws in a black community, Ishmael also faces accusations of being a traitor to his race for being a black policeman in the United States (51). The novel depicts the appropriation of culture in the colonial figure of the criminal Lord Thompson who claims that though his "skin is white" his "soul is African." (59) The quest to reveal the murderer, as with most fictions of crime, is the driving force behind the narrative, but in the quest for the discovery of this societal other the otherness and liminal identity of the detective is laid bare as is often the case in Noir.

Kwei Quartey's *Wife of the Gods* (2009), set in Ghana, incorporates the hard-boiled sub-genre of detective fiction in the figure of the lone detective, Darko Dawson,

who leaves the city to lead a murder investigation in rural Ketanu because he is fluent in the indigenous language spoken in the area. The novel subverts the genre expectations through Dawson's loving relationship with his wife and son, along with an emphasis on family and the conflict of traditional values with the more Western attitude in the city. By going to Ketanu, Dawson returns to an extended family that he left twenty-five years earlier after his mother inexplicably disappeared. The novel also deals with the commercialization of tradition, most notably the decorative Adinkra symbols that once only adorned cloth at funerals but have become commodified for tourists (20) The colonial presence is also addressed in the city where street names still copy those in England and the intrusion of the West is seen in "Internet cafes, glitzy stores and banks, and restaurants serving anything from sushi to pizza." (41) This world is in sharp contrast with Ketanu where "Men never collected water. That was women's work" (105), and the traditional healer, Boniface Kutu, is still charged with the "detection and cure of witches." (109). The modern detective, Dawson, is set in opposition to the traditional detective Kutu. But a dual narrative set in the city has Dawson's mother-in-law, Gifty, taking his son, Hosiah, to a traditional healer to mend his heart defect against Dawson's express wishes. The end result is that the boy is injured in an attempt to hold him down which causes strife in his family in the city, just as his investigation clashes with the traditional values of his family in Ketanu. The novel is a thorough examination of the negotiation of identity between cultures and highlights the detective's liminal position as he negotiates worlds. The ultimate unmasking of the murderer, a trusted and loved family

member, negates expectations of identity as a fixed ideal, a prime aspect of the hardboiled genre.

Crime fiction in postcolonial literature is especially prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa where my own creative work is set. Sunshine Noir is increasingly being appropriated by post-apartheid writers such as Deon Meyer, Margie Orford, Diale Thlolwe, Angela Makholwa, and Mike Nicol, among others to examine societal ills and explore the blurred lines of morality that the failed ideals of the revolution have left upon its subjects: "In a country known for its violent crime, crime novels provide South African citizens the ability to analyze their country's ills, affirm their country's path towards justice and democracy, and, ironically, escape – for just a while – the nitty-gritty of everyday crime." (Powers 30) Crime fiction as postcolonial literature is an especially effective tool for creating empathy and understanding of the other due to its scope and popularity. Deon Meyer, in his novel *The Heart of the Hunter*, was one of the first white South African novelists to have a black Xhosa man, Tiny Mpayipheli, as a protagonist. Meyer states that "in South African crime fiction, whatever we've had over the years, we've never had a black protagonist. And I just felt that it was time. It was something that needed to be done in Afrikaans literature." (Meyer NPR) Though Meyer's work has been translated into twenty-eight languages, he writes exclusively in Afrikaans as a way of preserving a language that, though spoken by a small percentage of the population, is seen by many as the language of the oppressor. His novels, all of which are steeped in Noir elements, are extremely popular in South Africa, are best understood as a vehicle for initiating the blurring of the color lines and creating an interstitial space where the

language of the oppressor and empathy for the racial other come together. Meyer's fiction often deals with maligned and discredited Afrikaner culture and specifically Afrikaner men. His work is intent on casting the Afrikaner in a positive light through the figure of a white male detective who has integrity and was trained within the apartheid system but is not racist. He pairs his hero, Tiny Mpayipheli, from *Heart of the Hunter* with white detective Benny Griessel, in *Devil's Peak,* and some of his other novels, creating an interracial partnership, a theme which can also be found in Mike Nicol's Mace Bishop and Pylon Buso who work as security consultants in the New South Africa, and Orford's Clare Hart, who is paired up with Muslim Inspector Riedwaan Faizal in a professional as well as romantic relationship as they solve murders in Cape Town.

Regarding my own works of fiction, both *The Monster's Daughter* and *Where the Devil Turns* carry forth this tradition by pairing a young white police Constable, Alet Berg, with a middle-aged black Captain, Johannes Mathebe. Their partnership brings together not only two disparate personalities, but also diametrically opposed experiences of the history and present-day realities of South Africa. Their relationship itself becomes a negotiation of identities and social realities, a crossing of borders as it were, that necessitates a coming together in order to solve the crimes at the center of both novels.

Crime fiction, with its multi-dimensionality, has also been an important vehicle for the emergence of diverse writers such as Diale Thlolwe, Angela Makholwa, Sifiso Mzobe, and H.J. Golakai, as well as writers who write exclusively in Zulu, Xhosa and other native languages, giving a voice to once oppressed people. Thematic in the work of these writers are themes of identity negotiation and crossing borders. Thlolwe's detective,

Thabang Maje, negotiates his identity between the rural village with its traditional values and beliefs, and his life in Johannesburg as a professional detective seeking justice for those taken advantage of by the bourgeoisie. Angela Makholwa is notably the first black woman to make her mark in the genre and makes use of the unique urban vernacular of Johannesburg in her writing. Her heroine, Lucy Khambule, epitomizes the feminist ideals of the new generation of black South African women. She is strong and independent, a successful PR consultant who shifts her identity between the township and the middle-class suburbs of Johannesburg, but holds her own amidst a string of violent events when she gets involved in the plans of a serial killer in the novel, *Red Ink.* Sifiso Mzobe's main character, Sipho, negotiates his identity as a seventeen-year-old with little prospects in the gang-dominated townships of Umlazi. Golakai's transnational heroine, Vee Johnson, a Liberian immigrant who works as a journalist when she isn't solving mysteries, has to overcome her anxieties about her violent past in order to solve a murder in her adopted country. Even though the postcolonial realities of South Africa are embroiled in all these narratives, what is noticeably missing from all of them is the trope of apartheid transformation literature and the idea of talking back to the whites of the country in favor of the characters taking ownership of the country and their role in it. That gives crime fiction in South Africa the particular merit of being a new wave of postcolonial literature and a "legitimate and fertile literary category" (Naidu 737).

Social commentary and identity negotiation are also part of the reason that crime fiction has become an important genre in transnational literature. Although my own creative work focuses on the postcolonial condition in South Africa, I consider myself a

transnational writer, with a foot in both South African and American culture. Globalization and migrancy mean that borders have become fluid, both physically and culturally. The transnational individual is slowly becoming more common, especially in cosmopolitan cities such as New York and London as well as Johannesburg and Cape Town. People migrate towards better resources or, as is often the case, nations import resources in the form of skilled workers from other countries. Due to war or political turmoil, many people are also forced to flee their home countries. It is not surprising then, that this mass movement of people has also given rise to writers describing the transnational experience that they have become part of, with narratives of negotiating identity between the home and new country. An example of this can be found in Mũkoma wa, Ngũgĩ ‘s second novel featuring the detective Ishmael, *Black Star Nairobi* (2013), in which he has relocated to Kenya to start his own detective agency with O. Ishmael, who was once invisible as a black American, now has high visibility as an outsider in Kenya. He not only has to negotiate his identity in the novel, but also has to create a new hybrid identity to try to gain acceptance in his adopted country.

I left South Africa in 1999 after completing my undergraduate degree. The African National Congress, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, came into power in 1994, heralding a hopeful beginning for the country, which Bishop Desmond Tutu coined a “rainbow nation” (BBC). This New South Africa came into being without a civil war, and relatively little bloodshed. The wrongs of the past were approached in a spirit of *ubuntu*, meaning compassion and humanity, through hearings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which perpetrators, both black and white, stepped forward

to confess the wrongs they had committed, and were often publicly forgiven by their victims. Yet not all perpetrators stepped forward, and the belief exists that true justice was sacrificed to this idealistic concept of reconciliation (Bell 2). The 1994 democratic elections had promised equality and a better life for oppressed people of the country, but it had become clear at this point that the promise was only being fulfilled for a select few. There was also a call from certain political and cultural figures for whites to leave the country, Antjie Krog among them (though she herself has been slow to act on this idea), a sentiment that still echoes today whenever distraction is needed from governmental failure and corruption. The fact is that many white South Africans did leave, some out of fear of retribution after their positions of power in the country were compromised, and others because opportunities in their chosen field were limited due to affirmative action. This initial "brain-drain" of the educated people of the country is not only restricted to whites who had the privilege of that education during apartheid, but also led to the "Afropolitan" black South Africans who had been exiled during apartheid and chose to stay in their new country.

Afropolitanism is born from Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea of world citizenship which he describes as Cosmopolitanism (also the title of his book), which maintains the notion of universal values while at the same time demanding respect for legitimate differences (Appiah). Taiye Selasi in her 2005 essay, "Bye-Bye Babar" describes Afropolitanism as a diasporic generation with fluid relations to Africa:

> Afropolitans – [as] the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem. Lag/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us

> by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars… There is at least one place on the African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the back of our hands. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. (Selasi)

Achille Mbembe posits the idea of Afropolitanism as a philosophical concept that will lead the way to an integral transformation of identity politics and that it "holds to scrutiny the earlier movement of 'Negritude' through a redefinition of reality, origins and transnational movement" (quoted in Gehrman 64). He pleads for a "rupture with the postcolonial obsession of the colonial burden" and posits Afropolitanism as a way forward for postcolonial literature by "challeng[ing] victimhood discourses attached to Africa and the Black Diaspora" (Gehrman 65). Mbembe's idea of Afropolitanism seems to exclude the idea of white people as Africans. This becomes emblematic when whites, born and raised in Africa, are considered in the context of transnational literature, as it seemingly excludes them from having an African home or identity. Whereas I personally have little sympathy for this plight where it applies to colonizer and settler cultures, it does create a problem for the so-called born free generation of whites in South Africa as far as negotiating their identity when leaving the home country.

My own decision to leave was not intended as permanent. I was educated and had full-time employment, but a nagging sense of not belonging, and witnessing the refusal of whites to let go of their imagined superiority in order to live in the country in the spirit of Ubuntu, caused me little hesitation when the opportunity to live in both the United States, and later the United Kingdom presented itself. Leaving South Africa, and the racist cultural ideology I had been born and socialized into, gave me the distance to examine the norms of my cultural identity and weigh it against the expectations and experience of adopted countries and cultures. The contact with people of different nationalities outside a proscribed paradigm also gave me new insight into what was done in the name of racial purity and supremacy in South Africa.

I started writing later in life, but I doubt that my writing would have had much merit in examining the South African experience, since my South African experience had been rather one-dimensional. A fear of the other, instilled through racist ideology, made true interaction between cultures rare. Apartheid after all means separateness, and the borders between races had been strictly enforced in my life up to that point. Identity negotiation as a transnational subject was complicated by the fact that I am white. For example, when I tried to claim a dual identity, the expectations of my body became apparent in the visible disappointment of the new head of the creative writing department where I completed my MFA that the only African student was not black, and the expectations of my history reflected in the eyes of the black students on the first day in an African Lit class when I identified as South African. The country, along with the color of my skin, creates an expectation that I have to negate to be seen as an individual and not a

representation of the group to which I belong, Afrikaners, and the baggage that accompanies that. I squirm. I cringe, feeling the shame and guilt of a people I have felt the need to distance myself from, a culture identified throughout the world as evil, still evident in a recent example where the white villain in the recent movie, *Black Panther*, identified as South African. Yet totally negating that part of my being is not really possible as I too am a transnational subject who, like the characters in transnational novels, has had to compartmentalize a part of my identity in order not to offend, both in the adopted culture, and when returning home where new mores and behaviors are frowned upon. Yet cosmopolitanism demands that one's identity be maintained while being open to other cultures and identities, as well as having a conversation in order to understand one another.

Writing about South Africa, and about the other, has only been possible with time and distance and the examination of my identity and what it owes to the home country. *The Monster's Daughter*, my first novel, came into being as an exploration and re-examination of my personal history within the context of South African history, and holding the belief systems about race into which I was socialized to a better understanding of the socio-political forces at work in creating apartheid. The novel is preoccupied with the root cause and development of apartheid, causes and key aspects that find many parallels with the current emergence of the white supremacist movement in the United States. While not a transnational narrative, it does reflect the cultural hybridity of South Africans. People of color had to adopt hybridity before the end of apartheid as a mode of survival, language being a key example. Black people, in addition

to speaking their native language, had to be able to converse in both English and Afrikaans to be able to work and negotiate their safety with whites. The reverse was almost never the case. People of color also had to become culturally hybrid and adapt to white expectations when crossing the border between segregated black and white areas. People of color in South Africa can be viewed as not only colonized subjects, but also transnational individuals due to this cultural border crossing and identity negotiation. To further illustrate this concept of hybridity in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha refers to the body of the coloured (spelling intentional) South African, who reveals a difference within, and inhabits an in-between reality (19). The coloured South African undermines the idea of a pure culture, because his existence is evidence of the hybrid state between black and white. Hybridity was then not only cultural in people of color in South Africa, but literally inscribed on the body. This aspect is most visible in the character of Jakob in *The Monster's Daughter*, who has a white father and black mother and is classified as coloured in the South African system. Jakob is marked as not belonging by both whites and blacks. He has to negotiate his language and identity when moving between the two groups as well as his name which changes from the English Jacob to the Afrikaans Jakob as he strives to appease different groups. It is an enterprise that drives him to mental instability, a reference to Fanon's chapter on mental conditions as a symptom of colonialism in *Wretched of the Earth*, and ultimately causes his demise.

A curious, though understandable, consequence of my own adopted identity as an American citizen, was the fact that it helped me to talk to people of color in South Africa. Even though apartheid was abolished twenty-four years ago, there is still a general

rigidity in perceptions between black and white, whites clinging to notions of racial superiority, and blacks being distrustful and resentful towards whites. In America, I actively try to erase my identity as an outsider, but whenever I am in South Africa, I find that the mark of otherness is essential if I want to have a conversation that is not mired in the mistrust and resentment with people of color. Attitudes visibly shift from visual encounter to when I open my mouth (and put on my best, though flawed, American accent). Though my accent rarely passes muster in the United States, it differentiates me enough from white South Africans to make dialogue possible. In contrast, white South Africans often feel threatened by otherness, and the language of communication needs to be in Afrikaans to identify myself explicitly as part of the group.

My own cultural hybridity has therefore aided me in my writing research and in seeing the situation more objectively, but the physical distance from the home country that transnationalism mandates has been limiting insofar as my participation in and knowledge of the culture is concerned. After living abroad for almost twenty years, my connection to the home country is tenuous at best. Familial connection for the most part has been broken, partly because of my hybridized identity and refusal to accept and be part of the racial colonial mindset that persists. Travel to South Africa is expensive and time-consuming and sometimes only possible with research scholarships and other assistance. Even then, my cultural contact can be classified more as tourist than participant. Whereas I could draw on memory in combination with research for *The Monster's Daughter*, my dissertation, *Where the Devil Turns*, an examination of the postcolonial condition in present-day South Africa is hindered in its authenticity by my

distance from the culture. In many ways, I am no longer a South African, particularly because I am not experiencing the hybridization of the present culture in the country which only tangentially resembles the culture at the time that I left. Language has changed, both in slang and usage, cultural references that are ingrained in the people's understanding of events are foreign to me, and the lived every day experience of South African life is lost to me. All of these aspects hinder to some extent the authentic representation of the country in my work. However, the postcolonial condition in South Africa follows well-established and documented patterns found in a postcolonial society as described in the work of Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe and *Where the Devil Turns* aims to address the socio-economic condition of post-apartheid South Africa, specifically issues pertaining to gender violence.

Cape Town, the main setting of *Where the Devil Turns*, serves as a representation of the country as a whole because of its historicity and its present-day status as a metropolitan city where luxury hotels and expensive real-estate are only a few miles away from the extreme poverty of the Cape Flats. In the twenty-four years since South Africa's first democratic election, despite a focus on human rights in the new constitution (Jolly 1), the country has experienced ever-increasing violent crime, an AIDS epidemic that has barely been brought under control, a plunging economy, extreme poverty, and devastating misogynistic practices such as corrective rape, in which lesbians are sexually assaulted, often with the consent of family members, to "cure" them (Foster). The cause of serious crime in South Africa can be traced back to factors that occurred in the post-apartheid state such as a rapid transformation, and corruption in institutions such as the

police, judiciary, and government after 1994, the government's failure to fulfill its political promises, and the influx of illegal migrants from other parts of Africa giving rise to incidents of xenophobia (Warnes 984). What sets crime in South Africa apart though, is not the sharp increase in volume after 1994, but its violence, especially against women. The country's intentional homicide rate, estimated at 33 per 100 000 in 2014, is one of the highest in the world for a country not at war. Just in the last year, the rate jumped by 4.9 per cent, which means that an average of 51 people are murdered every day in the country, which is slightly smaller than twice the size of Texas (Lockeyer). In addition, there are an average of 143 daily reported incidences of sexual offences (England). Margie Orford, a well-known South African crime fiction writer, puts forth the idea that there is explicit gender violence and misogyny present in all levels of South African society (Writing Crime 187) and that unspent violence, due to there being no civil war or true justice after apartheid ended, was sublimated into a war against women (*Like Clockwork* 27-28). This idea of a culture of violence in the country is also put forth by Rosemary Jolly (*Cultured Violence*) and makes an even stronger case for the exploration of the post-apartheid state through the vehicle of crime fiction.

Where the Devil Turns picks up the narrative eight years after *The Monster's Daughter*'s conclusion during the water crisis in Cape Town known as Day Zero. Alet Berg works in the booming industry of private security. The industry's success is predicated on the fact that the population has lost faith in the police's ability to protect and deliver justice. Private security is a privilege for those who can afford it, another indication that the wealthy have disengaged from the society in which they dwell, which

makes equity impossible and enforces the societal divide. Day Zero also serves as a stressor to emphasize governmental failure. Whereas the privileged can leave the city and pay for private security to protect their property, the poor have no option but to remain and deal with violent crime as the result of a failing economy.

The central mystery in the novel presents itself when Alet's old police partner, Johannes Mathebe comes to Cape Town in search of his young daughter, Celiwe, who had disappeared from Unie the week before along with her friend, Lydia Mfeka. Alet still suffers trauma as a result of the events in *The Monster's Daughter*, and is initially hesitant to help her former partner, but when the body of Lydia Mfeka is discovered, she realizes that she has an obligation to her friend to help him find his daughter. The mystery unfolds as Alet learns that her father, apartheid-era assassin for the state Adriaan Berg, is to be released from prison for cooperating with the police and meeting with his victims' families to disclose where their loved ones are buried.

A second narrative thread follows a young homeless boy from the end of apartheid to the present-day. Fairchance is an orphan whose only means of survival is entanglement with the drug gangs of Cape Town and to become a criminal himself. This narrative thread aims to explore the country's postcolonial legacy of crime. Fairchance is central to understanding some of the violence perpetrated in the novel, and crime in the country as a whole. Although Fairchance fulfills the role of criminal in the novel, he is very much the product of a government that has failed in its promises and a society that has failed its people.

A third narrative thread is presented in the form of a book extract by journalist Grace Bhuku, which offers an account of the actions and movements of Adriaan Berg. Grace's writing follows the popular format of "true crime" or creative nonfiction in the tradition of Capote's *In Cold Blood*, and posits the question whether redemption is possible for the perpetrators of apartheid. These three narrative threads intersect in the present-day action to illuminate and explore the human toll of the postcolonial condition in South Africa and whether establishing an inclusive identity as a white South African is possible.

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WHERE THE DEVIL TURNS

Prologue

"The Cape winds had eroded the sands around the shallow grave. That's how we found her. She was hog tied in a web of knots, engineered so that if she moved her arms or legs the rope around her neck would pull tighter. Quite smart that. The body was buried face down. Like the others. My men dug her out, lay her on her side so we could determine cause of death. We had to shake the sand off her. It was everywhere, stuck to the wounds in her throat, her thighs. The pathologist thought she was around fifteen, no more, he said. Her eyes were still open. There was sand in them too. Maybe they were brown. Probably, now that I think about it. She had a soft face, like girls that age do. Her lips were pulled away from her teeth when we found her. Like a grimace… Believe me, she had been in agony. Conscious and aware of every second that he... Anyway, it took a long time for her to die. Is this okay? Shall I go on?"

He asked the question more to the lawyer than the two coloured women in front of him. They clung to each other, mother and daughter, eyes downcast. Poverty revealed itself through the brittle dryness of their skin and hollow cheeks, the worn straps of their matching plastic handbags. They had washed with green soap, the kind they used for laundry. He could smell it from across the table. They had prepared themselves for this visit by cleansing themselves and putting on their best, the seams shiny, the fabric faded. The younger women had painted her nails with a pearlescent pink polish. For him? The idea was absurd, yet he'd seen it before. The formal air of church on Sunday was pervasive. He was the preacher of truth. They were the congregants in need of salvation,

seeking forgiveness for the sin of not knowing. Or perhaps he was the confessor to their higher power?

He suddenly became self-aware, wondering how these two women saw him, his eyes hidden behind thick glasses, his thinning hair now overwhelmingly gray. He wondered if they could still recognize the man he had been. He didn't know when things changed, when he started to see them as human. Or perhaps it was he who had shed the numbness and allowed them to make him feel something. Remorse perhaps? Or was it fear? He dwelled in the past more often now, the act of remembering for these meetings initiating an avalanche, refusing him the choice of the details that rushed into his consciousness. He'd focus on a day, an event prescribed by the lawyer, and found himself thinking about the black nanny he had as a child, each harsh, condescending word he spoke to her now a nail in his flesh. The past festered, became a rank mass he couldn't purge from his body.

The lawyer touched one of the women, the mother, on her shoulder. The mother's eyes met his briefly, an understanding passing between them. He didn't wait for the lawyer's consent.

"The girl had been there less than a week, judging by the state of decomposition," he continued. "Of course, by this point we already suspected Jackson. He liked the risk, I think. It becomes an addiction. A train station less than two hundred meters away and there'd be no witnesses even if we sent officers door-to-door the whole of Khayelitsha." The blacks hadn't trusted them back then. The same people who were supposed to represent justice were the ones who carried out midnight raids and imposed curfews,

made sure that there was no mixing between black and white. The people knew that, feared that knock on the door. It had made it easier for him and his colleagues to do what was needed to make Jackson's mess disappear.

"You didn't alert the local police commanders?" The lawyer had a self-important indignation that made him want to slap her. She was a white, mid-forties. One of those privileged by apartheid, yet now denied the advantages she received because of it. Or perhaps she thought that working on this case would make her guilt disappear. It was comfortable for all of them to have someone like him to point at and say, there's the bad apple, the evil, we didn't do it, we didn't know. He couldn't give a damn about all that. It had been his job to make apartheid work, to make sure it continued working. Nobody had the self-indulgent luxury of soul-searching in those days. They were no different than him. He was just the one left holding the gun.

"Jackson got brazen," he said without looking at the lawyer. "Arrogant. And the longer he got away with what he was doing, the bolder he became." He reached for a cigarette and let it dangle between his index and middle finger without lighting it. "It was a matter of time before Jackson was caught. And if that happened, he would jeopardize… other operations."

In those days catching killers was the reason he was a policeman. The puzzle. Hunting the hunter, searching out the right path so he could follow the careless crumbs of a killer. It got his blood up, lit his senses so that even the stale coffee at the station house in Brixton tasted good. And he was good at it. The length of rope that went around the necks of all those bastards he'd caught could close a loop around Table Mountain. His

reputation was the reason Cape Town police had called him in to consult. The bodies had been piling up, thirteen by then, and the police were flopping around. All of the victims were young girls under sixteen. All of them tied up with multiple bite wounds over their bodies, chunks of flesh missing. The pathologist's autopsies confirmed that they all had died the same way. A desperate need to escape, to save themselves while they were being butchered, each resistance tightening the noose that would bring the end. He had been the one that fingered Jackson Rooi, and once he knew, it wasn't so much a case of catching a killer than doing damage control. Rooi was an *askari* at the Civil Cooperation Bureau, a useful death squad tool in their war against the black danger. He did what he was told, no questions or complaints. But Jackson had proclivities, an appetite that wasn't slaked by his work for the state. He had to be stopped before he exposed them all.

"What did you do about it?" In the beginning the lawyer coaxed, a gentle tiptoe. They didn't know whether they could trust him, his revelations threatening to their fragile illusions of control. Now she demanded, his information a right they felt they were owed.

"We made the bodies disappear. Burned them." He had watched them load the girl in the ambulance and drive away. He had a daughter, merely a toddler back then. Nobody could predict where a young girl would end up, he thought as he looked at the two women in front of him.

"And you are absolutely sure that all the girls were murdered by Jackson Rooi?"

"The pathologist, Dr. Koch, matched Rooi with the forensics. Bite marks, blood group, so on. We didn't have DNA testing yet." He had never liked Koch, though he had worked many cases with the man. In his line of work, he had distrusted men like that.

They weren't police. They spent their days in laboratories playing with test tubes and indoctrinating students in the infallibility of forensics and science. What did they know about instinct and leads? Looking a man in the eye and knowing, with a gut-wrenching certainty, that he was guilty. Smelling the fear as you pushed him to the edge, the stink of a cornered animal as your own heart drummed in your ears. And then those so-called Doctors came with their charts and probabilities and blew your case to dust. Koch had been a visionary in his field, developing new techniques to match evidence to a criminal, better even than what the Americans were coming up with. His word was God in a courtroom.

"And this Dr. Koch was working for the Security Police?"

"We had recruited him by then. Cape Town Police didn't know."

"He died in…" The lawyer looked at her notes. "2010. Just before you were –"

"A car accident."

The lawyer nodded. "Are all the remains from this case accounted for by the locations you pointed out?"

"Yes." He lit the cigarette. A filthy habit, but it passed the time. "Except one." The mother let out a sob. The daughter dug herself even deeper into the older woman's folds, as if the truth could never find her there.

"Well, Mr. Berg?"

"Colonel Berg." The lawyer pursed her lips together. He let it go. He needed to get out of prison and they needed to see him humbled, humiliated, the privilege of rank no longer his. So be it. "What do you want to know?"

"What happened to Jackson Rooi?"

The sister unfolded herself from the mother's grip. They both sat up a bit straighter, their eyes trained on him, and he had to look away.

"He died in action."

"We already know that's a lie, Mr. Berg. We are here for the truth."

He nodded and stumped out the barely-smoked cigarette in the ash tray. "I was ordered to make sure he wouldn't become a problem." He met the eyes of the mother again. "I killed him, Mrs. Rooi. I know where he is buried." He reached across the table, resting his hand centimeters from hers. "I am sorry."

Tears still streamed down the mother's face, her eyes penetrating him. She moved her hand closer to his, then took it in hers. "Thank you," she said, the words escaping like a death rattle. Jackson's sister raised her eyes up. Her lips fell open, her breath carrying the first notes of a hymn.

Alet

Alet Berg stared up at the showerhead, her right hand full of shampoo, her other poised at the tap. She braced herself for the first sting of icy water. Since they couldn't wait for the water to run hot, the house's geyser had been switched off permanently. She now looked forward to that cold shower with the fervor of the religious, ritualistically placing the plastic tub meant to catch runoff water under the showerhead before stepping inside. Baby wipes and sanitizers could only go so far, and her long dark hair was slick and oily against her scalp after three days of not washing. Baseball caps had become a drought-time fashion statement throughout the city along with a distinctly human perfume that floated like a miasma in the stagnant summer air. Her clothes, piled into the overflowing laundry basket next to the sink, had begun to produce its own rancid atmosphere.

She'd gotten her showering routine down to an art form. She'd be ready with soap and shampoo and open the tap for a few seconds, closing it the moment she was wet. Next, she would lather up, making sure she got soap everywhere that counted. The last step was to open the tap again to rinse off as fast as she could without splashing water outside the plastic tub so that it could be used to flush the toilet. All-in-all she could get clean in under two minutes, three if she had to wash her hair. Alet opened the tap and was greeted with an empty gurgle that seemed to reverberate right down to the bottom of her soul. Rationing had been in place for several months and it wasn't unusual for water to be turned off without warning. It could take hours, or days before it would be turned back on again, it was anyone's guess. It took a full five minutes of staring up at the dry

showerhead before she admitted defeat and cleaned the shampoo off her hand with toilet paper and baby wipes. She dressed from the dirty laundry pile, and grabbed a couple of plastic bubble dispensers from the kitchen. It was seven o'clock in the morning by the time she reached the natural spring eight kilometers away. The queue of people clutching empty containers was already hundreds strong. Sweaty bodies shuffled and waited in turn, an unrhythmic two-step that was danced around all the water points in Cape Town. Snippets of conversation drifted in an ever-increasing entropy of rehashed sentiments in the queue. Pray for rain. Infrastructure and nature-based solution. Politicians who knew what was happening, but took a chance. Water meters, gray water, effluent fines. Protests and sanitation wars. It was all talk to try to control the one thing on everybody's mind, a way to keep the panic at bay. After months of countless grand gestures, debates, and makeshift solutions, the dam water levels were down to fifteen percent. Day Zero, the day the water would be turned off and their rations decreased to twenty-five liters per person, would happen if the water levels hit thirteen and a half percent. The date had been pushed back numerous times and once even bought forward, but without rain the city would run out of water in less than a month.

Alet placed her containers under the water spout once she reached the front, listening to the low hollow tone of water hitting the bottom rise as it filled up. Someone had had the idea to harvest the natural spring which flowed down from the mountain and erected a rickety PVC pipe structure to funnel the water. There had been so much traffic that people were talking about a more permanent structure. People from the line stepped up to the spouts in an endless rotation, all of them bent over like cattle at a trough while

two private security guards made sure they didn't take more than the allotted fifty liters. Scuffles regularly broke out over greed, and many collection points were now being patrolled by the police.

"Wonderful weather, hey?" The portly man next to Alet had hopeful eyes fixed on the sky as he filled his containers. Dark clouds had gathered, shrouding the top of Table Mountain in a blanket of white. There was a folk tale about the fog on the mountain. A Dutchman, Van Hunks, had settled in Cape Town in the 1700s and his wife wouldn't let him smoke in the house, so he always went to a secret spot on the mountain. A flicker of her father's face suddenly surfaced in the memory, his rough hands taking on a life of their own as he told the tale. A stranger in black lurked in Van Hunk's smoking spot on Windberg when he got there and asked Van Hunks if he could spare some tobacco. Boastful, Van Hunks challenged the man to a smoking contest. The competition went on for days, shrouding the mountain in a thick cloud of smoke, neither man giving in. Van Hunks noticed that his companion looked ill. The man tried to get up, but stumbled, and his hat tumbled to the ground. Alet remembered her father's open palms as he mimicked the smoke undulating over the mountain, morphing into the horns of the devil in his index and ring finger, as the stranger was unmasked, furious at having lost the wager. Adriaan had lit his own cigarette before continuing. From then on, the legend went, Van Hunks returned every year to duel with the devil, and Windberg's name changed to Devil's Peak.

Alet bit her lip to stop the unexpected sting behind her eyes. She nodded at the man, who was still eying the sky, unable to muster a reply. Even if it did rain today, the torrent would have to be of Biblical proportions to avoid Day Zero. He gave her an

awkward smile, then struggled away with his container, his vacated spot quickly filled by another empty bucket.

Water secured in her trunk, Alet followed an armored truck off the highway into the nearest petrol station. With the long daily trek to the water points, lines for fuel had grown as well. As she waited for her turn at the pump, Alet watched a few lone car washers on the side of the road try to drum up business by approaching cars that were stopped at the light. Rags in hand, their buckets filled to the brim with soapy water, they sloshed over to cars that pulled up to the side of the road, constantly on the lookout for the police. Water meters were mandatory on every property, warnings and fines issued to water wasters, but with jobs rapidly disappearing in the city, informal businesses like the car washers persisted. Too poor to pay the fines for wasting water, they were now threatened with jail time if they were caught. A beat-up blue *bakkie* broke away from the stream of cars on the highway, driving over an old poster in the road, yellow, green and black, with the new president's face as a center piece, and pulled up to the front of the petrol station. Two men jumped off the back and disappeared into the store. The driver stayed behind in the idling vehicle. He caught Alet looking at him, and puckered his lips, blowing her a quick succession of kisses, his dark eyes mocking. Alet looked away, angry that she felt embarrassed.

"Oil check, Madam?" The petrol attendant took Alet's keys with a smile that felt out of place in the sea of disgruntled faces.

"No. I'm in a hurry, hey."

"Sharp-sharp." The attendant gave her two thumbs up.

A white taxi minibus idled behind Alet's Toyota, squeezing in two more passengers while waiting its turn. Tendrils of rhythm escaped from within. Alet opened the glove compartment to get her wallet, forgetting about the broken hinge. The contents spilled to the floor, her wallet surfing a stack of unopened mail and empty headache powder wrappers. The bills had caught up to her after the last postal strike, her work address printed in red across each of them in Theo, her ex's precise block letters. Alet reached for her wallet and managed to knock it further under the seat. "*Fok.*" The awkward angle shot pain from the old bullet wound in her shoulder down her arm. She still stubbornly saw a physical therapist in hopes of getting full function back, even though the insurance had stopped paying long ago. The surgeon had told her there were bullet fragments in the joint he couldn't get at without causing more nerve damage. She might also set off an airport metal detector, he said. Not that she ever went anywhere. But that might change. There was a job offer in her inbox. An old police contact, Wynand Myers, had become a big name in private security. His firm was based in Jo'burg, but they were big enough to form partnerships with firms in Namibia, and recently, the UK. He had heard she was in the business and said he needed people he could trust over there. He'd also need an answer soon.

"Check the tires, Madam?"

"*Jissis*, don't you listen? I said –" Alet turned her head towards the attendant.

Pop.

The attendant's large brown eyes reflected Alet's own panic. He disappeared

behind the car door.

Pop. Pop.

Confusion morphed rapidly to fear that slammed into her with the violence of a punch to her sternum. The world was replaced by a paralyzing black that overwhelmed her senses. Metal zinged as a shot hit close by. Alet's body contracted, an automated attempt to make herself smaller. The blackness kept its grip as shots ripped through the air, syncopated by screams. She held her breath as the smell of burning petrol stung her nostrils, the memory of charred flesh, mountains on fire. Her body refused her brain's command to move. A man shouted something in Xhosa, the words comforting despite her lack of understanding. A shock of noise drowned the voice, the individual sounds making up the whole an indistinguishable siren of mayhem. Then utter silence.

A heartbeat.

Then another.

Light faded in a rush of blood, heat rising to her skin. She was aware of the dank earth smell of the car's floor mats next to her face. She clawed her way back to the present, unballing her body painfully. She lifted her head, and chaos erupted outside the car window. A woman's moans broke, matching the pitch of screeching tires. The blue *bakkie* was gone, so was the armored vehicle. The still figure of a woman in a security uniform lay on the concrete, her features obscured by blood and lacerated flesh. A teenager sat on the ground near the entrance, clutching his stomach as a plump woman rocked his body in her arms, her face collapsing under shrill desperate wails. Smoke seeped from a dark sedan. A panicked driver tore his sweatshirt off and flung it at the

flames as if he was beating a wayward donkey, his cheeks and thick abdomen rippling with every stroke. A still figure slumped through a shattered window in the back seat as a bewildered toddler looked on. There was blood on the hem of her dress. Nobody else seemed to notice her. Bodies piled into the taxi behind Alet. It charged into traffic amidst the sound of blaring horns and cars swerving out of its way.

It was only then that Alet saw him, the attendant, Sibuye his nametag read. He lay curled on the ground next to the pump. His right arm covered his face, his body in the throes of a violent spasm. Alet smelled blood as she opened the door. A stain spread rapidly on his pale blue shirt. She couldn't tell where he'd been hit. She reached for her keys on the ground next to him. Her hands shook uncontrollably as she got back into the car. She dropped the key twice before she got it into the ignition. As she glanced up at the rear-view mirror, she realized that the petrol nozzle was still suspended in her tank.

*

The huge security gate's motor thudded to a halt as iron jaws snapped shut behind Alet. She reached for the backpack behind her seat. As she got out of the Toyota, her gaze rested for a moment on the dark interruption in the paintwork where a bullet had hit. Riaan blocked her way when she turned around.

"Is this a time to show up, Alet?"

"Howzit." Alet's smile failed, the throbbing behind her eye settling into a constant drone.

"I'm not please-explaining for you anymore okay? Done. You're on thin ice with Marais already." He wagged a finger at her for emphasis.

Alet held her hands up in front of her face. "*Ja, Baas*. Is right, my *Baas*." She sidestepped Riaan and made her way up the driveway to the unassuming white house with the "CAPESEC SECURITY SPECIALISTS" sign on the wall.

"Stop that *kak*." Riaan glanced around furtively to see if any of the guards nearby had heard her. His head seemed too small for his overly-muscular body, his protruding ears turning clown red. Alet suppressed the urge to laugh. The lines between Riaan's eyes deepened. "Are you drunk?"

"*Fokit,* Riaan. Just back off, okay?" Alet pressed the buzzer, her hands unsteady. The lock of the security gate released moments later.

"It's the third time this month, man. We miss a call and then… I'm not getting fired cause of you."

Alet nodded, tried to collect herself. Riaan was young, not the sharpest, but he loved the job. He had wanted to join the South African Police Service, but barely got through matric, his grades too low to meet the police college requirements. She knew he harbored a sullied mix of admiration and resentment towards her. After all, she had been police, had had her fifteen seconds of fame, the mere constable who brought an apartheid monster, her own father no less, to justice. Or some such sensational rubbish. She could have gotten a promotion, perhaps a fast-track to Captain if she pushed it. But she had walked away, quit the force, preferring anonymity to the daily reminders of who she was supposed to be.

"Sorry, Riaan," Alet mumbled, the prospect of explaining what happened that morning suddenly daunting.

At the front desk, Mrs. Meintjies's gray helmet hairdo was bowed to the gossip pages of a glossy Afrikaans magazine. They were the only two women on staff, but Alet couldn't remember them ever having had a conversation that lasted beyond perfunctory exchanges. Mrs. Meintjies was about as interested in her colleagues as in picking up dog turds. She answered the phones and left promptly at five. She made it quite clear on Alet's first day that she wasn't there do anything besides what she was paid to do - answer the phones. Alet rushed past the two front offices, afraid she might run into the shift manager. The boss, Jan Marais, had stolen away to move his family to Hermanus before Day Zero hit. The small coastal town was only an hour away, but had enough boreholes and fewer people, so they could withstand the immediate crisis. Marais, like so many blokes in the private security business, was white ex-police, ejected from the force under affirmative action when apartheid ended. He didn't ask questions when Alet came to him for a job. He would have had to be blind and deaf not to know who she was, but the fact that she had been police, one of them, was all the convincing he needed.

Alet made her way to the room in the back of the house. It had once been the master bedroom but had been expanded into the adjacent garage to serve as a staff locker room. A couple of guards coming off shift eyed her warily when she walked into the room. She grabbed her Capesec uniform out of her locker, golf shirt with a red logo that she still couldn't figure out, worn with black cargo pants.

Riaan shifted his weight as if he had to pee. "Hurry up. We were supposed to be in Bantry Bay an hour ago."

"*Ja, ja*, okay." Alet shut the bathroom door behind her. "Make me a coffee please

man, Riaan? There's water here, right?"

Riaan mumbled something about not being a maid. She waited until she heard his plodding footsteps die away before she allowed herself to breathe. Her practiced exterior of calm crumbled. She sank to the floor, struggling to breathe, the petrol attendant's huge brown eyes scoring the inside of her eyelids. Sibuye. She mouthed the name, scared to give it voice. She had tried to find his wound, stop the bleeding with a roll of paper towel used to clean windshields, her hands sinking into a hot crimson mess. Sibuye's whole body had contracted into a fetal position. He had stopped shaking by the time she let go, collateral damage of the heist, the bullet meant for anybody.

Sibuye.

Alet imagined his body, cold now, in the city morgue, waiting to be prodded or claimed. Alone. An empty thing that had once been a person, could still have been one if events had unraveled differently, just the slightest bit, the line so easily crossed. She should have noticed what was going on. That's what she'd been trained to do at police college. Be alert, aware of your surroundings always. If she had told him to get down, if the bullet had hit him anywhere else, he would have gone about his day right now, shaken up, but alive.

"Alet?" Riaan knocked on the door.

"*Fokof,* Riaan. I'm coming, okay?"

"Coffee's on the counter. I'll wait in the van."

Alet pushed herself off the floor and ran the tap with cold water, splashing it on her face. There was blood under her black t-shirt when she peeled it off, crusted like a

dark rash on her pale skin. It could have been her blood. The thought lodged her fear even deeper. Alet reached into her backpack for wipes. Her hand came to a rest on the holstered 9mm. She should have done something.

Rush-hour traffic was almost at a standstill by the time Alet and Riaan approached the city. The sun glared white, the promise of rain long since burned off. Alet turned up the SUV's air conditioner, her skin clammy, her head buzzing.

"Clifton's been a circus all morning." In the passenger seat, Riaan had an earbud plugged into his left ear, listening to a police scanner app on his phone. His sandy hair was shaved so close to his skull that he looked almost bald in the bright sunlight coming through the window. "Three muggings and a couple of domestics on Third Beach. Must be locals cause the tourists are staying away. Probably all those hotel workers with nothing to do."

Capesec had several contracts in the city for security systems, surveillance, and armed response. Usually Alet would ride by herself, but the anticipation of trouble had all the armed response personnel partnering up on patrol. Stories had been circulating for a while that the army was getting ready to move in if tensions got out of hand. The police weren't trusted, sometimes taking hours to respond to a call, more likely to be perpetrator than protector, the video proof of their transgressions all over the internet without anyone in the government showing enough concern to do something about it. Safety now came at a premium for those who could afford it, and private security companies like Capesec were cashing in.

Alet exited the highway and followed the road as it wound around the mountain. Palatial houses with spectacular views of Lion's Head dappled the hillside that rose above four sugar white beaches. They installed a video camera at a large residence in Bantry Bay, then continued checking alarms at empty properties, watching for "individuals who are out of place," as the manual put it. *Tsotsis* or *bergies*, poor people from the flats that wandered into the wealthy neighborhoods. During apartheid the manual would just have called them not white.

Alet turned up a side street that led up the mountainside in Clifton and stopped the SUV in a cul-de-sac. High electrified fences surrounded each of the houses down the street. Alet wondered if Cliftonites got bored behind those prison-like walls. The neighborhood had terrible satellite reception because of the mountain, the four public SABC channels blurry at best. Even cell coverage was iffy.

An armed guard, Stephen, dressed in the Capesec uniform and a bullet-proof vest, stepped out into the street, his one hand on a R4, the other raised in greeting. "*Eish*, that was chop-chop," he said. "I only just-now made the call."

Riaan plucked out the earbuds. "What you talking about?"

"I do the checks down there by the beach. Half hour ago. Then I come up. That's the route I always take." Stephen tapped his watch. "Everything fine. Then a panic button. Just now." He waved his hand across his body for emphasis.

Alet shifted into reverse. "Did you call the house?"

"No answer. It's one of the ghost houses, check the logs." Stephen gripped the rifle with both hands. "I was going to check it out when you came."

"Which house?" Riaan craned his neck past Alet.

"Number twenty-one. Next street over." Stephen pointed down the steep slope. "I'm telling you, everything was okay when I checked."

"*Ja,* okay. Finish checks here in case perps are looking for an easy score. Then come meet us there."

They turned into the next street and stopped in front of an expansive three-story house, all right angles and glass, a paved driveway leading from the front gate to a three-door garage. Alet checked their logs. Stephen was right, the owners were gone. Residents who could afford it were leaving the city and many of the properties under contract with Capesec were left standing empty. Riaan got out and checked the intercom at the gate. He pressed the button a couple of times before getting back into the SUV.

"False alarm, probably." Riaan sounded disappointed. He radioed for the gate override code. "Those switches are too sensitive, man. Probably just a cat or something rubbed up against it, like at that other place."

"*Ja,* probably." Alet had heard the story of the cat before. And the one where Riaan caught a guy just as he broke a window and cut himself on the glass and was bleeding all over the place so Riaan had to call the medics, "It's a miracle I don't have Aids now, hey," and the one time he *moered* this guy he found in the back yard of this house in Bantry till the perp started crying, and the time he caught a domestic red-handed trying to fence the madam's jewelry, and the one about the coloured *oke* from Mannenberg, and that "*fokken kaffir"* who tried to pull a gun, but Riaan had nailed him good. Alet had heard all his stories at least a half-dozen times. She wished he would just

shut the fuck up, but he seemed incapable, the verbal diarrhea starting the moment he got in the car. At least he had stopped prodding her about her father and what happened to her in Unie when she was still police. “It’s all in the papers,” she had said the last time he wouldn’t let it go. “Nothing else to tell. Happened just like they said.”

“Put your vest on,” Riaan said as Alet got out of the SUV. “It’s the rules, okay?”

Alet sighed and got the bullet-proof vest out of the back. It was hot, and she hated the way it restricted her movements. The image of Sibuye falling came back to her as she tightened the straps, everything but his face vague, out of focus. What color was his shirt? Red? No. Like the others. He must have been wearing a uniform, she reminded herself as if preparing to give evidence. Blue shirt, blue cap, blue jeans. Yellow, black, and green posters. Blue *bakkie*. Brown skin made black with blood. She touched the butt of the 9mm in her holster. Perhaps everybody in Cape Town should wear a vest.

“You all right?” Riaan frowned at her.

“*Ja*.” The question irritated Alet. She slammed the van door shut.

Riaan entered the override and opened the gate. “Central says the alarm is still on,” he said as they walked to the front door. The place was a fortress. Every window barred, every door locked behind an iron gate. They rang the bell, but predictably there was no answer. Alet and Riaan circled the house, checking all windows and doors for a possible entry point. Nothing seemed out of place. At the back of the house, beach blankets with bright designs draped on patio furniture next to a full pool. Alet remembered her dry shower from that morning and she felt a deep resentment towards whoever owned the house. Rules apparently only applied to some people. There were

body indents on the towels, as if someone had interrupted a party only moments before.

"You sure these people are gone?"

Riaan shrugged. "Try the guy's cell again. What's his name?"

"Tutterov. You do it. I have to go do the report."

Riaan pretended not to hear her, retracing his steps to the front gate. Below them lay a magnificent view of sugar white beach and deep blue ocean. Riaan's face appeared on the other side of the gate. "Something's going on down at the beach."

"What?"

"The beach. There's a bunch of people. I better look in on the properties there. You can't trust Stephen. Half-asses everything."

Alet looked back at the silent house, dying light reflecting in the glass. "Okay. Check it out." She closed the gate behind her and got back into the air-conditioned SUV to call in the report. There was a missed call on her phone, but she didn't recognize the number. Mr. Tutterov's phone went straight to voicemail.

"Nothing," Riaan said when he returned twenty minutes later, his face red from the jog up the hill. "Maybe a seal, or a penguin. Who knows? Some tourist saw something half an hour ago and then all the monkeys ran over to stare at nothing."

Alet caught sight of a Mercedes Roadster turning the corner at a hell of a speed. It pulled up behind them. A man got out, late twenties, early thirties, maybe. He met Alet at the driver side of the SUV before she could get out, his hands resting on the doorframe.

"Why are you here?" He had a thick accent, Slavic-sounding, blue eyes to match, their drooping corners giving him a sleepy look. His dark hair was cut short and spiked

with styling products. Stubble framed his fleshy lips. Alet noticed the edges of a gold cross protruding above the top button of his shirt, the expensive watch, the wedding ring.

"Mr. Tutterov?" Alet got out of the van. For a moment she thought she might have to push him out of her way, but he slowly let go of the door and stepped back. "We called. You had a tripped panic alarm. We've inspected the house exterior but didn't find anything. We were waiting for your authorization to do an interior check."

Tutterov looked at her dully. "I've been out of town. There's nobody here."

"Somebody must have –"

Tutterov shrugged. "I told you people I don't need all this shit."

"The panic button is part of the system. For your protection in case there's an emergency," she recited the company policy.

"I don't need protection." Tutterov looked at her with derision. "I just need to know that nobody gets in while I'm not here. Get it?"

"We should really check –"

"You go now, I'll take care of it."

Riaan got out of the SUV, puffing his chest. "It's procedure that we go in with you and make sure the house is secure."

Tutterov ignored Riaan. He brought his face level with Alet's, looking her in the eye. "It's nothing. Get out of my way." He got back into his car and backed up, tires screeching up the drive as soon as they cleared it. The high security gate shut behind him.

"Nice manners, hey? These foreigners coming here, doing what they like." Riaan was feeling under-appreciated. Alet prepared herself for a sulky tirade that would last the

rest of the afternoon. She needed a drink. She watched Tutterov's Mercedes disappear behind the garage door as Riaan yammered on. "What the hell does he have security for then? I tell you, you can take the baboon out of the bush… These foreign types are no better than the blacks."

*

Alet surfaced from the rim of her whiskey glass a few hours later. Freddy's was blanketed in a complete darkness that was interrupted only by the screen light of a few scattered smartphones. Almost immediately after the power went out the beam of a flashlight appeared from behind the bar, illuminating pale hands clutched around beer bottles, and half-empty glasses on the lacquered pine surface.

"Great," the voice behind the flashlight said, presumably Freddy himself, judging by his proprietary attitude. "Sizwe, go."

"This is *kak*, man," a man shouted from the back.

"Hold on, gents. Generators will be up in a few. Still have them from the blackout days."

A scramble of bar flaps and a back door near the toilets opening and banging shut signaled Sizwe, the black bartender, making his way outside. Rolling blackouts or "load shedding" as Eskom, the power company, had called it, plagued the city for several years, the problem barely taken care of before the water restrictions started. It always felt like the government was sticking its fingers in a leaking dam rather than being proactive.

Alet drained the dregs from her glass. She had only been at Freddy's a couple of times. It was a dingy place, low lights and Christmas garlands that probably stuck around

all year, but it was near her new place, which made it easier to avoid the traffic cops after a few drinks. She had moved in with a woman she barely knew the week before, Maryna, a niece or something of Jan Marais's wife. Maryna had a married boyfriend and as Alet listened to them going at it in the bedroom her first night while Maryna's older-than-the-gates-of-hell Spaniel pissed in the middle of the kitchen floor, it was obvious that the arrangement wasn't going to work out. But for now, Alet had to stick it out. The thing between her and Theo had ended abruptly, leaving her homeless and sleeping on a couch at Capesec until Marais found out about it. If she had been honest with herself, she would have paid attention to the widening fissures between her and Theo, made sure that she braced herself for the day he realized he'd made a mistake when he asked her to move in. Then again, perhaps there was only so much truth and honesty one person could make themselves face, and Alet was sure her quota was filled.

"Another one, Miss?" Freddy's disembodied face appeared in front of her, lighted by a flashlight.

"Probably a bad idea." Alet felt around in her jacket pocket and slid a R100 note across the bar. It was after eleven o'clock the last time she paid attention and she wondered if Maryna's boyfriend had left the house yet to go home to his wife and kids. "Make it a double, hey."

"On the house. For the inconvenience." Freddy slid her money back and poured two fingers of J&B in her glass. "You look like you need it, my dear." He touched her arm with his rough hand. Alet jerked away, not expecting it. The lights came up suddenly, the sound system resuming mid-song, something well-worn that she had never known the

lyrics to. She nodded thanks at Freddy, feigning interest in the screen above his head, a re-broadcast of the mayor addressing reporters about the diversion of water to the city, the three desalination plants that were going into operation. There was reiterated warnings, threats to water wasters.

"A joke!"

Alet glanced over her shoulder, catching a peripheral glimpse of the speaker, a bloke in a blue dress shirt, the top button undone. For a fraction of a second, she thought it was Theo, and her pulse quickened.

Freddy shook his head. "Ja, man. They think we're stupid. Those plants are a drop in the bucket. East London and Port Elizabeth are next. The whole bloody country is going to pieces. Even my sister in Bloemfontein says they're starting restrictions." He seemed to lose his train of thought and went to tend a couple at the other end of the bar.

Alet turned in her seat. *On closer inspection, the man looked nothing like Theo, his face broader, softer, his dark hair longer than Theo would ever have tolerated it.* There was something about the shape of his brown eyes that stirred brief recognition, but it was gone before she could place it.

"What's going on?"

The man eyed her before speaking, his lips curled in a wry grin. "You don't know?"

"That's why I'm asking."

The man smiled, more to himself than to her. "The ANC accused the DA of using Day Zero for scare tactics." He swirled the bottle before finishing the dregs of his beer.

“As if they’re just hiding the water somewhere until they get some votes. So now the DA is launching an offensive, grandstanding their efforts and releasing the paper trail of them asking the government to declare Cape Town a disaster area more than a year ago. Everybody’s pointing fingers and the corruption continues. Now there’s talk of pushing Day Zero back. Two months! Anything to make it look like they’re doing their job, while the taps run dry.”

Alet shot a look at the TV screen. “You’d think they’d be showing all that on repeat.”

The man snorted. “They are. Everywhere but the SABC.” He got up and walked over to her. “Joe, by the way.”

“Alet.”

Joe signaled to Freddy over her shoulder. “Have a drink with me, Alet.”

Alet eyed him for a moment. “I’m really not up for whatever you’re selling.”

“A friendly drink, that’s all. Just company.” He held up his hands. “Promise.”

Sizwe and Freddy both waved at Alet as she slunk out of the bar an hour later. She had stayed for another couple, tipping too much, taking her leave when Joe went to the bathroom to avoid any awkward expectations. The night’s bite invaded her skin, but she was too numb to care. Her hand slipped as she reached out to steady herself against her car and she almost fell.

“Constable Berg?”

Alet’s insides twisted and unwound at the sound of her old partner, Mathebe’s,

voice. She was too afraid to look up, afraid that her mind had conjured up his presence, no more than a specter merging with others in the cast-off street light.

"Constable Berg."

"It's just Alet now. Remember?" Alet half-expected Mathebe to be in uniform, but he stood there, his shoulders stiff as a coat hanger, a button-down shirt and stiff khaki pants somehow awkward over his ramrod posture. The hound-dog droop of his features had become exaggerated over the years, the thick brow etched with grooves, his black eyes supported by a latticework of lines and shadows in his dark skin. Alet imagined a speckling of snow in his hair. She wondered if the time since she had last seen him had been as unkind to her.

"What are you doing here, Captain?"

Mathebe hesitated for a moment as if he had done something wrong. "You did not answer your cellphone. Mr. Theo Van Niekerk… he gave me your new home number. The lady there told me to come here." Alet could imagine the awkward conversations Mathebe had to navigate to eventually end up at Freddy's. There had been promises that they would keep in touch after she left the Unie police force, talk of holidays with his wife, Miriam, and their two kids, Celiwe and Little Johannes, special occasions that never materialized. The longer Alet waited to pick up the phone, the harder it became, until doing so seemed like it would be an imposition on them. She was more than glad to see him, grateful even, but Mathebe's sudden appearance made the world feel unsteady.

"I will take you home." Curt and to the point, as always, Mathebe took the car keys out of her hand. Alet nodded, falling into the passenger seat as he held the door for

her.

"Sorry I haven't been in touch. I didn't get around to Christmas cards. December… You know how it is. And then all this water stuff started... I was going to send you my new address, but I probably won't stay there long anyway."

"Yes." Mathebe looked straight ahead of him without turning the key in the ignition. The silence between them stretched until Alet could barely stand it.

"I'm sorry I –"

"Are you all right?"

Alet was taken aback by the question. "*Ja*. Doing okay. Weeds don't die easy, right?" She tried to force a laugh, but Mathebe's look stopped her. "It's not always like this, Johannes. Promise. I'm just…" Alet struggled with the words. "Something happened today." She swallowed afraid to admit what happened. She ventured a glance in his direction. "I… I froze." Her voice wavered. Mathebe frowned, his droopy eyes narrowing. She knew he understood. Alet sometimes forgot that she hadn't been the only one on that mountain. Did Mathebe have nightmares like hers? She opened her mouth to ask, but the question felt trite.

"You survived."

Alet turned her head away. Mathebe's simple logic defied further discussion. She watched a couple of drunks slink out of Freddy's. Everybody was getting wasted on hard liquor between irregular beer and cool drink deliveries.

Mathebe spoke slowly, his words measured. "Perhaps there is a professional person, a therapist you could –"

"Fat lot of good that did me last time." Alet forced an uncomfortable smile. Months of some newly-graduated twat the department appointed digging into her daddy issues and a sleeping tablet prescription problem later, and she still couldn't shut her mind off. "I'm okay. Really. I didn't expect it, that's all." Mathebe nodded. "What brings you to town?" Alet was desperate to change the subject. "Are you on a training course or something? The kids must be so big already. Miriam probably –" Mathebe's stoic façade contorted, the cracks of emotion strangely unsettling. "Johannes?"

Mathebe struggled to get his emotions under control, his voice wavering when he answered. "Celiwe is missing, Constable."

"What do you mean?" Alet fought to clear her mind, remembering a young girl with big eyes and honey-brown skin like Miriam, and a studious disposition like Mathebe.

"She did not come home."

"When?"

"It has been eight days. Miriam, she is…" Mathebe's voice trailed off, as if he simply did not have enough energy to complete the sentence.

"Kids run away. Go to George or Oudtshoorn for a *jol*, Johannes, you know that. She'll turn up again."

"I have gone to every town in the area myself." Mathebe closed his eyes. "There were searches, alerts. Every time a tip came through on the hotline I –" It took him a while to continue. "Celiwe has a friend. We found out they got on a bus the day she didn't come home. We think they came here."

"Did you talk to the locals?"

Mathebe shook his head. "The police here, they are not looking. They say they are doing everything, but there are more important things to attend to now." He looked at Alet, desperation in his plea. "She is only thirteen."

Fairchance

Day Zero had ceded its front-page status in Fairchance's daily newspaper to the DA calling for the military to step in to fight violent crime in the city. The story he had been looking for had only made it to page five. Some publicity was unavoidable, unfortunately, but the police were distracted and there was nothing to tie the heist to him. He folded the paper on the table before draining his coffee and signaling the waitress for the bill. She smiled, a skinny white girl, addressing him in respectful tones. Attitudes changed when you wore a suit and a decent watch, attitudes changed when you had power. St. George's Mall was filled with dwindling groups of tourists following guides, retail staff on their lunch breaks, and hawkers peddling cheap Chinese shit. A few weather-worn posters of the election still clung to lampposts, the smiling faces and campaign promises as faded as the real thing.

Parliament stood across the street and he walked over to the balcony where the new statue of Nelson Mandela stood, one hand in the air, the other clutching the speech he gave as a free man in 1990. The figure's fresh metal face had a yellow sheen in the sunlight, but perhaps with the tarnish of years to come you could imagine that the man himself was still standing there. There was a time Fairchance couldn't get near parliament, now he drank fine scotch with ministers. It was a long way from the one-room shack in Grabouw he left as a boy. His journey to Cape Town regularly invaded his memories these days, the boy standing by the edge of the road, hoping for a lift. He had been heading to the Promised Land back then. Now people couldn't get out of the city fast enough. He remembered how the force of a minibus thundering by had sent him

tumbling onto the gravel. Too close, his mother's voice had had echoed in his head. Stay back, be safe. But he was short for his age. Nobody would have seen him if he didn't stand right on the shoulder. His hands frequently traveled to his stomach for the reassuring crinkle of the plastic shopping bag he hid under his shirt. It held his other pair of underwear, a comb, and the last R50 note from the envelope in his mother's Bible. There used to be more, but that was before she got sick. He had left Grabouw two days prior, begging rides and sleeping in the long grass on the side of the road, but the town still clung to him, itching closest to his skin. He had promised himself that when he got to Cape Town he would buy a bar of Sunlight soap and scrub himself clean, head to toe and the in-between, and get rid of the past for always and then he'd be new, he'd be bold like Brenda Fassie, MaBrrr, as the people called her. MaBrrr belted so the world could hear, declaring I am here, you better pay attention. His mother had always sung along to the radio when a MaBrrr song played, her hips swaying as she swept the floor of their one-room shack. Fairchance wished she had been bold too.

Standing on the side of the road that day, Fairchance had imagined that Cape Town lay between the uneven contours in the distance. He tried not to look directly at the baboons on the other side of the highway. They had been squatting there as if they were hoping to hitch a ride going in the opposite direction, back to Grabouw. There was a big boss on his laurels, contemplating every passing car as if it issued a personal challenge. Then the mammas, with babies clinging onto them, while a brood of little ones shoved and chased each other in the foliage. Two older ones, not quite big, perched on the guard rails, separate from the others. Every now and then, as if on a dare, one of them would try

to cross the road, scampering back as he lost the game of chicken with an approaching car. They got bolder with every attempt. One of the young baboons moved to the edge of the road. He looked back to make sure his friend was behind him. Number two bounded after him, hesitated at the faded center line, then planted his hind quarters on the asphalt. His eyes were trained on Fairchance, incisors bared in a yawn. Fear traced an acid burn in Fairchance's empty stomach. If he ran, the baboons would be on him, tear him for sport like the dogs did with the old cat, Djipsie, that used to come beg for scraps at their door. In her prime, Djipsie would have given them hell, but she became too old and arthritic to jump out of harm's way. The old bull gets slaughtered to make room for the young, his mother had said. The world is too small to let everybody stay.

Number one edged forward, less than ten feet between him and Fairchance. Fairchance took a step back, his body now flush with the rock face behind him.

"*Zimb' izindaba* ..." Fairchance's voice faltered at the first notes of the song. Be bold, he whispered to himself.

Number one halted at the high-pitched squeak, his indecision clear.

Fairchance renewed his effort. "*Mina Ngihamba* –" The melody broke through the crackle.

The baboon bared his teeth, not a yawn this time. Fairchance clasped both hands tightly over his mouth, terrified as number one crossed the center line. Tires screeched. An elongated horn of an old *bakkie* blared, the driver cursing loudly. Gesturing arms and exclamations of protest came from behind the cab where men were thrown against each other in the sudden stop. The two young baboons scattered back to their troop, their tails

like antennas in the bushes. The big boss watched the whole scene with bored indifference.

Fairchance ran to the *bakkie*, waving his arms wildly. The driver shouted an obscenity and shooed him away, putting the pickup in gear. Fairchance banged on the window in desperation. “Please!” The *bakkie* began to move. “*Yima*!” He ran next to it, rapidly losing the race. “Wait!”

An arm grabbed hold of him, his feet pedaled air, his body wriggled in space as a jumble of gray sky and mountain streaked past his eyes. His behind collided violently with the cold steel of the *bakkie*’s bed, vibrating with the hum of the engine. Someone laughed from deep in their belly, an old man with downy white hair. He had a hollow face, his rough hands as bony as his wiry body. Fairchance struggled against him and he let go. Two younger men huddled against the *bakkie*’s cab, sheltering against the wind. They clutched their own bags to their chests as the pickup accelerated.

“You run like the chicken from the fox!” Fragile brown skin around the old man’s eyes crinkled in delight. “Screamed like a girl.”

“I’m not a girl.” Fairchance ruffled. For a moment he thought about getting off. Rock face and bushes rushed past his face and he thought of the baboons.

“*Ja*? What are you then?”

Fairchance lifted his chin defiantly. “A man.”

“You’re still in diapers, boy. Where’s your *umama*?”

Fairchance swallowed back the burn. “I am fourteen.” He knew would not be respected if he told them he was only ten, the lie coming easier every time he told it. “I do things by myself.”

The old man shook his head. He leaned his back against the cab with the other two. There was no room next to them, so Fairchance scooched to the back of the pickup where the wind ripped and growled and pulled on his clothes, his face too, so he had to scrunch up his eyes and squeeze his lips together. The pickup sped through the switchbacks down the mountain pass, knocking them about. Bare metal ridges bruised Fairchance’s back. He leaned away from the side, the metal imprint lingering on his skin. The pickup took a sharp bend without slowing down and he tumbled onto his side, hitting his head.

“Hold on, boy,” the old man shouted over the wind.

Fairchance turned his back to the old man, both hands holding on tightly to the back flap. Behind them, the curly black tar-snake of the road wound and twisted, its tail disappearing rapidly. If he played the video tape in reverse, like when the preacher rewound the film about Jesus at Christmas, they’d go back up the mountain, he’d be thrown off the pickup by the old man, run back to the baboons, chase them away, shuffle downhill and along a very long road, jump in and out of a myriad of old cars and minibus taxis while dry savannah blurred by until the darkness would find him crawling off the smuggler’s truck. He’d walk through the dirt streets of Grabouw, squeeze between the people lining up in the night. He would enter his mother’s shack, and lie awake on their mattress, staring at her empty place for hours. Then he would get up, go back to the

hospital and the doctor would stop shaking his head, and Fairchance would help his mother home, and she would get better and better every day. The blood from her coughs would disappear, and she would get up again to go to work, and Fairchance would go back to school, and he would shove Diliza out of his mother's bed, stuff the word bastard right back down Diliza's throat, and his mother's wounds would heal and her bruises disappear and Diliza would walk out the door with his flowers and his pretty words, and it would just be the two of them again, happy, dancing and singing to the radio while they waited for samp to boil. And if he rewound the movie far enough, his father would come home, but he was too young to remember that time, he only had his mother's stories to believe.

The *bakkie* slowed behind a line of cars. The rolling hills were gone. The landscape lay flat and brown, interrupted by low structures, held together by mercy, it seemed, and shipping containers so close to each other that you couldn't pass a Lucky packet between them. Dusty narrow paths divided the shacks into claustrophobic blocks where men and women emerged and disappeared, swallowed whole by the chaos. A mass of people walked down the side of the highway, snippets of excited voices coming together then trailing off to nothing.

Fairchance turned around to the three men. "This is Cape Town?" Panic had lumped in his throat. This wasn't the city of his future. This place was worse than Grabouw's township, and a hundred, no, a thousand times bigger. One of his companions, a man with fat cheeks, looked at him dully. "This is Khayelitsha." He pointed behind him. "The city is on the other side."

Fairchance craned his neck to see past the cab. A mountain rose in the distance, its top so flat it had to have been sliced off by God himself. The driver banged against the window and pickup pulled onto the broad shoulder of the road. The two younger men immediately jumped off.

"Come," the old man said, his descent careful, measured. "This is as far as he'll take us."

"But I have to get to Cape Town." Fairchance stared at the faint outline of the mountain. It was still so far away.

"In the morning." The old man smiled, not unkind this time. "Tonight, you can share what I have." He gestured to the people on the side of the road. "It is good that we are all together to witness this day."

"What day?"

"Have you been asleep all this time that you do not know, boy?"

Fairchance fought through the confused haze of the past few days, the jovial mood he encountered everywhere, the long lines of people waiting to vote. The impossible had become real. The election had made his mother smile in the last days, even though she would never see the results. The driver bleated the horn, his irritation clear. Fairchance jumped off the *bakkie*. It sped away as soon as his feet touched ground. The old man started walking up a narrow lane that faltered between two shacks.

Fairchance touched the bag under his clothes. "Hey," he said, suddenly worried. He ran after the old man. "Wait. Who won?"

The old man, Lwazi was his name, lived in a small, tenuous shack. As the wind beat against it, poking thick fingers through the seams in the corrugated zinc, Fairchance prayed that it wouldn't collapse on them. Newspaper pages lined the walls for insulation. Bright advertisements for groceries, real estate, and fancy cars, fought for space between violent headlines and pictures of fat bald men. The rest of the room was sparse. A thin sponge mattress on a plank was kept off the ground by a stack of bricks. Evidence of flood water was visible in the marbled dirt floor. On the shelf of a small plank bookcase rested a tin plate and cup.

Fellow South Africans - the people of South Africa: This is indeed a joyous night. The voice of Nelson Mandela, speaking from the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg, crackled across the country to the little wireless around which Fairchance and the old man crouched on upturned milk crates. Lwazi's head bobbed in agreement every time Madiba spoke.

Although not yet final, we have received the provisional results of the election. My friends, I can tell you that we are delighted by the overwhelming support for the African National Congress.

Outside the shack a cheer rose from people who had gathered in the street. Lwazi reached for a packet of tobacco in his pocket to stop a weathered pipe. He looked ancient and frail in the candle light, his cheeks streaked with wet lines. "Turn that up, boy," he said when he noticed Fairchance staring at him. Fairchance turned the knob, drowning out the noise from outside.

… it is you, the people, who are our true heroes. You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim this country as your own. - and from the rooftops - free at last! An ANC government will serve all the people of South Africa, not just ANC members…

They sat in silence long after Madiba's "thank you" died down. The old man stared into the distance, his hands scrunched into a ball on his lap. Fairchance followed his gaze to a small frame with a faded photograph of a woman with a sad smile. She stood in front of a round hut with a thatched roof, a baby dressed in only a diaper on her hips.

"My wife," Lwazi said. "A very long time ago."

"Is she here too?"

"She passed, boy."

"And the baby? It is big now?"

Lwazi held up a hand as if to shield himself from the question. "Amandla! Viva! Viva!" The chanting outside had grown to a fevered pitch. Fairchance got up from his seat to listen at the door.

"It will all be well now, hey *Baba*?"

Lwazi look startled, as if he had forgotten Fairchance was there. "This land," he said after a moment, "it has drunk much blood, boy. Hate wraps itself around the hearts of men. It does not let go easily."

"Like we hate the whites?"

"I think they hate us more."

A fervor rushed Fairchance's veins. "It doesn't matter anymore, *Baba*. They can go back to where they came from. It's our country now."

"The whites say God gave them this land." The old man seemed unperturbed by Fairchance's sudden outrage. Fairchance remembered his mother praying with the open Bible in her lap, her lips trembling as she pleaded for forgiveness. He had never understood what she had done wrong.

"Did He, *Baba*?"

"I think God, He is a strange ruler. He bends like a reed for the things His people want to be true."

A horn blasted right outside the shack, joining the cacophony of voices. Music flared up. Afropop. Fairchance tapped his foot in time to the bass.

"You should go to them, boy. Tonight, we are all one."

"You too?"

"I am all right here." The old man patted Fairchance on the shoulder. "But you are young. One day you can say to the ones that will come, I saw, I was there." He took the tin mug from the shelf and sat back down next to the radio.

Fairchance glimpsed Lwazi fill his mug from a paper bag as he closed the shack's door behind him. Outside, fires had smoldered in drums and smoke rose to tease his nostrils. Amber light seeped thick between the shadows, hiding and revealing in turn. There were people everywhere. Bodies entwined, writhing like a living thing. It moved like a strange beast through the night, devouring everyone in its way, growing fat off manic joy. Warmed by cheap brandy and the damp slick of others on their skin, nobody

seemed to feel the autumn chill. Fairchance stood on the edge, watching them with fascination. His longing to join them had turned to trepidation. Exhaustion and fear held him, the prospect of one more step threatening to undo him. These people, they were not like the people from Grabouw, bowed and passive. Their hard faces and sinewy bodies were scarred with the struggle, their menace veiled in celebration, a tightening coil that threatened on the edge of release. Faces bore down on Fairchance, shouting "*Bhuti! Bhuti!*" Vines sprouted from darkness to entreat him, arms open, in their embrace a promise. A hoarse voice somewhere in the throng broke out in *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* falling into strange syncopation with the baseline of MaBrrr singing *My Black President* over car speakers.

Fairchance whispered along, his voice steadily filling with fire. The words dissolved in incoherent knowledge until the chorus came around and his efforts renewed. "Hmm maa, hmm maa, Madiba!" He threw his arms in the air, suddenly light-headed, giddy. There was no past here, only the now in vivid color, the pungent taste of life in his mouth. Fairchance stepped into the throng and gave over. He was folded into the undulating machine of greens and yellows, of black. Flesh pressed up against him, a never-ending beat carrying them through the narrow winding paths of the township, away from the shacks with their plastic tarp roofs. The road widened slightly, dumping them between multi-colored houses. A man, dressed in a Sunday suit, rushed out at them, followed closely by an old woman and three young ones who laughed while waving small ANC flags. The man stretched out his arms and yelled, sound escaping from the depths of him, his eyes closed in rapture. As the procession passed an alley, Fairchance

saw the dark shadows of men embracing. Somebody shoved a bottle into Fairchance's hand. He took a tentative sip. The quick burn in his stomach languidly spread a warm glow through his veins. A girl, no, a woman smiled as she took the bottle from him. She tilted her head back and a thin liquid line traced a path from the corner of her mouth, down her neck, hesitating just above her clavicle. Fairchance was mesmerized by the shiny trace on her skin, wondering how far the numbness would go. He reached for the bottle. She playfully slapped his hand away and folded his body into hers, her breasts against his chest, her breath sticky on his face. She brought the bottle to his lips, teasing for a moment before tipping it. Fairchance suckled the slow trickle.

"I like your moves," she smiled. Her almond-shaped brown eyes laughed as she tickled the back of his neck with sharp fingers. Fairchance's body reacted like an alien being. He tried to break free, not sure what was happening to him, but her hands were down there, touching, stroking. Around him faces disappeared into each other, becoming something molten, pliable. The beast's turgid belly burst over him, through him, and he was one with it, spreading over everything and everyone. Strong hands gripped his back, locking him in an embrace. "Free," a man's voice had whispered in his ear. "You are free now."

Fairchance broke eye contact with Mandela's statue, the memory bitter in his mouth, and walked away. He turned down a side street that led to Greenmarket Square. Sammy had died on one of these streets, perhaps this one, he couldn't remember, found with a gunshot wound to the back of his head. Fairchance missed him, desperately

sometimes. Or perhaps he felt a guilt he knew he could never make right. He had watched quietly as Sammy destroyed himself with *tik* and bad decisions. He never could control his urges, hate overpowering every choice. People said that Sammy had chosen his path, that nobody could have changed that. But Fairchance knew that he could have saved Sammy. The truth was that he chose to do nothing.

The square moved lethargically, the early winter nipping at the decimated customers. Stall owners, foreigners from the North, sat around chatting in elevated notes between bright colored fabric and wooden masks, their faces lighting up as Fairchance approached.

"Chess set, you like? Hand carved in Zimbabwe. Only R300… Okay R200 for you."

"Nice batiks from Congo, I give you a good price."

Fairchance weaved between the stalls, quibbling about price, joking with some of the regular guys who knew him. He bought a couple of animal figurines for Puma to add to his collection, and, on a whim, a toy car fashioned from bright red wire and coke bottle tops. It had a wire steering wheel connected to a column that extended waist-high from to the front axis. He steered the little car as he walked the perimeter of the square, searching the faces huddled in the doorways, young boys in thin shirts giving his purchase covetous looks. There were newcomers every week, young and old, many whites among them. Fairchance made a few inquiries along the way, finding the familiar figure hunched at the bottom of the hotel steps.

"Thank you, thank you, Chief." Mavo held his hands together, as if in prayer, before he took the paper notes Fairchance held out. Fairchance noticed the bruises on Mavo's right arm before it disappeared under a threadbare blanket he clutched over his shoulders.

"Do you need anything?"

"I am all right, Chief. I get along."

"Winter is near. I'll get you a new blanket."

Mavo glanced over at a group of teenagers hanging around at the end of the block. "I will only lose it."

Fairchance crouched down next to Mavo, ignoring the pungent assault of piss and layers of old sweat on his senses. "Come stay with me then," he pleaded again. "I have a big place, plenty room. Johnny and Puma have space too. We can all be together, like we always said."

Mavo shook his head. "I am all right."

Fairchance got up, irritated by the judgment in Mavo's eyes. Mavo still believed in the hollow promises. Fairchance didn't understand how he had failed to notice that nothing ever changed except the size of the elected officials' stomachs. Freedom was for those who were bold enough to take it.

"Did you see her?" Mavo looked at Fairchance with sudden expectation. It was the signal that he wanted the visit to end.

Brenda Fassie had died in 2004. The headline had loitered on every street corner as if the world had at last approached its miserable end, punctuated by the mournful

expression of black anchors as they read the script on television screens in bars and coffee shops. MaBrrr had overdosed on cocaine. Mandela, along with a slew of VIPs, had visited her deathbed before they switched off the machines. The rumor that she had Aids was vehemently denied. That was the first time Mavo had asked the question. Fairchance had initially thought that smoking *tik* had affected Mavo's mind. In the years since it had become a strange ritual between them. Fairchance knew it held some importance to Mavo, so he played along even though the meaning escaped him.

"Did you go? Did you see her?" Mavo became more insistent.

Fairchance remembered the day he went to a MaBrr concert. He'd saved for months. The jubilant crowd had rushed past him through the stadium gates, breaking out in song as they went, joy on their faces, hips swaying in time to the amplified beat that had started up deep within the stadium walls. The voice over the speaker system was tinny and thin, barely evoking the rich cadence Fairchance had worshipped for so long. He had stood silently amongst those people, watched them celebrate, his ticket crumpled in his fist, unable to feel anything.

"No, Mavo," Fairchance said, touching his old friend's shoulder. "I never did."

Fairchance steered the little red wire car back across the square. He eyed the group of teenagers, as he passed them. One of the boys had a nasty scar that ran from his temple down his cheek, terminating just above his jawline. He certainly wasn't the oldest or even the toughest-looking of the group, but there was something in his eyes, a sharp-

edged determination, that Fairchance recognized. He waived a R20 note at the boy to come over.

"Your name?"

"Jama."

"Sure." Fairchance said with a smile. "Jama, my friend, I have a problem."

"*Ja*?" The boy was full of bravado, shooting a look at his companions.

"You see, I think someone's been bothering my friend over there. And I think it might have been you." Jama didn't say anything. "Perhaps you don't know which friend I mean?"

Jama briefly looked at Fairchance before looking away again. "Not me, *Ntate*. I bother nobody."

Fairchance dragged the pause out, reveling in his own sense of drama. "I'm sure it was a mistake. You didn't realize he was my friend. Me being a wealthy man and him a *skollie*. I think you thought he was maybe just a good for nothing with no people?"

"No." Jama's voice falsettoed.

"Then, if it was not you, maybe you could help me and make sure that nobody else bothers him. It will upset me. And when I'm upset I get so very, very, angry, you know? I break things without meaning to. You see?" Fairchance touched the boy's chin, tilting it towards him. "Don't let me come back here and break you, Jama."

Jama's eyes met his, dark, beautiful, the way only fear could make them. He relished that look, thrived on it. That was one thing Sammy had gotten wrong. Sammy had always craved others' respect. But Fairchance preferred their fear.

"*Voetsek,*" Fairchance whispered to Jama. There was a moment of confusion on the young face, then the boy took off running.

Alet

"Got lucky?" Maryna perched in the kitchen doorway. Morning light cruelly highlighted the flaws in her unmade skin and her brittle hair, dyed a deep auburn from a box at the beginning of every month. Alet hadn't quite made up her mind about how old Maryna was. She dressed and acted as if she was in her late twenties, yet she expressed herself through the excessive use of Afrikaans diminutives. As if that would soften her not-so-subtle bigotry.

"What's that?" Alet tore breast meat off a cold rotisserie carcass and stuffed it in her mouth.

Maryna raised an eyebrow that barely distinguished itself from her pasty skin. She seemed to change her mind on which subject to pursue. "Couldn't have been much fun." She pinched her lips together as if to prevent herself from saying more.

"What are you talking about?" Alet's hangover was hurting and she was in no mood for Maryna's euphemisms and circular references.

"You slept on the couch. Although, I think I mentioned when you moved in that I don't want anyone doing that. Consideration for others, you know?"

"Do we have mayo?"

Maryna gestured to the fridge. "You haven't contributed anything towards the communal use items yet, you know. Things are expensive."

"Sorry. I'll go get groceries today."

"And you left bread crumbs in the Golden Syrup again."

Alet sighed. "Sorry." She'd been saying that word an awful lot since she moved

in.

"Good morning." Mathebe stood in the hallway, straight as a pin, not a wrinkle to be found on his white shirt and gray pants. Alet never understood how he pulled that off. Even when she went to the trouble of ironing, clothes just reverted to their former slovenliness the moment she put them on. Most days she just stuck to jeans and the cheap black t-shirts she had bought in bulk when they had to stop doing regular laundry. Nobody noticed what she was wearing anyway, or so she told herself.

Maryna turned around, the stiff smile on her face fading when she saw Mathebe. She shot a look packed with innuendo in Alet's direction.

"Morning." Alet dragged a chicken wing through the mayonnaise she had heaped on the plate, tracing curlicues in the thick mound.

"This is your…" Maryna pursed her lips for a moment, "friend from last night?"

"Oh. *Ja.* Maryna, this is Johannes. Johannes, Maryna, my roommate."

"I thank you for your hospitality." Mathebe stretched out his right hand.

"*Ja,* well." Maryna shook his hand, letting go as soon as politeness permitted. "It's getting late. I'll just…" She tightened her nightgown's belt and slithered down the hall to her room.

"Breakfast?" Alet splayed her greasy fingers and opened the fridge with her pinky. She propped the door open with her hip while she peered over numerous containers. "I think there are eggs. Or I can make you a chicken sandwich."

"Thank you. But it is all right."

"Coffee then? Water's back on and the kettle just boiled."

Mathebe nodded. He took a seat at the small table in the center of the room while Alet spooned some instant coffee into a couple of mugs. She planted a can of condensed milk on the table along with rusks from Maryna's stash, hidden on top of the cabinet.

"Did you sleep okay?" Alet poured water into the two mugs and added instant coffee. ""I've been meaning to get a new mattress, but I'll probably just have to move it again." She bit her lip. It was probably a bad time to tell Mathebe about Wynand Meyers' job offer.

"Everything was comfortable, thank you."

Alet met Mathebe's eyes. "I wasn't in the greatest of shape last night. Sorry. I –"

Mathebe held up his hand, as blunt as always when he didn't think a subject was worth further discussion. Alet sat down opposite him and dipped her teaspoon into the cold condensed milk, letting the congealed bubble dissolve in her coffee. She didn't know how to continue. Mathebe had not asked her explicitly for help the previous evening, but it was there, in his eyes and his demeanor. She could see his desperation and it made her loathe herself. She had left that life behind, the police, investigating crimes, going after suspects. If she wanted, she could soon be putting the whole country behind her. She didn't know what to feel about it, but perhaps leaving was a good place to start. The idea of getting involved again, of failing and adding yet another body to her nightmares, terrified her.

"Constable. I am the one who must apologize."

"Stop calling me Constable, Johannes. That's gone, hey."

Mathebe nodded. "I realize that I am imposing."

"Of course not. You stay here for as long as you want."

"I thank you, but that is not what I mean." He looked away, suddenly awkward.

"Tell me what happened." It was automatic, all Alet could think of to fill the silence, though she dreaded the answer.

Mathebe hesitated, mustering courage to speak. "Celiwe's friend is Lydia Mfeka. She lived with her aunt and uncle in Unie." He produced a weathered notebook. He seemed to need it for comfort rather than aid as he recited facts. A case file spilled out in Mathebe's controlled cadence, the way it used to do when they still worked together. Alet knew he was trying to be a police officer, to deliver the facts with detachment. She also knew it was impossible.

"Lydia moved to Unie six months ago. Her teacher said she was a good student, but often did not come to school."

"Why?"

"The aunt and uncle were laborers on one of the farms." Alet understood. The workers often didn't have enough money to pay for transport into town and Alet doubted they could have paid the high school's hostel fees. She wondered if the farms in Unie were as affected by the drought as Cape Town. Grape vines were being uprooted at local vineyards, cattle and produce scaled back drastically. Even Rooibos tea was becoming scarce, jeopardizing the whole culture.

"What about her parents?" Alet sipped her coffee, the sweetness of the condensed milk failing to mask the acidity.

"The family did not know the father. The mother's name is Zanele Mfeka. The

aunt is her sister. Zanele could not take care of Lydia in the city. That is why she was sent to Unie."

"Did you meet her?"

Mathebe's eyes dropped to the unopened notebook. "Miriam saw her once, drove her home. Celiwe asked if Lydia could stay over at the house, but Myriam does not allow sleepovers. Lydia's aunt gave me this." He pulled a photograph from between the notebook's pages. The girl in the picture, thin and timid-looking, was dressed in a black school pinafore and white blouse. She had a long face with deep-set eyes and wore her hair cropped close to her scalp. "The mother's last known address was in Khayelitsha."

"You think Lydia tried to come back here, to her *ma*?"

"Cape Town metro could not find Ms. Mfeka."

"I'm sure they tried real hard."

"The mother sent money every month," Mathebe continued without acknowledging her sarcasm. "Then the postal strike happened. The family has not heard anything from her since."

"She doesn't have a cell?"

Mathebe shook his head. "The number just rings. I have to go to Khayelitsha."

"The Flats are dangerous. Especially now."

"Yes."

"I…" Alet stopped herself. She hated that she was afraid. When she was younger the idea of being the hero excited her, a driving force that sent her into a hornet's nest without thinking. But the reality of violence, the cost of being at the center, had been

nothing like the dreams of her youth. She reached for her phone on the table to look up the address in Khayelitsha he had written down, grateful that she could avoid looking him in the eye. Maryna appeared in the doorway, made-up and dressed in a black pantsuit, her hair styled in a jagged bob. Alet wondered for the first time exactly what it was Maryna did for a living. The move into Maryna's rental had happened so fast, and their schedules were so disparate that they never quite managed a conversation beyond due bills and things Alet did wrong.

"I thought you looked familiar. It's been bothering me, but I'm not one to pry." Maryna spoke in measured tones that verged on contempt.

"What –"

"SA247. You're quite the celebrity, dearie." Maryna seemed annoyed at Alet's incomprehension. "Just know, I only took you in because *Oom* Jan asked me for a favor. If you bring *him* here as well, you can find yourself someplace else to live." She turned and left. Moments later the front door closed. The dog started whining.

Alet's confusion mirrored in Mathebe's frown. She went onto the SA247 website, an independent news outlet with short, succinct bulletins that prided itself on up-to-date and live coverage. With so much going wrong in the country, short attention spans and willful ignorance, it wasn't feasible to devote much more than a few sentences to anything. Alet scrolled through updates on the new president's latest press conference, two hijackings, and a fatal car crash on the N1, all posted in the past hour. Her heart started to race as soon as she saw the photograph. It was the one from her father's trial. At the time it was printed in almost every newspaper in the country. Alet in her police

uniform, giving testimony. Her hair was longer then, her skin sickly sallow in the harsh fluorescent lighting. Her wide-set eyes were ringed with dark circles and her usually plump cheeks looked almost gaunt. She wore a bewildered expression, her lips slightly parted, prominent eyebrows creased. Alet knew the exact moment the photograph was taken. The advocate had been drilling her for almost an hour on the sequence of events that led to the discovery of her father's apartheid-era crimes, about his confession to murder. She had clenched her fists so tight on that witness stand that the bruises from her nails marked her palms for days after. Throughout the whole ordeal Adriaan had stared straight ahead of him with a stoic expression. Then the advocate had asked Alet why she was testifying against her own father, as if there had been a choice in the matter. Adriaan had looked at her for the first time, his eyes dead. That's when she heard the camera's shutter. The shock at seeing the photograph again was quickly replaced with trepidation as Alet read the headline, "Berg's Daughter Unaware of His Release." It was by a journalist named Jonas Kleingeld.

"*Fok*." Alet felt cold as she skimmed through the article. The words refused to take on real meaning. She handed her phone to Mathebe.

"It says your father is getting clemency for cooperating with the police." Mathebe looked as incredulous as Alet felt. "He will be released from prison."

"They're actually buying this bullshit about him just being a cog in the machinery? Why the hell did we bother putting him away?" A fury, fanned by new fear, tightened her chest. "And who the hell is Jonas Kleingeld? I'll wring his bloody neck for him."

"He writes here that you gave him an exclusive interview." Mathebe tapped on a link.

"No ways. I didn't talk to any—" Mathebe handed Alet's phone back to her. "I…" Alet stared at the picture of the man she'd met at Freddy's the previous evening. She fought the fuzziness of her memory, only snippets of the conversation surfacing. "He was at the bar."

"The article does not give details."

Alet did a search on her phone. "Nobody else is reporting on this," she said. She clung to the hope that Kleingeld was just a sensation-seeking jerk.

"Perhaps it is a mistake."

"*Ja*." Conviction failed her. What if it was true? Would Adriaan come looking for her? She could feel herself descend into a familiar spiral of panic. Theo had sometimes managed to pull her out of it, but even he had eventually reached his limit.

"This is Captain Mathebe speaking."

Alet had not realized his phone had rung. She tried to focus her thoughts by reading the short article again, scanning it for clues. Kleingeld used language vague enough that nobody could bring him to task, rehashing facts that were available in the archives of any media outlet. Kleingeld even had the nerve to intimate that Alet had issues with her father leaving her and her mother and wanted to get back at him. Jonas Kleingeld had better hope that he wasn't at Freddy's the next time she walked in. She'd show him a thing or two about having issues.

"… thank you. I am on my way."

Alet dipped out of her fantasy of putting Kleingeld in his place to find Mathebe ashen-faced.

"Johannes?"

Mathebe tried to stand up but sank back in his chair again. He put his elbows on the table, his head sunk between his hands. "They have found a body," he said. "A teenaged girl."

Alet's mouth felt dry. "Is it –" The words stuck in her throat.

"They are not sure."

Fairchance

"Hey, Shortie!"

Fairchance rankled at the name. Johnny was the only person who could get away with calling him that to his face. "For Puma," he said, and put the wire car and wooden figurines down on Johnnie's desk. The DJ was doing sound checks for the night downstairs. Being one of the few clubs that remained open during the water crisis gave them an advantage. By midnight there would be a line down the block to get into Club Exotix.

"Sure, sure," Johnny said. He closed the door of his office and the noise was instantly silenced. "But you should come by and give it to the *boytjie* yourself."

"How is he?"

Johnny shrugged. "Some good days, mostly bad. The government drugs came late. You know it's a miracle he's made it this long. The nurse makes him comfortable, that's all we can do."

"You get him whatever he needs, hear?"

"*Eish*! You *mos* know I take care of our boy, Boss. You should come for dinner, *ne*. The new girl makes excellent filet." Johnny took a second glass out of his drawer and filled it from a bottle of Moët. Fairchance didn't feel like coming up with an excuse for not going over to Johnnie's place.

"What I don't understand, Johnny," he said, the dry acidity of the champagne lingering in his mouth, "Is why you waste good money on imported stuff when we live an hour from wine country. Local is supposed to be *lekker,* man."

Johnny laughed. “You know why, brother…” He paused, as was custom in this joke. Fairchance could almost time it to the millisecond. “Because I can!” Fairchance laughed along, as ritual required. “No but seriously, bra. The local stuff is scarce. Not too long before we’ll have to charge a premium for it. Fancy that.”

“What are we celebrating?”

Johnny held his glass in the air. “A very good Monday.” Fairchance lifted his own glass to the toast.

“There was a report in the paper.”

“Not a single hitch, Boss. They can’t bring it back to us.”

“And a body count.” Fairchance watched Johnny’s face closely. “An MP got shot.”

“You can’t predict these things.” Johnny turned his back to Fairchance for a moment as he topped up his glass. Years of practice on the streets had made lying like breathing for all of them, but Johnny had it down to an art, no tell, no hesitation. “But we got a cool ten mil out of it.” His smile threatened to extend past his earlobes when he turned around. “And that after we pay our associates for a job well done.”

“Ten, you say?” Fairchance lingered on the words, drawing them out.

“It was early. The truck had only made a couple of stops.” Johnny chatted on as if he was discussing the next World Cup. “And we had to get rid of the *bakkie*. No good selling it so the cops can find a trail.” Johnny’s tap dance left Fairchance unimpressed, but it wasn’t the time to cause a stir. He and Johnny went back a long way, almost to the beginning. That first democratic election in ’94. Jubilation had turned stale that first

morning he saw Johnny. A shoe had nudged Fairchance in the back, a voice shouting close to his ear, “Hey, you rubbish.” Fairchance had opened his eyes to imposing walls behind a spiked iron fence. He now knew it was the church, but it had looked like a prison of some sort. Sharp sunlight had reflected off high arched windows and dug straight through his skull.

“This is my place.” Another kick punctuated the interrupting voice. Fairchance rolled over on the concrete. A coloured boy jumped away in fright. Johnny. He was a bit younger than Fairchance, maybe nine or so, with a round face, thin nose, and high cheek bones. Ribs showed through the holes of his t-shirt. Fairchance pushed himself off the ground and wished that he hadn’t as nausea tickled his jaw.

“Move!” Johnny raised his fists to eye level, his fury growing. “Or I’ll make you.”

Fairchance tried to speak but immediately lost the meager content of his stomach.

“Sis, man.” A slackness infiltrated Johnny’s arms. His bottom lip trembled. “You clean it up.” Fairchance waved him away and sagged back onto the ground. “Clean it, you… you good for nothing. I sleep here.”

“Leave me alone.”

“No ways, sissy boy. I’ll get Sammy. He’ll get you no problem.” The boy’s eyes narrowed maliciously, his face scrunching to a point. “Like they did you last night, *ne*.”

“What?” Remnants of touch weaved phantom sensations on Fairchance’s skin, the memory of it out of reach.

“Is true. I saw. Pants down your ankles. No better than the girls on the corner.” The boy grinned. “But *they* smarter than to give it away.”

"It's not true."

"Go, sissy boy. Run if you know what's what. Sammy will be here soon."

Fairchance had struggled to his knees, gripping the iron railing for support. The woman with the almond eyes flashed before him. The numbness that made him forget. He had told her that he was going to be a famous singer like MaBrrr. MaBrrr was from Cape Town, so that's where he was going too. He'd meet her, and all would be all right, he knew. She'd sing with him. And then he'd be famous and buy a house with an indoor toilet and your own private water tap, just like his *mama* had wanted. The woman with the almond eyes had listened, heard all the secrets he carried. She said her boyfriend was going to the city, that they'd take him too. Her lips had touched his. The man's too. And it had felt good, like chocolate melting on your tongue. Fairchance touched his stomach. His bag was gone. Dread gripped his chest so violently that he couldn't breathe. He fumbled with the buttons of his shirt, fingers shaking as he stared at his naked stomach in disbelief. He frantically patted his shorts, turning full circle to check the place where he had slept. Dizzy, weak, his panic boiled to hysteria, uncontrollable tears adding to his humiliation. When he looked up, an older boy had joined them.

"Johnny says you're in his place," the other boy said. "We don't take no *kak*. It's our turf, hear? You move." The boy's dark eyes sized Fairchance up, a puzzled look on his face when Fairchance didn't move. "You deaf, hey?"

"He stole my money!" The accusation churned to truth in Fairchance's mind until there was no other explanation. "I want it back. Fifty rand!" He advanced on Johnny, ignoring the older boy blocking his way. "You hear –"

The older boy grabbed the collar of his shirt as Fairchance tried to push him aside. He shoved Fairchance, but Fairchance found his footing and struck blindly. His fist crunched on bone. They locked into each other, horns entwined. Fairchance felt weak. He tried to shift, and the boy sucker punched him. Fairchance returned the blow, sure he did some damage to the boy judging by the pain that exploded in his hand.

"Chips, Mavo! Chips!" Johnny suddenly took off, his thin legs streaking down the block.

The older boy, Mavo, let go of Fairchance. A white policeman was coming towards them. Mavo didn't hesitate. He ran in a different direction than Johnny. Fairchance stood frozen as the policeman barreled down the street, not sure what was going on. They were free now, they could be wherever they liked. He didn't do anything wrong. The menace of the man brought back memories of bull horns, and Casspirs, and stones met with bullets, men and women falling in the dust like empty maize bags.

"Hey, you!" Mavo paused half a block away, his eyes wide with terror. "*Beweeg*!" He gestured with both arms for Fairchance to run.

The poison in Fairchance's veins turned to adrenalin as the policeman grabbed him by the neck and flung him to the ground. The word *kaffir* escaping through short breaths and blows. Fairchance struggled to his knees, shielding his face. As the man lifted his baton, Fairchance found the ground under him and broke free. He kept running, sure that the policeman was steps behind him. The streets wound and twisted beyond comprehension, their path obscured by buildings higher than he'd ever seen. He caught a glimpse of the green cap Mavo had worn in the crowd ahead and clung to it like a life

raft, their earlier scuffle forgotten. The cap disappeared again between two buildings with red and yellow awnings. Everything around Fairchance moved without letting up, car horns, the drone of engines, each street corner more confusing than the previous one. His legs threatened to buckle under him, but he couldn't stop running, afraid that this noise might swallow him if he did. Turning a corner, he collided with Mavo. Mavo shoved him off and crossed his mouth with his index finger. He gestured for Fairchance to follow him. They scaled a tower of broken crates and clambered over a fence.

"You stupid, short stuff?" Mavo said once they landed in the alley on the other side. "Those rockspiders will mess you up, man."

Fairchance's heart thumped in his ears, dizziness overtaking him. He leaned against a wall. "Do you have food?"

"*Eish*!" Mavo shook his head. "Where you from? This here is Cape Town, bra. No free nothing and every *oke* for himself. You don't know that, you know nothing."

"They took everything." Fairchance's voice quivered, tears threatening again. "They said they would help, but they just took my coin."

Mavo tilted his head, eyeing Fairchance. "Sharks like babies like you. Easy pickings." He turned and walked away. Fairchance grabbed his shoulder, terrified at the thought of being left alone, convinced that he would be crushed by the gray hardness around him.

"I want to go with you."

"We don't want nobody new."

"I'll do whatever you say. Please," he added, hoping manners would do the trick.

Mavo's eyes softened as if he was remembering something. When he spoke, his voice was a pretend hard. "Maybe," he said. "No promises, hear? Sammy decides." The name scared Fairchance. Johnny and Mavo spoke in tones both reverent and threatening when they said it. Mavo started walking without checking to see if Fairchance was following. "You better be quiet," he said. "Let me do the talking. Sammy says no, it's no, hear? No ifs or buts and make yourself scarce. He'll *bliksem* you good if he doesn't like you."

"Thank you." Fairchance struggled to keep up as Mavo wound and dodged through the city's alleys before doubling back to an old church with thick stone walls on Wale Street. Mavo said that he and Johnny ran with Puma and Sammy, that they always met at this spot. Sammy was the oldest, not a boy anymore. Fairchance stood quietly watching Mavo and Sammy talk. Mavo's words came fast, his tongue stumbling every now and then. Sammy glanced at Fairchance, his eyes hooded by thick brows. He had bulbous features that made him look fat even though he was as skinny as the others.

"What do you say?" Mavo stood back at the end of his pitch, his arms crossed.

"He doesn't look like much. And he's dark, like a black."

"He's coloured for sure, no worries. One of us. Hey, what's your name?"

Fairchance was too scared to tell them that his mom had been Xhosa, her clan name Tshomane, and that that was the name she raised him with. He would go along with whatever they wanted him to be, as long as they let him stay.

"I am Fairchance…" He hesitated. Like his father. Yes. "Fairchance Davids."

"See? Coloured. And he's little," Mavo said. "That's good, right? We can try him."

Sammy paused, studying Fairchance as if he only just noticed him, green eyes calculating his worth. "If he makes coin." He pointed a finger at Fairchance. "We don't take no freeloaders. Everybody shares what they make, you check?" Fairchance nodded. He didn't trust his mouth with more words.

The boys took him to Greenmarket Square where they begged for change. Fairchance watched Mavo skulk around, checking out targets, usually white, some wielding cameras. He'd offer to give them directions or told them which of the curio stalls had the best masks and carvings. Fairchance tried it too, but he didn't know the city or what to say, and he got shooed away by man in a felt hat.

"Use what you got, man." Mavo counted the bronze coins a woman had dropped in his hand. "Look at Johnny. He follows people, sticking his stomach out and stuff and they feel sorry for him. You're even more of a baby than him. You can easily do it."

Fairchance wanted to hit Mavo for saying it, but he knew he was on probation, so he kept it to himself and watched Johnny more closely. Johnny looked like he was about to cry as he held his hands out, a faint shiver in his shoulders. Even though he only made a little at a time, more people gave him loose change for nothing. Fairchance tried to copy him. He held out his hands, but people didn't take notice of him, his "Please, *Baas*, *Mies*," met with looks of contempt. Fairchance wanted to go hide somewhere, but the fear of telling Sammy he didn't have any money kept him rooted to the spot. Use what you got, Mavo had said. Fairchance opened his mouth. The first strained notes of a

lullaby his mother used to sing rang pure and crisp into the crowded marketplace. People glanced over, more than before, but still no coin. The song made him feel better, so he kept going, stamping his feet in rhythm.

A woman holding a little girl's hand smiled at Fairchance as she walked by. She stopped and gave the girl change from her purse. The girl waddled over to him. She confidently placed a ten-cent piece in Fairchance's outstretched palm. As her fingers brushed his skin, he looked into her blue eyes. She had short curls and round cheeks, her dress the whitest white he had ever seen with little yellow roses embroidered along the collar. So fragile, so pretty, he thought, a hollow longing opening up. He reached out to touch one of the roses, just wanting to feel the prettiness on his skin. The girl shrieked unexpectedly. The woman's face contorted into a snarl as she raced towards them. "*Voetsek*, you rubbish," she shouted at Fairchance as she scooped the girl into her arms. The streets around Fairchance moved without noticing him, the fear carrying him until he found a safe nook, his fingers cramped in a fist around the ten-cent coin. He touched his shirt and remembered the closeness of beauty, knowing that it would never belong to him. Something inside him started to seethe.

Fairchance rarely sang after that. Instead, he perfected a look that drooped on the edge of tears, his arms outstretched, palms up. Money came reliably if he cried. Most days the hunger and cold was enough so he didn't have to pretend. Security guards were paid to chase the boys away, but Sammy was friendly with some of them, so they would turn a blind eye if nobody complained. The gang sometimes worked the church near where they slept, but only when tourists came to look at it, not when there were services

and the members turned their faces away, pretending not to hear the "*Baas*, I'm hungry." Sometimes the younger men bounced coins on the ground and laughed when the boys scrambled for them.

"Your people are in charge now," one old guy snarled when Mavo wouldn't leave him alone. "Ask them for money. You're not our bother anymore."

"Ha, *ja*!" Mavo lifted his chest, a sudden menace crowding out the submissive posture from moments before. "Your time is over, whitie. Watch out!" He pointed two fingers straight at the offender, a fat Afrikaner with a heavy accent. "We gonna get all your stuff, hey. And all the jobs. Very, very soon. You watch." The man gave chase, shouting something about beating the shit out of Mavo. He lasted only half a block before he doubled over, coughs spasming through his body. An even fatter woman with stiff gray hair waddled after him, her tuberous arms flailing. Fairchance laughed at them with the others. He laughed even when it stopped being funny, just because he could.

At the end of the day they would come together at their spot behind the church and give everything they had made to Sammy. He would get them what they needed from the shops, usually a loaf of bread, sometimes chips on good days. Sammy didn't beg with them. He was too big for people to feel sorry for him and he scared the tourists and old ladies, but he kept other gangs away and made sure nobody took their turf.

The five of them would sit together all night to tell stories from their other life and make up new stories about this one. Sammy was the first. He had been living on the streets since he was nine, so he knew how things worked. Sammy's *ma* had worked for whites in the suburbs and could only come home on weekends, so he was left on his own

all the time. He skipped school a lot and hung out with the other kids on the streets of Mannenberg, getting into all sorts of trouble. Then, one day, some *skollies* cornered his *ma* at a bus stop because they said she had broken the strike. He never saw her again. They told him that he could claim her body, but he had no money to bury her, so he didn't. A man came looking for rent money soon after. He beat Sammy up when he didn't have it. That's when he started to rough it in the city. Johnny's dad beat him all the time, so he ran away, and nobody knew about Puma, except that one day he was just there and never left. They didn't know why Puma was different, but he had the sort of pretty face that made you think of an angel, and he put even Sammy in a good mood, so the boys looked after him. Mavo never told them much of what really happened to him, only that he had stayed in school almost to the end of standard six and Sammy had found him at the underpass one day and started to look after him. Adding numbers wasn't all Mavo was good at. He'd tell them pretend stories under the blanket that he said he'd read in books. Stories of Sangomas in houses made of maize that fed children in cages till they were fat and then ate them or sent a Thokoloshe to steal pretty girls from their mothers and keep them as slaves to spin gold. Fairchance often wished he could be a Sangoma when he thought of the woman with the almond eyes. He'd put a curse on her for taking his money, turn her into an old hag with no teeth. Fragments of shame and arousal glimmered when he tried to remember that night, but he didn't know what was real, and what his imagination added. The woman's boyfriend just always turned into Sammy in his imagination, no matter how hard he tried to remember what he looked like, and he didn't dare ask Johnny about it because he was afraid that the others would find out.

By that time the damp Cape winter had started to settle in. The cold had them seeking out patches of sun to warm themselves in during the day. At night, they shivered in doorways. Fairchance usually curled himself into a ball, tucking his head to his knees and clutching his bare legs with his arms. On nights like these he dreamt about his mother and their shack in Grabouw. He often wished that he wouldn't have to wake up again. Mandela had been inaugurated as president months before. He had made a speech at parliament, the crowd so thick that Fairchance and the others couldn't get close. But nothing had changed for them yet. "Promises take time," Mavo kept saying. "We'll all get houses and jobs, you'll see. Madiba doesn't lie to his people."

Puma showed up one day with an old blanket. It stank of a strange body's sweat, but they all huddled together, trying to get at least some part of their bodies under it, their breaths rising like smoke in the frigid air. That was how they slept at night from then on, together in a tangle of limbs, the blanket a sacred object that they would hide behind some bushes in the Company Gardens during the day.

Sometimes Sammy would disappear for a while with their money. Mavo said Sammy had a sickness that he couldn't help. He called it a demon that would only go away if Sammy took some special medicine and that that was what he needed the money for. Fairchance thought it unfair that they had to go hungry after begging all day, even if Sammy was sick. When Sammy came back from being gone that first time, he had a bottle of purple methylated spirits and a loaf of bread with him.

"Tonight, we ride the blue train," Sammy said. "Luxury, first class. Watch." He held the loaf of bread over a paper cup and poured the spirits through the top end. After a

while, clear liquid dripped from the bottom. Once the bottle was empty, he tossed the purple-stained loaf aside, and took a sip. The cup was passed around. Fairchance's lips lingered on the rim, the chemical smell making him queasy. Sammy tipped the cup, forcing liquid into his mouth. It tasted evil. Fairchance tried to spit the spirits out, but Sammy clamped his hands over Fairchance's mouth, giggling as he did it. Fairchance kicked against Sammy as the spirits burned the flesh in his mouth, but Sammy held fast. Fairchance held his breath until he had no choice but to swallow and a raw path seared down his throat. Only once he stopped struggling, and Sammy loosened his grip, the others tangling themselves in the blanket as they laughed, did Fairchance realize he wasn't so cold anymore.

After that first time, they'd do it whenever they could. When coins were scarce, they'd stretch the bottle of spirits by dipping a rag and putting it into a plastic bag. Every time Fairchance breathed the fumes, it felt like his body became rubber, then vapor, as light as the all-encompassing fog that crept over Cape Town. In his mind he'd twirl on a stage, his voice reverberating over hills and crags and into the souls of the people, nesting, feeling their hearts beat in his, his breath one with theirs. There was no hunger, no rival gangs chasing them, no police clearing the city for overseas tourists, or cricket and rugby teams on tour now that sanctions were lifted. Fairchance danced on the roof of the church on these nights, then on Table Mountain, then among the stars, singing glory, glory, glory.

Fairchance eyed Johnny over the rim of his champagne glass. If he looked long enough, he could still make out the little boy that had slept under that blanket with him on the street. A certain amount of tolerance accompanied a history like the one they shared, a willingness to look the other way for a few rand that slip through the cracks. They were the closest thing each of them had to family, after all, and there was much you forgave family.

Fairchance drained his glass and got up. “I have a few things to take care of.”

“Sure, sure, Boss.” Johnny was all smiles. “I’ll have the cash ready for you by tomorrow night.”

“Fine. And, Johnny?”

“Boss?”

“Make sure to count it yourself.” Johnny looked at him, a flicker of panic in his dark eyes, but it was gone almost instantly.

“You can trust me, Boss,” Johnny said. “I always have your back.”

Extract from *Such Things Among Us* by Grace Bhuku

I knew the name Adriaan Berg long before the Monday morning that my editor contacted me. I was working for a major American news outlet at the time and was back in the country as an Africa correspondent. Let me explain. Adriaan Berg was the bogeyman of my youth, a name whispered amongst the adults who still remembered the old days of midnight raids and teargas, Casspirs and necklacings, and friends who disappeared without warning. They huddled in their shacks around radios and blurry television screens, devouring every word that would nail Berg's coffin shut. Some neighbors we knew even journeyed to the courts, ready to tell their stories, as if the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were still in operation. But if they had hoped to be heard, to receive an apology, they were inevitably disappointed. Berg refused to admit to his apartheid-era activities and after all these years, little evidence remained to tie him to the atrocities. The state could ultimately only convict him of the murder of Trudie Pienaar and link him to the death of Jakob Mens, rumored to be the only surviving askari (black soldier working for the apartheid regime) of Berg's death squad. Another known member of the squad, Captain Tokkie Mynhardt, had died of a heart attack shortly after being arrested. There were cheers on my street as the judge read out Berg's sentence. A hundred and fifteen years in prison. Some voiced regret that the death penalty had been abolished, while others felt that death would have been too easy for the man. Predictably, there was silence from most white people. I can only speculate that some of them felt shame. The ones who did voice opinions were careful to point out that Adriaan Berg didn't represent them. That they would never have done such things.

As school girl, about to take my matric exams at the time, I only paid half-hearted attention to the trial. I was part of the born-free generation and apartheid felt like it didn't belong to me and my friends. I had won a scholarship to university, and after graduating I left the country to work as an international correspondent. On my return to South Africa, my work focused on the rising incidences of gender and domestic violence, most of my articles a combination of investigative journalism and human interest. I made a name in journalism circles for an award-winning article I had written on the socio-biological aspect of gender violence, a phenomenon that's not restricted to homo sapiens. The article was controversial. I received a lot of mail, some complimentary, some trying to debunk the science I quoted with passages from the Bible, others that went so far as to threaten me with rape and even death for writing the truth. I suppose the irony was lost on them. This is all to say that I was not unused to controversy and had always refused to shy away from it. But when my editor called and asked if I knew the name Adriaan Berg, I inevitably felt an exhausted dread. Why did we have to rehash this again? Give attention to the likes of Berg? It's been twenty-five years since apartheid ended. Wasn't it time to look to the future, to hold our government accountable for their misconduct and waste? To demand that they live up to the promise of our glorious humanistic constitution? Surely there was nothing to gain by doing yet another feature on a man that would most certainly never be let out of prison. If anything, we were doing the country a disservice by giving him attention. My editor's next words were unexpected, to say the least.

"Adriaan Berg is talking," she said, her American accent stumbling over the pronunciation of the name. "He agreed to grant us exclusive access to him. But he wants you to cover the story."

"Me?"

"He's read your work. Thinks you'd handle this correctly."

I protested, I admit. Whereas this was the opportunity of a lifetime for a journalist, the thought of being in contact with a man who killed people to bring the resistance to its knees, to be the one to give voice to his story, well, it felt like a betrayal of every person I knew that had suffered under the apartheid regime, black, colored, Indian, it didn't matter. My editor, to her credit, was not dissuaded. She told me to think about it, let her know by morning. I went home that evening still convinced that she was mistaken.

I had just moved in with my partner. She lived in a beautiful one-bedroom flat in Sea Point. Unpacked boxes were still stacked high in the sitting room, packing materials strewn about from the previous night's attempt at melding our lives. The chaos when I walked in reflected the jumble of feelings that had been churning inside me since the phone call. Relics of my old life in Khayelitsha were lined up on the floor, carried with me all these years overseas and now incorporated into my new life in Sea Point. The metaphor wasn't lost on me. The past will always follow us into the present, like my mother's antique tea pot that she had passed on to me before she died. It was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen, but I could never get rid of it. All these things needed to be ordered and dealt with in the present so that we could make a new, comfortable home for

ourselves. How else would we know who we are? It might seem like a trite analogy, but it was a moment that started me thinking. Perhaps Adriaan Berg telling the truth was a way for all his victims to find a place to put the past, to order it, to move on and inhabit their home in this country at last. I discussed this idea with my partner over a glass of wine that evening. She was older than me and, like all people of color, had known trauma because of men like Berg. Though I knew she'd support me, her insistence still surprised me. "You have to do this," she said. "How could you bear to trust someone less skilled with our country's narrative?"

I made the call to New York that evening and accepted the assignment. I still had my doubts and feared that I wouldn't be able to remain objective, especially once I met the man. I don't know what I was expecting, perhaps a grotesque oaf with horns, if I'm honest. The reality was much more mundane than I could have anticipated. I flew to Johannesburg and stayed with distant relatives in Soweto, making the hour drive to Pretoria every week, sometimes bi-weekly when I got special permission from the warden.

Adriaan Berg was held at Kgosi Mampuru II Prison (formerly the Pretoria Central Prison). He was a tall man, the expectations set by his thin frame antithetical to the surety of his movements as he walked over and shook my hand that first day. The younger man that I had seen in photographs ghosted behind his lined skin and direct gaze. He was in good shape being in his late-sixties, his thick silver hair still speckled in places with a dark pepper. Like all inmates, he wore the orange prison jumpsuit with the word "CORRECTIONS" printed in black circles on the rough fabric. We sat down on

opposite sides of a table in the visitor room. It was astonishingly noisy inside the prison, and we had to shout our introductions. I remembered that I was surprised about the noise level on a previous visit as well. On that occasion the press had been invited into the old gallows located near the C-Max section when plans were announced to turn it into a heritage site. Fifty-two steps lead up to the gallows where as many as seven men at a time were hung during the apartheid years, some of them political prisoners, most of them black. It was the one section of the prison where there had always been absolute silence, the warden had explained in front of flashing cameras. I wondered if Berg ever walked past the steps that led to the gallows, grateful that the death penalty has been abolished in this New South Africa that he once fought against.

I had read up as much as possible on him while I prepared for our first meeting and found out that he was housed in the medical ward, and like the other famous inmate of Kgosi Mampuru II, Oscar Pistorius, had a private cell. Rankling at the fact of this preferential treatment, other inmates being forced to sleep in dangerously overcrowded conditions, disease and assault a daily part of inmates' lives, it was the first question I put to him. At least Pistorius had a disability, but why did Adriaan Berg garner special privileges? Patiently, he explained to me that he had no part in that. It was the warden's decision to keep him separate from the general population.

"You can understand, can't you?" he said with a shy, disarming smile that unnerved me. "They have to keep me separate, because they have to keep me alive."

Alet

Alet didn't believe in praying, but as she watched Mathebe disappear into the viewing room at the Salt River State Mortuary with a Detective who identified himself as Ntongama, she understood why people felt the need for a higher power. In the ride over, Mathebe had slouched against the seat, staring straight ahead, a school picture of Celiwe clutched in his hands. Celiwe, at thirteen, had transformed from the awkward, nerdy, pre-pubescent girl Alet remembered, to a young woman with the promise of extraordinary beauty. Her round face had thinned to display prominent cheek bones and a strong chin. Thick lashes accentuated her deep brown eyes, while braided extensions made her school uniform seem like a costume. Her bearing imitated an adult's knowledge of the world. But Celiwe wasn't an adult. She was a child without an adult's protection in a country that paraded brutality towards its weakest citizens in whatever newspaper you wished to open or newscast you tuned into. And behind that door, her abused body could be on display, while her father identified her to men who had seen so many bodies like hers that Celiwe didn't even register as human anymore. Alet thought about Sibuye again, swallowing back the nausea that rose in her stomach.

It was only a few minutes before Mathebe walked back through the viewing room door again. Alet had chewed a hangnail to a bleeding mess which she quickly covered with the hem of her t-shirt. She couldn't read the expression on Mathebe's face, but she knew from the look in his eyes as he came towards her.

"It's not her," she said. Mathebe shook his head. He didn't seem as relieved as Alet felt. "What happened in there?"

Mathebe made eye contact with Ntongama who was talking to the pathologist in the doorway. A look passed between the two men. “Let us go,” he said. The parking guard ran over as soon as he saw them exiting the security gate, his cupped right hand outstretched, the other clutching his wrist. Alet slipped him a R5 coin before getting in the car.

“What’s going on, Johannes?”

“The body was… mangled.”

“But it’s not Celiwe. That’s all that counts.”

Mathebe seemed to gather courage before he spoke. “It is the body of Lydia Mfeka.”

“Shit.” This wasn’t good news if Lydia and Celiwe had been together. “Are you sure?”

Mathebe closed his eyes. “Yes,” he said quietly. Celiwe was in danger. If she wasn’t dead. The thought was out before Alet could stop herself. If she was thinking it, she knew Mathebe was too.

“Did they tell you anything?”

“They found Lydia’s body on a beach. They think it was a shark attack. The Inspector said people swim in the ocean and never come back. We should be lucky there is a body.” Alet sank back in her seat. If the police were unwilling to investigate, there was little they could do.

“So, what now? The police can’t ignore this.”

“Celiwe is listed as a missing juvenile. They have closed the case on Lydia.”

"And Lydia's *ma*?"

"They have not been able to find her." Mathebe's shoulders jerked. He crumpled forward, his body folding in on itself. Alet didn't know what to do. Mathebe was the strong one, the one always in control. How could she console him when his daughter might be dead? She was about to start the car when she saw the detective on the case come out of the mortuary.

"Wait here," she said to Mathebe. Alet crossed the road and stopped Detective Warrant Officer Ntongama as he exited the gate.

"Miss Berg?" Ntongama extended his hand when she introduced herself. He wasn't a tall man, but impressively built, power radiating from his movements.

"Detective, I'm a friend of Captain Mathebe. Is there anything you can tell me about the Lydia Mfeka case that can help us find Celiwe?"

"There is no case, Ms. Berg. It was death by misadventure. The pathologist's report verified that."

"Shark attack? That's the official version?"

"It is the only version."

"There must be more to it, Detective."

"Is that so?" Ntongama stared at her from underneath heavy lids. "And what makes you think that? Do you have any evidence? Or do you just naturally assume you know better than the police? Like most…" He stopped himself.

Alet bit back a tart reply. Now was not the time to get into an argument. She smiled, checking her tone. "All we want to do is to find Celiwe Mathebe, Detective. I

promise you, I don't care about anything else. And she was last seen with Lydia Mfeka. Now I don't have to tell you what that means if Lydia was murdered."

"No, Ms. Berg. You don't. But as I said, the girl was not murdered. All you have is a runaway teenager and inconclusive evidence. Do you know how many children are reported missing in Cape Town alone? There are also an average forty-five murders in this city every day. Real murders, with a perpetrator we can look for." His lips twisted in a sardonic smile. "Sharks, unfortunately, are not perpetrators."

"Depends on what type of shark you're talking about."

Ntongama sighed, weariness sagging his broad shoulders. "Ms. Berg, do not try to make this more than it is just because it suits your purpose. I understand that you are worried for Captain Mathebe's daughter, but there is no evidence to suggest that she is connected to this. All we know for certain is that the girls were together at some point. Maybe they split up."

"Can I see the report?" Alet realized Ntongama had lost interest in the conversation, his attention suddenly intensely focused on worrying a stain on his sleeve. She tried changing tactics. "Look, Detective, I used to be police. I understand that you have a lot to deal with, but her family is very distressed, as you can understand. Please."

Ntongama met Alet's gaze, a mixture of fatigue and apathy in his dark eyes. "If I knew something, don't you think I would follow up on it? We are running on a skeleton crew these days, Ms. Berg. Most resources are being diverted to patrolling water points and keeping protests under control. Now, we have to deal with those idiots from the DA who want to bring the army into this mess. Even if there was evidence of a crime, this

case would have to get in a very long line." He walked away, disappearing into a nearby parking structure without responding to her protests. When Alet turned around, she noticed the pathologist from earlier watching her from the mortuary entrance. The woman went back into the building as soon as their eyes met. Alet felt her frustration and powerlessness acutely, Mathebe's suffering compounding her own. The old her wouldn't have hesitated to do everything to help him, and she was so sick of this person she had become.

"I don't know what's going on here, Johannes," she said as she got into the car, "but it doesn't make sense to me that Lydia would go to the trouble of running away, get all the way to Cape Town to look for her mom, and then go for a casual swim in shark-infested waters. Do you have any idea how bloody cold that water is? If the police conveniently believe that fairy tale, then I'll tell them another one. We are going to find out what happened to those two girls between getting on that bus and yesterday, you hear me?" Mathebe lifted his head for the first time, a question in his eyes. "We are going to find Celiwe," Alet said, her decision made. "Screw the police."

*

It was too early for there to be meaningful clientele at Freddy's, but Alet thought she'd take a chance. She had dropped Mathebe at home to give him a chance to call Miriam with the news. She also needed some time by herself to think this thing over. She knew she'd have to give Wynand Meyers an answer soon. She also knew that she had to help Mathebe, that she needed to see this through whatever the outcome, or she'd never be able to forgive herself.

"Whiskey, Alet?" Freddy had become chatty since their last encounter.

"Sure, thanks. *Haai,* Sizwe!" Alet waved at the bartender. He raised his hand in a greeting.

"Staying for a while?" Freddy inquired as he poured her drink.

"Maybe," Alet said. "You remember the guy I talked to last night?"

"*Ja.* Comes in here from time to time. Not a great tipper, right Sizwe?" Sizwe shook his head while wiping off the counter.

"You think he lives nearby or something?"

Freddy had a mischievous smile on his face. "You two hit it off?"

Alet scowled. "Not if he bought drinks all night long."

Freddy released a belly laugh. "Smart lady, this, Sizwe."

"Bad tippers, they bad everywhere." Sizwe made a gesture that clearly indicated sex. Freddy cleared his throat. Sizwe abruptly turned back to stocking the fridge.

"*Ja,* well, I have to talk to him, man. Business." Alet had contacted the SA247 offices, but nobody was willing to give her Kleingeld's information. She couldn't wait any longer. "You know where I can find him?"

Freddy stopped mid-shake. "Oh, hold on." He produced a glass bowl from under the counter and rummaged through it. "From the match last Saturday. We had a raffle for a t-shirt and I think he entered. What was his name again?"

"Joe. Something with a K for the last name." Alet feigned ignorance.

"Maybe this one?" Freddy said after lining several tickets up on the counter. He handed it to her. The name J. Kleingeld and a cell number were printed on it, the losing team's name scribbled at the bottom.

"No drinks for him," Alet said as Freddy handed her the ticket.

"Bad tipper," Sizwe repeated, as if it explained all of life's failures.

Alet downed her drink. She had her cell out as soon as she reached the parking lot. He answered on the second ring.

"Kleingeld."

"This is Alet Berg."

"Ms. Berg." Kleingeld's tone became formal. "Can I help you?"

"We need to talk."

"Go ahead."

"In person."

Kleingeld hesitated. "Why would I do that?"

Alet bit back the abuse she wanted to hurl at him. "You didn't seem to mind last night."

"Mmm. I really don't want to have my teeth knocked out in some alley by a couple of your dad's buddies because they didn't like me talking to you."

"Joe!" Alet feigned injury. "If you know anything about me at all, you should know that I prefer my father in jail."

"I don't know anything of the sort."

"I thought you journalists would do anything for a story. Perhaps we can help each other."

Kleingeld hesitated on the other end. "What do you want?"

"Not on the phone. Meet me at Freddy's. Just you and me. Promise," she said when he didn't respond. "It's a public place, and Freddy looks like he can handle a girl, if you're scared."

Kleingeld showed up half an hour later, his eyes darting through the regulars that had slowly trickled in since they spoke. Alet waited at a booth in the back. She signaled Freddy for a round.

"Take your phone out." Alet put hers on the table.

"Why?"

"Because I asked you nicely."

Kleingeld hesitated for a moment, then placed his phone on the table. Alet shook her head as she stopped the recording in progress. Freddy dropped two drinks off, his eyebrow raised suggestively at Alet. She ignored him and put money on the table.

"A lady buying me a drink. Nice change."

"Don't get used to it."

"So why are we here?" Kleingeld leaned back in his seat pretending to be casual, but Alet noticed the tenseness in his movement as he sipped at his rum and coke.

"How did you get the info about my father?"

"He really didn't contact you?" A look of smugness invaded Kleingeld's expression. "I took a chance on that."

"And I should knock your teeth out." Alet felt uneasy. Kleingeld seemed pretty sure of himself. "I think you're lying."

"Ja? Well, we'll just have to see. Look, I'm just doing my job."

"Making up shit?"

Kleingeld shrugged. "My birdie said there was some wheeling and dealing going on between Adriaan Berg and the government. He's been a model prisoner, felt it his duty to right the wrongs from the past."

"Too bloody late for that."

"He's been inviting the family members of his victims to visit him in prison. Asking their forgiveness face-to-face. He's identifying the disappeared, exchanging locations of burial sites for an early release. Maybe once he's out he'll volunteer with the homeless and lead prayer meetings. A changed man."

Alet ignored Kleingeld's facetiousness. The only thing Adriaan Berg was ever sorry about in his life, was that he got caught. The thought of her father back in the world turned her stomach. "How reliable is this source? You seem to be the only one with information about this."

"You know the government has most of the major news outlets in their pockets. You think they want this getting around? Tell their supporters that one of the enemies of the revolution is going to walk free after serving next to no time? That won't fly. There's elections coming up and the people must be reminded of who saved them from the whites. My bet is that they're going to claim all his help as their own good work. And he

keeps quiet as part of the deal. The way things are going these days, they need all the good PR they can get."

"You haven't answered my question. If you're just making shit up for ratings I have to know."

Kleingeld seemed to settle a debate in his mind before speaking. "I'm not giving you a name, okay? Let's just say I know someone intimately involved with your daddy's release."

"It's true then?" The anxiety Alet had felt since reading Kleingeld's report that morning turned sour.

"*Ja*."

"When?"

"I don't know." There was a chink in Kleingeld's cockiness. "All I know is he's not in prison anymore."

"I thought you said your source is involved in this whole business."

Kleingeld looked uncomfortable. "That's why I published the story early. Since I found out about the deal there's been silence. I thought I could shake things up. He's not been officially pardoned, but he's no longer locked up. Nobody knows where Adriaan Berg is. Not even his lawyer."

"*Fok*." Alet tried to get her emotions under control, but her hand shook as she raised her glass to her lips.

"Well," said Kleingeld, "if that's all." He started sidling out of his seat.

"Wait. I need you to do something for me."

"Don't see as I owe you any favors, Alet. It's obvious you know less than I do. So, if there's nothing else?" Kleingeld raised both eyebrows.

"He's my father." Alet thought fast. "I'll give you an exclusive." She knew she had Kleingeld's attention. After her father's trial, an interview with her had been a hot commodity, especially since she refused to talk to the press. Adriaan's release would spark renewed interest and a middling journalist like Kleingeld would have his reputation made if he managed to secure an exclusive.

"In exchange for what?"

"Sit down, will you?" Kleingeld perched at the edge of his chair. "I need information. A young girl is missing, and the police are not doing much."

"Girls go missing all the time in Cape Town. It's not news."

Alet took a deep breath. They had no leads, the trail ended with Lydia. From a quick study of his stories, it was clear Kleingeld had connections in the police and the gangs. It was worth a shot.

"How about murder?" Alet knew she was bluffing, but Kleingeld seemed to take the bait.

"I'm listening."

"I'm looking for Zanele Mfeka. Her daughter's body turned up yesterday."

"I thought you said a girl is missing."

"There was another girl with her."

"What's your interest? Come now, Alet," he said when she hesitated. "Can't help if you don't give me anything to go on."

"This stays out of your smut, understand?"

Kleingeld tilted his head, his eyes mocking. "Maybe."

"Celiwe Mathebe."

"Your old partner's daughter?"

"You mention her or her father's name on your site, just once, and your exclusive is out the window, you hear?"

"This might be a better story."

"Listen, Kleingeld." Alet struggled not to lose her temper. "Prove to me that you're smarter than you look, hey? I'm itching to give you a lesson in respecting people's privacy."

"Threats are not going to get you anywhere, Alet. You should try playing nice."

Alet dropped money on the table for the drinks. "Call when you have something."

Fairchance

Outside the central police station, officers escorted handcuffed men and women to and from the courthouse. “Hey *skattie*, do me a favor hey?” and more obscene comments rained down from the windows of the neighboring jail as inmates tried to get the attention of the people below. Once Fairchance had been the one waiting for a visit behind those walls, terrified as he listened to the experienced birds talk about the horrors of Pollsmoor prison and being forced to become a “wife” to one of the Numbers gang. It had made him understand Sammy’s lies a little better. Amidst the bustle and noise, Fairchance almost didn’t hear his phone ring. He didn’t recognize the number, but there was no mistaking the voice.

“We need to talk. Today.”

“Mr. Patel.”

“Eleven. The usual place.”

Fairchance rankled at the three short tones that indicated that the call had been terminated. His visit to the station would have to wait. Arav Patel and his brother, Sai, had never heard the word no. They owned properties in the city, several businesses, as well as few prominent politicians. Despite recent scandals and revelations, a president that resigned, and a cousin, Jori, wanted by the Hawks, the Patels were still a force to be reckoned with, their reach stretching further than the press’ paltry investigative sensation pieces could imagine. Fairchance wasn’t quite sure how his dealings with the Patels began. Probably someone recommended him for a job. That job well done led to bigger jobs. The Patels let Johnny run Exotix on Fairchance’s recommendation, while he

became entwined with imports and distribution, the euphemism for dealing in guns, drugs, whatever the market demanded. The Patels, however, seemed to be able to weather any storm, Fairchance merely one of the many cogs that kept their enterprise thriving.

As he put the phone back in his pocket, Fairchance noticed the boy in the shade across the street. Jama ducked behind a tree when their eyes met. He'd been aware of Jama's presence all morning. He decided to let it play out a little longer, realizing that the boy had been on his mind as well, those brown eyes an inchoate shape rather than a solid thought. Like Sammy gripping him tight while he brought the spirits to Fairchance's lips, Sammy relaxing his grip but not letting go after Fairchance drank. If there was ever love between them, then it was in that touch that he'd started to feel it. He had no name for the way his body responded to Sammy, or for how he had replayed that moment between violence and softening in his mind. All these years later he still could not fully understand what had happened in that in-between, only that it was a place that he could hide and feel safe. Violence had been the only way that Sammy knew to be comfortable. The in-betweens, the soft, was a realm for weaklings. Girls. It was a taunt that was worse than anything if he flung it your way. When Sammy gave over to the soft in those rare unguarded moments, it was always a surprise. It was Sammy's violence that ultimately changed them. His addiction had grown as the months passed, making him volatile, raging at the collection of bronze and silver coins at the end of the day that could never be enough to pay for his fix. Fairchance remembered the hoarseness in his voice, the way he shouted abuse at them.

"*Ag* come now, Sammy," Mavo always placated. "The cold keeps people away, man. Tomorrow we do better."

"I'm sick of two cents here and ten cents there!" Sweat pearled on Sammy's thick brow as he ranted. "I tell you, I'm done with being treated like a child. No more small change. No more begging. We'll start acting like men. We'll take what we want."

"No man, Sammy. Hey!" Coins went flying as Sammy knocked them out of Mavo's hands.

"You listen to me." Sammy's nostrils flared. His big head thrust forward, eyes locked with Mavo's. Fairchance and Johnny crouched in the church doorway, staying out of the way. Puma was off in his own world, not paying them any attention. He pushed an empty biscuit box around in the dirt, mumbling to himself about big ships and storms, sometimes breaking into song about the Alabama coming over the sea. Fairchance hated these fights. They got out of hand, ended in bad bruises and Sammy disappearing again, leaving them by themselves. He barely slept those nights, terrified that other gangs would come take their things.

"*Ja*?" Mavo didn't back away. "Remember what happened the last time you tried it?"

Sammy seemed unsure of himself for the first time. "We just have to be careful, that's all."

Mavo turned his back on Sammy. "This joker was in jail, see? Got nailed by one of those fat buggers because of his long fingers. *Lekker,* I say. So, the police know him

now. Come looking every time there's trouble with a big dumb looking oke. And when they find him, they find us. I don't want trouble."

"Look here, *Ma*." Sammy pulled something out of his pocket, colored paper, and held it up to Mavo's nose. "Smell it." It had been so long since Fairchance had seen paper money up close that he didn't understand what it was at first.

"Where'd you get that?" Mavo reached for the money, but Sammy snatched it back.

"Old goat, this morning in the square. She was so busy looking at stalls, never even saw me."

"How much?"

"Enough that we can eat all week. Not bread, real food. Bunny chow, KFC."

"With mash?" Fairchance's stomach gurgled. They hadn't had anything decent to eat in days and his imagination was conjuring up all kinds of possibilities.

"Think if we all bring this." Sammy shook the money. "We could get a place to stay. No more cold nights and getting chased."

"We will have beds next to each other, all in a row, and a *Ma* who makes us porridge, like in the stories. And a dog. And chickens that go cockadoo, cockadoodoo, peeeeck, peck-peck-peck." They all looked over at Puma. His eyes were bright, then he lost concentration again and went back to pushing his biscuit box around.

Like in the stories. Fairchance felt a pang. His old life didn't feel real anymore. If his *mama* saw him now, begging and sleeping on the street, she'd be sad. "What do we do?" He said it more to himself than to the others, but Sammy jumped on the chance.

"I'll show you." Mavo shook his head slowly. Sammy slapped him on the shoulder. "It'll be all right, bra. No worries." His honeyed words trickled promise. "From now on we have gravy on our mash."

At first, they'd pick pockets, ending up with some money, but mostly things that were difficult to sell. Sammy had heard of other gangs working together, so they tried it. They'd find a target walking alone, always a white, that was the rule. Fairchance or Johnny would follow closely because they were the smallest and nobody would pay them attention. Fairchance was giddy with the new importance he had. He belonged, and they needed him. The others waited for him to give the signal that the coast was clear, then they would swarm, pretending to beg. "Please, *Mies*, please, *Baas*." They'd push and shove until they found money, then run. The whites were unharmed, lost their money, sure, but they had plenty anyway. They just had to get more from the machines. There were a few run-ins with the police and Puma got nabbed, once, but when the bastards saw he wasn't all there, they just threw him back on the streets with a few bruises and a bloody lip.

They were hanging around the slave museum one day when Sammy suddenly gave the signal. Fairchance and Johnny had been kicking an old tennis ball to each other, while Puma ran to fetch it if one of them missed.

"That one," Sammy said. He nodded his head at a young guy, awkward and skinny, with glasses and bad acne. The guy had been standing on the corner for the past couple of minutes, checking landmarks against a small map, folding and unfolding it between pale fingers. He glanced at his watch with increasing frequency, paced half way

up the block before returning to the corner. Fairchance noticed the tell-tale bulge of pouch under his loose shirt.

"*Ja*?" Mavo rubbed his eyes. He looked exhausted.

"Easy." Sammy looked over Mavo's shoulder. "He's moving. Johnny?"

Johnny sprinted across the street without further invitation, staying close to the guy. Sammy followed, with Fairchance and the others keeping their distance. The hunt was on. Fairchance's heart beat uncontrollably, his limbs jittery as he crossed the street and followed the pack. The young guy kept stopping, then turning down streets, only to backtrack seconds later. It made him hard to follow without being noticed. Once, he made eye contact and Fairchance thought for sure they were done, but brown boys in Cape Town all looked the same to whites. They kept their eye on Johnny until he turned a corner. Johnny retraced his steps, then waited, his body wound tight like a cat getting ready to pounce. They were close now, Fairchance knew from experience. There would be a few tense moments while Johnny made sure the coast was clear. Suddenly Johnny looked straight at Sammy and gave a nod. Sammy pointed at Fairchance and Puma and back at the street in a sweeping motion. They moved in. The small side-street was quiet, mainly flats with a few hawkers who never interfered, and a corner store. The white guy was half-way down the street by the time they surprised him.

"Please, *Baas*." Johnny stepped closer. "I'm hungry." He held cupped hands out to the man.

Fairchance and Puma followed with the same gesture. The guy waved them off, tried to move away, but noticed Sammy and Mavo blocking his path on either side. Fairchance pushed forward, got right under his nose, so Johnny could get in close.

"One rand, *Baas*. Is all. Give me your change." Fairchance pushed against the man. Mavo and Sammy stepped in too. They all started touching him, pushing against him. There was panic in the guy's eyes as he tried to push them off him.

"*Hamba*!" There was a man, his skin so black that his eyes looked like two moons in the night sky.

Fairchance was confused by the hand pulling at his shirt. They weren't supposed to fight back. They never fought back. The black man was tall and thick. His huge hands waved manically at them. Sammy was the first to run. Johnny reached under the white guy's shirt, refusing to be scared off. The black man came right at Fairchance, and he abandoned Johnny. He looked back as he turned the corner and saw the white guy holding Johnny by his shirt while planting a blow on his face. Sammy was the one that turned back. He stormed the white guy, hands above his head. Something flashed in the late afternoon sun. Sammy planted a blow. The white guy screamed and crumpled onto the sidewalk. The black guy backed off, his hands in the air.

Later that night, Sammy retold the story with relish as they sheltered from the rain at the underpass. Fairchance huddled with Puma, the fire smoldering in a drum, the smell of burning plastic raw in their nostrils. There were other boys too, unhappy about sharing with the new arrivals, but they kept their distance.

"That *moffie* went down! You should have seen it. Real sissy boy." Sammy smiled so broad, his gums showed. Johnny nodded in agreement. His eyes were bruised, his nose swollen and crooked.

"We said no knives." Mavo's jaw was tense.

"But after what he did..." The sound of a car drowned out Johnny's voice, the noise amplified by the hollow concrete of the underpass. He looked like he might cry. Sammy casually flipped the small pocket knife in the air, catching it with alternating hands.

Mavo grabbed it out of Sammy's hand. "Knives are trouble."

"Come on, *Ma*. We need this." Sammy's eyes held a challenge. The humiliation of being the first to run, showing fear, even though he had turned back, had agitated his short fuse. "Look at Johnny. It wouldn't have happened if we had the knife out from the beginning." He pointed a finger at Mavo. "You know that."

Mavo crossed his arms. "We have to stop," he said.

"And go back to begging?" Sammy's nostrils flared. "Tell me, how hungry are you right now?"

Mavo looked unsure of himself. They didn't get any money and had to hide from the police and security guards all day. Mavo had had fewer objections over what they did as the money came in. He even slipped a book from the CNA under his shirt one day and read them stories about fairies, golden-haired princesses, and snow-capped mountains where evil queens reigned. Fairchance thought the old stories about Sangomas were better, but he didn't say so.

"Do what you want." Angry tears ran down Johnny's cheeks. "I'm not getting beat up again."

"Why did the black guy help him?" Fairchance tried to ease the tension.

"Foreigners," Sammy snarled. "Don't know their place."

A car slowed down and pulled off the road. All wet and sleek, the half-light from the fire bounced of its metal shine. It idled near the underpass, the headlights flashing twice. The man behind the wheel's face was pale and hollow in the distortion of the wet windshield, and fear suddenly tickled Fairchance's insides. Sammy smiled at Mavo and got up. A boy from the other gang also moved over to the car. Sammy pointed a finger at him and for a moment it looked like there would be a fight, but the other boy backed off. The car window rolled down and Fairchance got a good look at the man. He was more pink than white, the contours of his face disappearing beneath a thick layer of facial hair. Bulging cheeks overwhelmed his small eyes as they drifted over Sammy. Sammy leaned casually on the door, all smiles. Traffic noises masked their conversation. The man shook his head and pointed at the group.

"Puma!" Sammy beckoned, and the boy came running. Sammy patted him on the head.

"Beautiful," Fairchance heard the man in the car say. He dangled a candy bar out the window. Puma reached for it. Fairchance felt his throat pinch closed again.

"What's he doing?" Fairchance turned to Johnny and Mavo. They remained quiet, their eyes fixed on the fire. Sammy led Puma over to the passenger side of the car. When he opened the door, Puma let out a yelp. Fairchance made to get up, but Mavo shook his

head, his eyes carrying a warning. Sammy grabbed Puma by the shoulders, whispered something in his ear and shoved him into the seat, slamming the door. The car took off, gravel rising behind it.

Sammy sauntered back. “We vote,” he said, as if there had been no interruption in the conversation. He looked at each of them in turn, daring them to say something. When nobody did, he sat back down. “Everybody who says we have a knife out from now on, put your hand up.” Sammy raised his right arm. Johnny mimicked him right away.

Mavo kept his arms folded. “And you, Shortie?”

Fairchance met Johnnie’s eyes, finding a threat there. Fairchance knew he wasn’t as fast as Johnny or as strong and big as Sammy. If someone got him, it’d be tickets for sure. He thought about Puma in the car. If he had a knife, he’d be safe, he’d escape.

“We won’t hurt anyone again, right?”

“Not unless we have to.” Sammy and Johnny both shook their heads in an exaggerated motion.

“We only scare them, Mavo. It’s okay then,” Fairchance pleaded.

Mavo held his hands in the air in exasperation. “I’m not doing this.”

“Everybody brings a share.” A smug smile twisted Sammy’s lips. “That’s the rule to stay.” Mavo looked forlorn, his hands curling into fists. Fairchance suddenly felt sorry for agreeing. “So, choose.”

Mavo’s eyes narrowed. “Fine,” he said. “Don’t cry when this all goes wrong, and you end up in the kitty again, hear? All of you!”

It was the early hours before Puma came back. The man left him up the road some to find his own way. He was washed clean, carried a bar of chocolate and a R10 note with him, which he handed over to Sammy without a word. Puma crawled under the blanket with Fairchance. Fairchance tried to hug him to stay warm like they always did, but Puma's body stiffened. He didn't sleep or make a sound, only stared at the deathly sputters of the last smoke twisting out of the fire with dull eyes.

"What did that white goat do with Puma?" Fairchance asked Mavo the next morning.

"It's nothing," Mavo said. "He'll be okay. We do it sometimes, when things are bad."

Johnny gave Fairchance a knowing look.

They hung around the beach all the next day, watching boats and looking out for tourists. It was already getting dark when they saw the couple, twined around each other, drunk, Fairchance could tell. Ghostly lines from the full moon undulated on the waves, the random pattern reminding him of the static on the televisions in the shop windows. The woman, dressed in a short tight dress, ran her hands over the man's back. He rested his lips on her neck, his attention consumed by working the strap of her dress over her shoulder. Neither of them noticed how the fog rolled off the peninsula behind them, a cauldron overflowing, its tentacles enveloping the land. They also didn't notice the boys.

Love, a foreign god. Fairchance couldn't take his eyes off them. He imagined what it would be like, that embrace. Fairchance fingered the ticket in his pocket as he watched them. Less than a week until the MaBrrr concert. The others didn't know. He'd

skimmed money off what he made for months, a little at a time, so that they wouldn't suspect, but once everything was be different, they'd forgive him. He'd be famous, and they would all live in a house together and never be hungry.

The couple's movements gained urgency. The man lifted the woman's dress in a frenzy, forcing her panties over her rounded buttocks. Fairchance's body tensed, his heart racing. He looked back at the large rocks a short distance up the beach where Sammy and the others waited for his signal. The man pushed the woman down on the sand. He turned her on her stomach and straddled her. Fairchance's temple started to throb. He was being pushed against the woman with the almond eyes, someone was spreading him open. Grief spilled from a place he had denied for too long in a muffled sob and turned to anger. The woman saw him first and screamed. The man got off her, his pink thing naked and threatening. He pulled up his pants and stormed over to Fairchance. The punch sent Fairchance back on the sand, salty grit in his mouth, his cheek throbbing. Sand plumed as the man kicked him. "Rubbish," he yelled. "Like what you see, hey?" Fairchance didn't try to block the blows. He wanted the hurt, wanted it to take over.

The woman yelled, but Sammy delivered a sudden punch to her stomach and she buckled. Only when Sammy withdrew his hand did Fairchance see the blade, covered in something dark.

"Stop," Mavo yelled, but Sammy rammed the knife into the man's back before he could turn around. He repeated the blow with force until the man crumpled forward. His blood, hot and alive, spilled over Fairchance. A harsh, shrill, sound suddenly ripped through Fairchance. He couldn't stop, even after Sammy shoved the man off him.

"Shut up." Sammy stood there, breathing hard, triumph glowing in his face. "He held the knife to Fairchance's left eye, pressing the bloody blade into the thin skin of the socket. Fairchance tried to contain this thing that consumed him, his body shaking violently, but he couldn't.

"You killed them." Mavo's eyes ran over the scene. Behind him Johnny stood in silence, his eyes black with shock. Puma had disappeared into the underbrush.

"*Ja*, so?" Sammy let go of Fairchance. "We protect our family."

"But she's coloured, like us."

"Skin doesn't matter anymore, Mavo boy. Or didn't you notice? Blacks are in charge now, but they're riding the gravy train without us." Sammy spat at the man's body. "And this lot had it easy for too long." He started going through the man's pockets and pulled out a wallet and car keys. "They won't play fair and they'll never share. So, fine." Sammy went through the wallet and pulled out a wad of notes. He tucked it inside his shorts. "We'll just have to take it."

Fairchance was on his knees, not sure if his legs could hold him. He looked at the two bodies on the beach then let his gaze drift to the great big houses scaling the mountainside. Sammy was right. This was his country too, his home. After all that they had suffered, they were owed some of it. He struggled to stand up, then waded into the icy water to wash the blood off him.

*

Sai Patel was a short stout man with a full head of thick black hair and chubby, child-like cheeks. Both the Patel brothers seemed cut from the same pattern, though Sai

sported a moustache where Arav had a permanent five o'clock shadow that made his face seem dirty. They kept offices in a high-rise nearby, but preferred meeting in one of the private suites of the Regal, one of their hotels off St. George's Mall. It suited Fairchance just fine. The Regal had excellent coffee, roasted locally, an even better selection of Scotch, and the lunch was first class. Sai met him at the door with a hearty handshake as Fairchance handed over a briefcase with their share of the take from the heist. Arav barely acknowledged his presence. There was a man with them whom Sai introduced as a Mr. Bellinger. Bellinger spoke in a British accent and nibbled at a bowl of bar nuts like a mouse.

"Mr. Bellinger used to work for one of the finest PR firms in London," Sai said by way of introduction. "Since their unfortunate demise, he's agreed to consult for us on a few matters."

Fairchance was aware of the firm. Misdirection and spin had been its greatest talent. And here was Mr. Bellinger, the dark lord of PR, working exclusively for the Patels. He nodded at Bellinger who looked at him with disinterest.

"Mr. Davids here is a useful man to know, Mr. Bellinger. The type of man you want in your team. Supply and demand mostly, as I mentioned before." Sai took a seat at the head of the table. "Along with certain talents that will serve our cause."

"Is that so?" Bellinger spoke in a bored drawl and dipped his hand into the nuts again.

Sai turned to Fairchance with a smile that was missing from his eyes. "You did well, Davids. A heist as a cover. Inspired idea to get rid of Soga."

"I'm sorry?" Fairchance felt uneasy. Onele Soga was the MP that had died in the heist. Things suddenly started making sense. Soga opposed the Patel bid for three new desalination plant contracts. Patel Construction combined with Fairchance's supply line for materials, and flair for providing cheap labor, would mean big money for all of them. But Soga didn't fall for the bribes and threats, determined to prove himself incorruptible.

"Who would suspect, right?" Sai was still smiling. "He wasn't the only one hit, which was brilliant, by the way. Only…"

"There have been questions." Bellinger's tone accused. "Journalists." He said the word as if he was biting into a lemon.

"We've kept the dogs from sniffing around," Sai said. "Luckily they can't prove anything. Yet."

"And?" Fairchance looked around the room, finding only stoic expressions.

"They cannot trace this back to us," Arav Patel chimed in unexpectedly, his words a sly confidence that Fairchance didn't understand. He was still reeling from the fact that Johnny went behind his back to do a hit for the Patels, but he couldn't let them suspect that he wasn't in charge.

"Perhaps he should sign something?" Bellinger fiddled with an envelope in front of him.

Fairchance almost burst out laughing. "Mr. Bellinger, I don't know what you think you'd be accomplishing. Here you either trust the people you do business with, or you don't do business with them."

“I like to make sure that the people I deal with don’t surprise me, Mr. Davids.” Bellinger sighed. “We have the security footage showing three men hijack the armored truck.” He slid a photograph across the table. It showed Johnny next to the blue *bakkie* used for the heist, talking to some men. “Those three men.”

“What is this?”

“We have audio too. Enough so your friend spends a long time in Pollsmoor. And we can make sure that the police find a connection to you as well.” Bellinger folded his hands in his lap. “After the debacle with my old firm, I need to know that you stand to lose just as much as the Patels, should you ever develop a conscience.”

“We need you to do a job.” Sai’s expression was its own ultimatum. “This is delicate, could ruin us if it came out, and Mr. Bellinger advised us to take precautionary steps.”

Fairchance shook his head, silently cursing Johnny. “Can you at least tell me what the job is?”

“In due course, Mr. Davids, or is it Tshomane?” Bellinger was prepared, that much was sure. Fairchance made a mental not to underestimate him in future.

“I am who I need to be, Mr. Bellinger,” Fairchance smiled, projecting a cool confidence he did not feel. “I have never given Mr. Patel or his brother occasion to doubt my loyalty, so all of this is unnecessary.”

Bellinger smiled back. “Once you do what we ask we’ll give you all the evidence incriminating your friend.”

"We're still friends, Davids," Sai said. "Nothing's changed. You do understand, don't you?"

Fairchance understood only too well. The Patels were thorough. They knew they had him in a corner. Do what they say, or Johnny goes down. He thought about Puma and Mavo. These people knew how to make problems go away for good and he was sure that they had more experienced contract killers than Johnny on the payroll. He had to make sure he didn't become one of those problems.

*

A discolored rag ran streaks in the soapy water on Fairchance's car. His mood from the meeting with the Patels compounded into an irritable rage when he saw the car washer cleaning his windscreen.

"Hey!" He advanced on the boy, the pressure inside ready to boil over. He grabbed the scruff of the boy's neck. "Who told you, you can –" As he pulled the boy away from the car he was met with those big eyes again. Jama.

"I'm sorry, Chief, sorry." Jama trembled under his grip, both hands raised to eye level to protect himself. Fairchance felt a stirring of recognition, a memory of that fear. He let the boy go.

"What you think you're doing, hey? You can't just go around washing cars if people don't tell you it's okay. The police are out looking for water wasters. You want to end up in jail?" Fairchance's anger and irritation subsided. "Here," he said and pulled a R50 note from his wallet. "You stop that now." Jama didn't take the money. His hands

hung limp at his sides, his thin frame drowned by the oversized t-shirt he wore. “Go on.” Fairchance took another R50 out and shook the money at the boy.

Jama looked him in the eye again, his scar making him seem pitiful rather than tough. “What good is it, Chief?” he said in a low voice. “It will last today, tomorrow. Then I’m here again.”

“I don’t know what you want then.” Fairchance threw his arms in the air. He pushed the lock on his car keys and two short beeps followed as he walked around to the driver seat.

“I want work,” Jama said before Fairchance could open the door.

“Everybody in Cape Town wants work, Boy.”

“I do whatever you want, okay? Whatever you want. It’s okay.” Jama hesitated before continuing. “I see you like me.” He locked eyes with Fairchance again, the implication clear. Nobody Fairchance knew would dare imply what the boy just did.

“I don’t do that. Sis, man.” Fairchance’s lips curled in a practiced snarl. The boy just shrugged.

“I do what you want. I don’t tell anybody.”

“You get one thing straight. I’m not a sissy.” He opened to door and got into the car just to get away from Jama. The boy grabbed the door before he could shut it.

“I work hard for you. Any job, it don’t matter.”

Puma’s old blanket suddenly crowded Fairchance’s thoughts, the rank smell of it, the feeling of pilled nylon and exposed wadding against his skin. Time had not

diminished that cold that bit down to the bone, that longing for more. “What can you do?” he asked Jama.

“I wash your car. I learn. You show me, I learn.”

“How old are you?

“Sixteen, Chief.”

“Get in,” Fairchance said before he could start thinking about the implications of taking the boy on. Even as Jama got in the back seat, Fairchance wanted to tell him that he had changed his mind. He turned around and saw that Jama had taken off his shoes, holding them in his lap so as not to ruin the clean floormats. The soles were worn smooth, the discolored canvas run through in patches. Fairchance’s will bended. If someone had been willing to help him when he lived on the street, would he be someone else? Would Sammy still be – He cut the thought short. “You call me Mr. Davids, hear?” he said to the boy. “And if I catch you stealing you’ll wish you never got in this car.”

Jama’s brow furrowed and a serious look crept into his face. “I’ll do good, Mr. Davids. You see. You don’t have to worry about Jama.”

*

Blood dripped off his outstretched arms like gentle rain off a tree. He searched for a wound but found none. The droplets of blood joined the ocean, coloring it black. Puma, Mavo, and Johnny waited on the beach, their faces blocked out by the glare of the noonday sun. Waves churned around him, growing more intense, until the water started to part at his feet. The sea bed turned to desert, dead creatures paving a path before him. Everything was dying around him as the blood drained from his body, the cold seeping

into his veins as his blood pooled at his feet. A creature sprang up from the blood and sand, his double without a face. He tried to touch it, but it turned away and walked towards the small group on the beach. “It’s not me,” he shouted. “Run away, save yourselves.” The words turned brittle in his throat, his lungs filling with sand. There was a sudden click, then darkness. Fairchance crossed into consciousness, the dark shapes in the unfamiliar room slowly becoming familiar as the seconds ticked by. He always struggled to recognize his surrounding when he first woke up, the expectations of the past still out of sync with the present, no matter how much distance he put between himself and the streets. He glanced at his alarm clock. Two am. Click. Not a part of his dream this time.

With a practiced motion he rolled on his side and found the knife that was taped behind the nightstand, pulling it free from its sheath. If he could get close enough to the intruder he could surprise him, even if he had a gun. He got out of bed, the tile cold under his bare feet as he crept towards the bedroom door. His waited a moment for his eyes to fully adjust to the dark, then opened his bedroom door as slowly as he could to avoid making noise. The house was dark and still. He trailed the fingers of his left hand along the rough stucco wall to guide him towards the kitchen. Steeling himself for whatever the light may reveal, he flipped the switch. A streak of striped fur bound across the kitchen floor and disappeared through the burglar bars of the open kitchen window. Fairchance leaned against the wall, trying to steady his heartbeat.

“Who is Sammy, Mr. Davids?”

Fairchance swung around. The boy jumped back, frightened eyes trained on the knife in Fairchance's hands.

"What are you sneaking around like a rubbish for, huh?" Fairchance placed the knife down on the counter, his limbs weak from the sudden rush. "You can be glad I didn't cut you."

"You seriously spooked, Mr. Davids. It's only the *baas* next door's cat. I saw the little ones play with it."

"Never call anyone *baas,* you hear? No white is your *baas*." The vehemence of his own words surprised Fairchance. "It's Sir, or Madam, or you call him Mister Barry. Understand?"

"Sorry, Mr. Davids." Jama hung his head. "Sorry." The word was little more than a faint murmur. Fairchance realized the boy was trying to hide the fact that he was crying. So strange, Jama was on the cusp of manhood, a tough street boy when he first called him over, but now he was away from the streets he was just a boy who didn't have a chance to grow up.

"What do you know about Sammy?" Fairchance's suspicions got the better of him. If this was all an act, if Jama was sent by Johnny or the Patels to spy on him, make him vulnerable, then he was not going to fall for it. Jama wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He kept staring at the ground. "Did you hear me, boy?"

"You said it, Mr. Davids. When you were sleeping."

"Said what?"

"Just Sammy. That's all."

"How did you…" His anger came quickly. "You were in my room?"

The boy cowered, his hands lifted eye-level. "I never slept alone in a bed before, Mr. Davids. I didn't do nothing bad. Swear. I was just in the corner." The boy was scared. Somehow, Fairchance hadn't noticed. It was a strange feeling. He had always just looked out for himself and his people, they were the only ones he could trust. Thinking about what Jama might be going through made him feel strange, as if he was betraying the others. He should have noticed the boy in the room. A mistake like that could cost him.

"Go to your room! You've got to learn. Men aren't scared of the dark. Are you a girl?"

"Sorry, Mr. Davids." Jama's head hung as he spoke and Fairchance felt it tear at him.

"I'm hungry." Fairchance walked over to the fridge. "There's peanut butter and syrup. I'll make us sandwiches. Just to show you how I like it, hear? Pay attention so you can make it for me when I ask."

Jama nodded. He cautiously came closer as Fairchance showed him where he kept the golden syrup and buns. Fairchance got the peanut butter out of the fridge and put the bottle in the microwave for a few seconds.

"It must be a little warm, then it spreads better," he said. "And no butter. It is better that way. Just peanut butter and lots of syrup." He opened the syrup tin and dunked a spoon into the thick amber liquid. A thin thread of syrup traced the path to the bun. He had always loved how the syrup glob fell off the spoon, becoming a thinning line which,

he used to trace the letters of his initials on the sandwich. When he was little his mom could not afford peanut butter or syrup, even bread was a luxury when things were tough. His eyes met Jama, the boy's brow knotted in concentration. "You want to try? Make your own?" The boy nodded, following Fairchance's demonstration. "You don't have to make yours like mine," he said when the boy didn't put butter on the bread.

"I do it like you, Mr. Davids. It's good." Jama took a bite of the finished product, smiling at Fairchance, his face suddenly opening up with an innocence that Fairchance had forgotten.

"You're not sixteen, are you, Jama?"

"No, Mr. Davids." Jama looked down again. "I'm fourteen. Please don't send me back."

"Why did you lie?"

"Everybody says you have to be sixteen to get a job. I want a job. I want to make money. Nobody can check my papers, because I don't have any, so it's okay. You won't get in trouble."

"It doesn't matter to me, but don't lie to me again. You hear? I don't trust liars to work for me."

"I won't Mr. Davids. Promise." Jama took the last bite of his sandwich. He had just about inhaled it. Fairchance pushed his half-eaten sandwich over for Jama to finish. He found Jama asleep on the rug next to his bed when he woke up the next morning. The boy's thin body curled into a ball so that it wouldn't touch the cold tile. He thought about waking the boy and sending him back to his own bed, but instead pulled the duvet off his

bed and covered Jama. He took extra care to be quiet as he got dressed, dreading the creak of his closet door as he opened it. What was he doing? Tiptoeing around a stranger in his own house? Fairchance shook his head. He was getting soft, no wonder the Patels knew exactly how to get him. It made him think of Johnny. Fairchance became agitated. Before he could refuse a job, walk away any time he liked. Now the Patels had him dancing like a puppet. He had to reign Johnny in before he got it in his head to do more damage.

He checked if Jama was still asleep and wrote out a list of chores for the boy. As he left the house, he couldn't help dreading what he'd find on his return.

Alet

"I told you already. Nobody here. I do nothing wrong." The woman was in her fifties, stylishly dressed in a mustard yellow skirt and patterned blouse. Her hair had been carefully bleached and set into a fountain of corkscrew curls that framed her plump round face. She crossed her arms, barring the doorway to a small house. It was built, like others in the iLitha Park neighborhood of Khayelitsha, from concrete blocks with a tin roof and a small yard. Above the doorway, ZUZU B&B PLACE was painted in fat pink letters. Alet wondered who would need a B&B in Khayelitsha.

"*Ja*, I'm not saying anything about you, *Mama*, but she gave the address next door to her family, see? You're sure you've never heard of Zanele Mfeka?"

"The people at that place don't stay long. They rent rooms by the week. The roof leaks. The wind goes right through the walls." The woman kept shaking her head. "It is not a good establishment like this." Over her shoulder, Alet could see a neat living room with blue leather couches and a television. The smell of roasting meat wafted through the air. "You go now," the woman said. She gave a step forward, physically herding Alet and Mathebe through the front gate. Mathebe gave Alet a look of dismay she understood. Her presence put them at a disadvantage, the residents of Khayelitsha wary of a white woman knocking on their doors asking questions.

"I really need to use the bathroom," Alet said. "Do you mind? I'll be quick-quick."

The woman eyed her for a moment before stepping aside. "Down the passage. And no *kaka* to flush, hear? I don't want fines."

"Thank you." Alet walked through the living room and past a small kitchen with an adjacent dining room. The dining room table was covered in potholders and plates, everything in preparation for a huge meal. In the kitchen an old woman in a headscarf smiled at Alet and gestured for her to keep going. She passed three small rooms, each with a single bed covered by traditional blankets. Besides that, the house had a suburban feel, with modern furniture and other creature comforts. She inspected some of the photographs that hung in the hallway. The proprietress, in fancy traditional dress, was posed with different people outside the B&B. There were also several pictures of a young man at different ages of development. He had a wide, open face, small teasing eyes, and a faint scar that bifurcated his left eyebrow. The latest photo was a formal portrait in which he wore a yellow golf shirt with the words Zuzu Tours embroidered on the chest. Alet heard a commotion outside. She turned to find the double of the final portrait stepping through the front door. He looked taken aback for a moment at finding her there but turned on a smile and walked towards her with an extended hand.

"*Molo*! I'm Dumisa. My friends call me Dumi, and now," he held up both hands, "you are a friend."

Alet shook his hand. He switched the grip on her, placing his fingers over her thumb. When she fumbled, he stood back in mock exasperation.

"My mother hasn't shown you how we greet each other here in Khaya?"

"No, I'm –"

"Let me show you then. He clasped his left hand to his wrist again and took her hand. "First, we shake like this, to honor our ancestors below." Dumi switched the grip.

"Then we go like this to greet God, see fingers facing up there. And then," he returned the grip to the normal handshake position, "we greet the ancestors again to make sure they don't feel neglected. Let's try again."

"That's okay. I got it. I'm just here to use the bathroom."

Dumi looked taken aback. "You're not staying at the B&B?"

"No, I'm with…" Alet gestured towards Mathebe who was scooching aside for a group of eight pale white people who poured out of a minibus outside. They shuffled into the house, all of them looking somewhat shell-shocked, despite the polite smiles on their faces. Dumi turned on a bright smile when the group entered, along with an even brighter persona.

"*Siya namkela nonke*! That means welcome. You are here in my mother's house," he boomed over their heads, "Zuzu's Bed and Breakfast where we will have a traditional township lunch. You can also stay overnight here in Khayelitsha, when you come back for the full township experience. This is my *mama*." The stylishly dressed owner of the house had suddenly appeared next to Dumi and he fitted her snugly under his arm. "And this is my grannie, *mamakhulu*." He pointed to the elderly woman fussing in the kitchen. "You say it."

"*Mamakhulu,*" the wavering voices came back from the group.

"Excellent," Dumi smiled. "Please, all, come take a seat."

The tour group crowded into the tiny dining room while *Mama* Zuzu went through the menu in limited English, lifting the lids off pots and dishes, to explain the

pork, chicken, samp, sweet potato and gravy. It was not much different than the Sunday lunches Alet's grandmother used to prepare when she was a child.

"Lunch will be R150 and is not included in the tour," Dumi said. "*Ukonwabele ukutya kwakho*. That means have a good meal."

"*Enkosi kakulu*," a very pale woman with bushy hair uttered, struggling with the phrase she had probably only learned that morning. The others repeated the phrase sheepishly. They meekly filled plates and shuffled towards their seats while *Mama* Zuzu collected cash. Alet caught a Dutch accent from a family of four, a few words exchanged in French amongst a couple as she inched past them to make her escape, but Dumi stopped her before she could reach the front door.

"Why are you here?" He was still smiling, but Alet was aware of a subtle hostility in his tone.

"We are looking for someone," Alet said, feeling relieved when Mathebe appeared in the doorway. Dumi glanced over his shoulder, then turned to eye Mathebe, giving a slight nod in greeting.

"Did you find the person you seek?"

"No," Alet said, even though the question had been addressed to Mathebe. "Perhaps you know her? Lydia Mfeka? She used to rent a room next door." Something flickered in Dumi's eyes, but he didn't say anything. "She's not in trouble. We just need to ask her a few things."

"You're police?"

"No," Alet said, before Mathebe could be honest. There was a definite distrust of police and the reaction everywhere in the township was pretty much the same. Nobody knew anything.

"Look, we're just looking for my friend's daughter. She's missing, and Lydia might know where we can find her."

"You must stay for lunch." Dumi's smiling demeanor was that of a snake charmer.

"I'm not paying R150 for lunch. I'm not a bloody tourist."

"Alet." Mathebe's voice was stern. At least he didn't call her Constable Berg. He turned to Dumi. "We are honored to be in your house."

"It is an interesting story," Dumi boomed for the tourists' benefit. "My mother worked very hard as a domestic worker in the old apartheid until she could put money down for a house here. But it was only this one front room, the back was not there. No kitchen and bathrooms." He pointed to the clean plates and waited for Alet to hand over money for two meals before continuing. "When I started Zuzu tours, when our people were free, it was to honor my mother and her hard work. And all I wanted to do was to give back, because I was blessed as her son." Here Dumi placed his hand on his chest, his eyes closed as if in prayer. "After a few years I could pay all the money my mother still owed on this house, and we built more rooms. Now we have this place here, to share our way of life with people from all over the world."

Alet dished a plate, then shoved it in Mathebe's hands. "I'm not paying a hundred-and-fifty Rand, so you can starve," she said under her breath as Dumi droned on

about his accomplishments. Mathebe nodded but sat there as if the fork in his hand was too heavy to lift. Alet piled food on her plate, dousing everything in gravy. It was the first home-cooked meal she'd had in a while and she was getting her money's worth.

After lunch, much of it spent with cameras going off at awkward moments, Dumi peddled his wares, CDs of local gospel choirs, beaded jewelry, and a book he'd written and self-published about township life. Once the tour group finished all transactions and posed with Dumi and his mother in front of the house for pictures, they piled back into the tour van to be driven back to their hotels by an associate of Dumi. Dumi waived as the van departed, a big smile on his face. He turned to Alet and Mathebe.

"My brother, my sister, how can Dumi be of assistance to you?"

"Lydia Mfeka," Alet said. "Do you know her?"

Dumi's smile didn't falter. "I believe I am familiar with that name. But the lady is no longer here."

"Do you know where she is?" Alet was getting impatient with Dumi's smile and reluctance to just tell them what they needed to know.

"Mr. Dumi," Mathebe said. "I am Captain Johannes Mathebe. I am police, but not here in Cape Town." He sighed, a decision tensing his expression. "I am a desperate man, trying to find my child who is missing. I fear we do not have much time."

"She's in Khaya?"

"Perhaps. That is why we are looking for Ms. Mfeka."

Dumi adopted a comic stance of considering the situation, his hand draped over his chin like a fleshy beard, his eyes narrowed in contemplation. "Private tours are

R1000," he said after a moment. "And you cannot tell anyone here you are police." Alet opened her mouth, but Mathebe spoke before she could say anything.

"That is acceptable. Thank you, Mr. Dumi."

"Khayelitsha means New Home in Xhosa," Dumi said as he started the engine of an old red VW beetle. Alet squeezed into the back seat behind Mathebe. "Before the drought it was the fastest-growing informal settlement in South Africa with a population of close to two and a half million people."

"You don't have to give us the tour. We only need to—"

Dumi held a hand up catching Alet's eye in the rear-view mirror. "I'm trying to explain that this is not Sea Point. No neat addresses. No quick answers to where so-and-so lives. Informal. That means shacks. People come and go like," he searched for the right saying, "like Marie biscuits in an orphanage." He chuckled at his own joke.

There was surprisingly little traffic in the township and people often walked in the middle of the road, slow to make way for the Beetle. The shocks on the car were somewhat worse for wear and Alet bounced violently as they drove over uneven surfaces. A taxi van pulled into the road in front of them without warning. Dumi stepped hard on the brakes, shouting obscenities at the driver.

"Dammit, Dumi."

"Hey. Not my fault, Miss Alet, you then saw."

"It's just Alet." Dumi nodded, an understanding forming between them.

"Alet, my sister." He suddenly made a sharp turn, barely missing a lone goat chewing the last remaining bits of green on the dusty street.

"Perhaps you should wear your belt, Constable," Mathebe said calmly as she let out another curse.

"Then how do you know where Zanele is hey, Dumi?" Alet struggled to clip the belt in. "I mean if it's like you said and people move around."

"That is why we are here." Dumi pulled up next to a small building with KEITH's CASH & CARRY across the doorway in bold letters along with a red Coke logo. Like all the spaza shops in the township this had more to do with signaling a place of business than a store where cold drinks were sold. By the looks of the barred cashier's window and the corner of a pool table visible through the doorway, this was a beer hall. A couple of young men sauntered into the building stealing sideways glances at Alet and saying something in Xhosa. Alet caught the word *umlungu*, obviously referring to her. She thought it best not to ask Mathebe for a translation of the rest. She didn't want him to be embarrassed.

"Wait here." Dumi disappeared into the shop. Alet could see him leaning against the cashier's window chatting to a hefty man behind the bars. He walked away with a couple of quarts of beer and disappeared out of view.

"Not in any hurry, is he?"

"These things take time. We will wait," Mathebe said resigned. Even with his back to her she could tell that he was exhausted. She watched him in the mirror as he struggled to keep his eyes open. She had heard him pacing in her room, had even gotten up off the couch in her still inebriated state, wishing she could console him, but she

realized she didn't know what to say, so she didn't knock. Dumi returned to the car almost an hour later. Africa time, Alet thought, then chided herself.

"The sister you are looking for, she paid for a room at the house next to my mother as you said." Dumi sank into the driver's seat. "But she did not get along with the lady of the house. Everybody knows that woman is a witch, that she put a spell on her husband, so he doesn't have other girlfriends."

"And Ms. Mfeka?" Mathebe's voice cracked, his irritation clear. Mathebe, a stern believer in logic and procedure, had little patience for the talk about witchcraft and superstition that many native people still believed in. Somehow, they were able to hold the knowledge and rationality that modernity brought separate from these ancient traditional beliefs without questioning their validity. Then again, didn't all religions do that? Alet remembered the ministers of her youth, raised above the congregations in pulpits, declaring themselves the mouthpieces of God, stating fantastical things as absolute fact, while University-educated people nodded in placid agreement.

"Sister Zanele needed a place to stay. She did not have much money, so it was not so easy. She asked some of the brothers here at Keith's."

"Did they help her or not?"

"*Eish*, sister, you do not give a man a chance. Some of my brothers they say that they sent the sister to ask at a certain *mama*'s shack in C Section."

"When was this?"

"It has been a long time."

"What does that mean?"

Dumi shrugged. “My brother thinks maybe more than a week, he can’t say.” Alet caught Mathebe’s eye. If that was true, then the girls may have found her.

“Mister Dumi,” Mathebe turned to Dumi, his tone calm, though Alet could tell that he could barely contain his agitation. “Do you know where this *mama* in C Section lives?”

“My brother, do not worry, we will find her.” Dumi patted Mathebe on the back before unceremoniously backing up and continuing the pattern of stopping short and swerving around cars and pedestrians. Khayelitsha passed by Alet’s window like a tape on fast forward, the muted colors of the desolate Cape Flats landscape interrupted by shipping containers housing hair salons and multiple families, bright pink, green, and red spaza shops, and small government-constructed houses packed tightly together in monotone blocks. The concrete houses became sparse, replaced by corrugated metal plates. Satellite dishes perched precariously on roofs and electric extension cords ran through windows. Boys played a game of soccer in the streets, their legs pale with dust. Dumi parked the Beetle next to a haphazard building that was painted white and blue, a signal to the community that it was a church, he explained. Alet and Mathebe got out and followed him down an alley that ran between the church and shacks. The smell of wood fires hung thick in the air. Alet’s stomach turned when she saw dead eyes stare up at her from a table of severed sheep heads. The heads looked like they were smiling, an expression frozen on their faces as the knife that ended their lives was pulled across their throats.

"The heads will be cleaned in a fire, the wool burned off, and then they will be cooked and sold for lunch or dinner." Dumi was obviously unable to turn off the role of tour-master.

A bit further down the alley women congregated in front of a sparse one-room building. Some of them were stirring the contents of big drums with a long wooden stick while others stood in a long line for water at the single water tap. The mayor had declared that the water would not be turned off to informal settlements on Day Zero. Not that it made a difference. People in the townships had been lining up for water their whole lives anyway, so this wasn't new for them. The water crisis had at last made things equal in the city, but instead of the poor being raised up, it had brought the wealthy down.

"In here," Dumi said, crouching as he entered a small shack. It was stuffy inside the low windowless room. Three of the walls were lined with low benches on which a few middle-aged men sat. Alet and Mathebe sat down next to Dumi. The shebeen queen came over and there was an exchange between her and Dumi in Xhosa. Dumi handed over money and the woman lifted a metal bucket from a small table in the corner and handed it to him. He took a careful sip from the bucket and passed it on to Mathebe who, to Alet's surprise took a sip. Mathebe didn't drink alcohol, had made that quite clear early on in their relationship that he disapproved of her drinking. Their eyes met as he handed the bucket to her. Alet thought about refusing. Nothing was made under sanitary conditions as far as she could tell, the communal bucket being passed between friend and stranger alike, the frothy white liquid brewed in the open air in plastic drums, it all seemed like a recipe for dysentery.

"It is all right," Mathebe whispered. Only then did Alet notice that the eyes of everyone else in the room were on her, the *umlungu*, the white person, and she knew that if she refused she might very well go from *umlungu* to *bhulu*, a far less flattering description. The bucket was filled to the brim and heavy. Alet had to grasp it with both hands as she raised it to her lips. The milky liquid was pleasant-tasting, sour and vaguely wheaty. As she lowered the bucket and passed it to the man next to her she noticed some smiles break out amongst her fellow drinkers.

"Ha! You like *umqombothi*!" Dumi said. "Is good *ne*? You are surprised."

"We're drinking in the middle of the afternoon." Alet felt defensive. She looked at Mathebe. "Never thought I'd see the day." There was a faint smile on Mathebe's face and Alet was grateful for the distraction.

"Do not worry, Alet. *Umqombothi* is home brew. Only three percent alcohol so we can sit here all day long and talk about the world." Alet hoped Dumi wasn't serious.

A little girl waddled into the shebeen from the alley, her feet covered in the muddy runoff from the water tap. The shebeen queen picked her up, fussing over her dirty feet with a rag. The girl's pink sweatpants and t-shirt were faded, her hair styled in a multitude of braids, each one tied with a pink bauble. Dumi spoke to the mother again and produced a lollipop from his jacket for the girl who shyly took it. Mathebe stared at them, his eyes watery. Alet had never wanted children, never even considered it as an option. Her own parents had taught her nothing about being a decent human being. How could she show a child how to be in the world if she had not even figured it out herself?

But Mathebe and Miriam were different. There was love in the home Celiwe grew up in. Why did she run away?

The bucket was making a second round. Alet smiled at her neighbor as he handed her the bucket and he returned a toothless grin, the tells of poverty hanging on his threadbare clothes and haggard expression. Dumi and the shebeen queen were involved in a hushed exchange. Mathebe had joined in, gestures becoming more animated. Alet hated the fact that she didn't understand Xhosa, that she hadn't managed to learn more than a few disparate words and phrases. Mathebe suddenly stood up and raised his voice. The woman topped him with shrill tones that Alet was sure carried beyond the alley. Dumi interjected at points, seemingly trying to calm everyone down, only to be drowned out by the other two voices. Alet had never seen Mathebe angry. Not like this. His anger was always hostage to his control, a creature muted in his core, never on display to the outside world. It was his way of surviving the indignities black people had been subjected to under apartheid. For Mathebe, losing control was tantamount to admitting defeat. Amidst the shouting he suddenly turned and stormed out. Alet put the *umqombothi* down and followed him, relieved to be out of the stuffy shack. She caught up with Mathebe near the table of smileys that were being pitched into the fire by a sturdy woman with a no-nonsense attitude.

"What's going on, Johannes? What did she say?"

Mathebe only stopped after she put her hand on his shoulder. "Zanele Mfeka had stayed with this woman for a short while. She gave her a room in exchange for helping

out in the shebeen." He refused to meet Alet's eyes as he spoke. "She said the girls were here."

"What? When?"

"They came here, but Ms. Mfeka had left by then. That woman chased them off." Mathebe's voice broke. "She said Ms. Mfeka stole money and disappeared and that she could see the girls were good for nothing as well. Out to rob her. This was four days ago."

"And the girls?"

Mathebe shook his head. "They did not come back."

Extract from *Such Things Among Us* by Grace Bhuku

Who knows what goes on in the heart of a man? Who gets to decide whether he speaks the truth when he says he is sorry? These questions occupied my mind as the weeks progressed. I had started a journey with Adriaan Berg, convicted murderer, the man responsible for the death of at least two other people, and as his confessions to the families of victims revealed, many more. I needed no convincing. To me the man I visited in prison every week was inherently bad. If not, how could he possibly have performed these things he so casually talked about as if he was describing what he had for dinner the previous evening? I had heard other apartheid monsters' stories, I even believed some of them when they expressed regret, but Adriaan Berg did not step forward and confess to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee like they did. He had shown no remorse when he was caught, even went so far as to deny his involvement outright. But now he was talking, asking forgiveness, saying that he was deeply ashamed of what he had done. I believed that he was capable of the deeds he confessed to, but I could not bring myself to accept his repentance. By the time I typed up the notes of our last meeting at Kgosi Mampuru II Prison, he had disappeared, and I wasn't so sure what I believed any more.

"You don't trust me Grace," Berg said one day after a particularly harrowing meeting with one of his victims' families. The circles under his eyes were so dark and swollen they looked like bruises and he had told me he was not sleeping. I knew that he passed his time in prison by reading. "Here there is nothing but time," he had said on more than one occasion. In his cell, he had several history books, journalistic accounts of

what happened in those dark years, and, this surprised me at the time, a copy of Wuthering Heights. *He had said that the reading made him understand things better, gave him a new perspective that he did not consider before. Perhaps I should have read some of those books of his back then, because I certainly did not understand.*

The family that had come to visit Berg had traveled all the way from a small rural town near the Transkei border. The elderly couple could not speak English well, so their middle-aged son acted as interpreter. The son had a twin. His brother had left town with a man who said he was recruiting fighters for the struggle. They were going to join Umkhonto we Sizwe and be heroes to the people. Nine boys went with him. The family never heard from their son or the other boys again. Their son was fifteen years old.

It is hard to describe what it was like sitting there, listening to their story, and to hear Berg pick up the thread from the moment the youngster got in the van with the supposed recruiter. It was as if their tale had been woven from the same yarn, though the pattern of the fabric had changed to something unrecognizable. The couple talked about a shy boy that helped his mother carry water every morning, tried his best at school, and wanted to be a farmer one day, but who became frustrated that he was being taught to be nothing better than a garden boy. He had sought a dignified future for himself and the people of his village. Berg talked about orders and eliminating threats, about the two askaris who had been assigned to sniff out potential revolutionaries - future terrorists he called them - that could be trained to act against the state. It was clear that he still thought of those days as a war, and himself as a soldier following a chain of command.

The askaris had drugged the boys with food and drink. They had buried them in a mass grave in the middle of the veld, not an hour outside their home town.

These meetings followed a pattern that became predictable as time went on. The family would speak, describe their loved one, then Berg would tell them what happened to them. There would be a few moments of silence. He'd bow his head and ask their forgiveness, as if he was speaking directly to God. Usually there were tears, sometimes there would be anger from male members of the family, but it would be fleeting. Mostly the families were in desperate need of closure and their relief at knowing was such that these meetings would conclude in a spirit of forgiveness. They always left that visitor's room with an expression of peace on their faces, sometimes outright joy that the burden of the past had been put to rest.

"What do you get out of this, Adriaan?" Berg had insisted that we be on a first-name basis and a part of me still cringed every time I said his name.

"I get salvation," he said in the calm cadence of a man who always needed to dictate the terms of the conversation.

"Am I supposed to believe that?" My emotions were still raw from the experience with the family and I struggled to remain professional. I was on the phone with my partner almost every night, talking and crying about the things I heard that day, but during my time with Berg I refused to let him know how much it all affected me.

"I can't convince you if you won't let me, Grace." Berg got up to go but seemed to change his mind. "I was a child once," he said. "I had dreams, like other children. I need you to remember that when you write about me."

When I was still working in the United States, I once had to interview a man who had been a white supremacist. He told me that while he was in the organization it was like a fire that kept being stoked, that it never let up so that he couldn't stop and think. He told me that it felt like everything else that was once part of him was consumed until all that remained was the ideology, the hate. He was in his forties at the time and had since become a member of an organization that helped rehabilitate other white supremacists. I asked him what had changed. "My girlfriend got pregnant," he told me. "I honestly didn't expect to ever be a father. It was like a reset button. I realized that I don't matter, that my fear didn't matter. I had to make the world better for my child."

It made me think about the meaning of the word ubuntu - I am who I am because of who we all are. The word had been bandied about so often as a feel-good placeholder in the New South Africa that it seemed to have lost any real significance. I had never considered its darker implication before. As Adriaan walked back through the gate of the visitor's room to be escorted to his cell, I couldn't help but wonder who that child he talked about would have become if there had never been such a thing as apartheid.

I was told as I signed in at Kgosi Mampuru II prison for my next scheduled visit to Berg that the prisoner was not available. I was annoyed as this appointment had been confirmed the week before. It had been two weeks since the last time I saw Berg. His lawyer had called me saying that he needed to take some time away from our sessions since they were preparing for a parole hearing. I was not too upset about this. My relationship was under strain because of this assignment, and the long telephone calls

grew more tense as time went on. We needed time together to work things out. I caught the next flight back to Cape Town and spent ten days at home with my love, getting reacquainted. It also gave me time to go over my transcripts of the interviews and write preliminary notes on the angle the article would take. The thought of a book had been on my mind since my first meeting with Berg and as his confidences grew more intimate, I envisioned a work that would give true insight into the machinations of evil. I normally hesitate to use the word evil. It reeks of sensationalism and tawdry headlines. Evil in horror movies is a force that lies beyond our control, and that lack of control is an easy way to wash our hands of it. God versus the Devil. Light against dark with humans as the helpless victims in the middle. But how do we understand evil as man-made? Or worse, an event in which we are complicit? The single philosophy class I took at University to fulfill a requirement didn't prepare me for glimpses into the state of mind of the devil.

My partner alerted me to news of the prison riots the Monday morning after I flew home. Inmates at Kgosi Mampuru II had handed over demands addressing overcrowding, poor food quality, and the violence in which warders dealt with inmates. The inmates refused to return to their cells, and the riot which ensued resulted in multiple injuries for both prisoners and guards. Although Berg was housed separate from the general population, I still called his lawyer to make sure that he was all right. I decided to return to Pretoria earlier than anticipated.

After two days of phone calls and being ignored by Berg's lawyer, I went back to Kgosi Mampuru II and demanded to speak with the warden directly. I've had to deal with Area Commissioner Gwili Cele on several occasions regarding special visitation rights

to Berg. A stout, stern-looking man, he had a direct way of speaking that could have been misconstrued as rude if you had not met him before. He sat me down in his office and after exchanging basic pleasantries, informed me that I could not see Berg because he had been transferred the day before. When I inquired about Berg's location, Cele explained that the transfer had been done on the government's request and that he had no further information. Further questions were met with a shrug. I had a similar response when I contacted Berg's lawyer later that same day. He assured me that Berg was still interested in having the piece published the last time they spoke; as a matter of fact, he had insisted on it. The lawyer had no direct contact with his client however and was working through a government intermediary. It seemed that the recent prison riots had been too close for comfort and certain parties within the government felt that keeping Berg in Kgosi Mampuru II constituted a serious risk to their new truth-telling asset. When I asked whether Berg was being pardoned, I was met with silence. "No comment" sums up the rest of our conversation succinctly. It seemed that my work would be suspended indefinitely unless Berg re-emerged from custody.

Fairchance

"What were you thinking?" Fairchance tried to keep his voice down, but his panic was taking over.

Johnny shrugged, his eyes focused on the ice cube melting in his glass of Scotch. "It was just a job."

"You come to me. Always! What were you doing messing with that shit?"

"I took initiative, Shortie. Somebody has to. That *poes,* Soga, was going to cost us." Johnny smiled. "The vote was up yesterday. Patels got the contract so we win too. You're not complaining too much about that, are you, brother?"

"You lied to my face."

"You wouldn't have agreed."

"We don't kill people!"

"This is news." Johnny looked up his eyes mocking.

Fairchance met his gaze, determined not to let Johnny off the hook. "We're not guns for hire. Killing isn't our business."

"Tell that to Sammy. Ah, I forgot. He's dead, *ne*."

"Don't –" Fairchance's anger was momentarily suspended, Johnny's words like a gut punch. The silence in Johnny's sitting room became sour, interrupted only by clanging noises in the kitchen as the new girl Johnny mentioned made dinner. Fairchance had already forgotten her name. Slender and pretty, she looked the same as all the others. Johnny had a pattern, a habit. A girl at the club would take his fancy. He'd charm her, tell her that she wouldn't want for anything if she came to work for him at home. Most of

these girls would do anything to escape the Flats. Trading up to a fancy neighborhood was an easy decision. Once Johnny grew bored he'd move to the next one, the girl's name never spoken again, as if she simply never existed. Fairchance sometimes envied Johnny's ability to navigate the world without thought or regret. On the streets there had been no place for that sort of thing. The past held pain, and the future was unimaginable, so the only thing you could do was live in the now, spend money when you had it, go without food if you didn't. Fairchance had learned to numb himself over the years, but the ghosts were always there to remind him the moment he let his guard down.

"Since when are you scared, Shortie?" Johnny got up from a recliner that formed a sedate centerpiece in the gaudiness of a room with velvet curtains, red leather furniture, and even a chandelier. A muted flat-screen television flashed images of a Kaiser Chiefs game. Johnny dropped more ice in his drink from a silver bucket on the bar. "Besides, everything worked out." He turned to face Fairchance, a sudden excitement in his expression. "Now's the time we expand, get rid of all this kiddie *kak* and move to the big leagues ourselves. People don't have work, so the small-timers are having trouble making money. Shit, even muggers are skint since the tourists are gone. We can do a good business on the side. The cops are too busy dealing with water points and riots to pay attention to us. Guns, drugs, girls. It's ours for the taking. With the Patels we can push all the competition out. We'll own the market by the time things go back to normal."

"Stop talking crazy, Johnny. Look, you don't know what the Patels are capable of. They're not just going to sit back and let us run the show. You and I will both be dead before that day. So just keep your head down and let me deal with them, okay?"

"You're trying to cut me out."

"What?"

"You met with Sai and Arav today. You've *kakked* me out, but I know they were happy with what I did. They told me."

"You stay away from them. No more backdoor deals. Understand?"

"I knew it." Johnny lifted his chin, his lips curled in disgust. "You always got to be the boss man, *ne*."

"What are you talking about?" Fairchance's temple suddenly throbbed from the effort to keep his emotions at bay.

"This isn't about protecting us. It's about you stealing the gravy while you throw me breadcrumbs."

"I've always taken care of you."

"You take care of you and keep me and Puma on a leash. Like always."

"Look at this house. I made that happen. You're running a club, girls anytime you want. The big man around town with your BMW and your designer suits. You'd still be selling *tik* and sleeping rough if it wasn't for me."

"You want a thank you?" Johnny made a curtsey, but momentarily lost his balance. His drink spilled over the rim.

"You're stupid drunk. Look at you."

"I hold my liquor, and my girls. Hey, *Sisi*! Come clean up here." Johnny slumped back against the bar. The girl appeared with a kitchen towel. She was a little older than Johnny usually liked them. In her thirties, Fairchance guessed. "Hey, darling. Daddy's

made a mess." Johnny pointed at the floor. The girl smiled self-consciously at Fairchance and bent down to mop up the spilled whiskey, while Johnny openly leered at her cleavage, protruding from the neckline of a flowing yellow sundress.

"Women love me, hear?" Johnny said as the girl left. He turned his back to Fairchance to refill his drink. "Is more than you can say, Shortie." Fairchance flinched. After all these years, Johnny was still ready to wield his shame at a moment's notice.

"Enough." Fairchance felt a headache germinate at the base of his skull. "I'm done talking. Go behind my back again and you can go share Mavo's doorway with him. Don't think I won't."

Johnny looked at Fairchance with heavy lids. He sucked his teeth before replying. "Whatever you say… Boss." He pronounced the last word in an exaggerated American accent, drawing the o out so that it sounded like an elongated a. *Baas.*

Fairchance threw his hands in the air. "You're just plain stupid, you know that?"

"We'll see who'd stupid, Shortie. We'll see." Johnny slurred his words, his eyes out of focus. Fairchance had to get out of there before he did something he regretted. If only Johnny knew how close to the precipice he was standing, he'd change his tune. Fairchance almost told him as he stared into those dull eyes but changed his mind. If Johnny got involved it might lead to an even bigger mess. He and he alone had to do the job, or the audio of the conversation between Johnny and the hijackers would find their way to the news stations and even his police contacts wouldn't be able to make it disappear. Fairchance didn't bother to threaten the Patels with exposure. He knew there would be no evidence tying them to the heist or the assassination. It would all be on

Johnny, and he wasn't so sure that Johnny wouldn't finger him just to settle some imagined score. When lives were as intertwined as theirs were, there'd always be plenty of dirt that Johnny could throw his way.

Fairchance climbed the spiral staircase and made his way down the second-story hallway to Puma's room. The walls of the room were painted in primary colors, pictures of boats and trains crowding each other out. The small wooden carvings he sent Puma formed a careful display on a small blue bookshelf next to big picture books. A chemical smell masked the stench of illness in the room. Fairchance nodded to the nurse that sat in the corner reading and watched the sleeping figure from the doorway. Puma's labored breaths made his own chest feel tight. He noticed that the vials and pill bottles that lined the silver tray on the nightstand had grown in number. It had taken them some time to realize that there was something seriously wrong with Puma. He got sick, but winter on the streets frequently left all of them with sore throats and fevers. Even the rash and the diarrhea weren't unusual. But instead of getting better it went on for months, years. Even if they had gone to the clinic right away, there wasn't anything the nurses and doctors could have done. The government had already made it clear that it would not provide antiretrovirals, HIV and Aids were not related, the president said. Eat African potato and garlic, the minister of health said. People died nonetheless. Families had to bury multiple bodies in the same grave or leave their loved ones' bodies unclaimed because they could not pay for all the funerals. Many familiar faces disappeared off the streets as well. One day you'd share a *zol* with a boy, and the next he'd be gone. In a way it wasn't so different from the apartheid years, only the enemy had no color this time and no protest

or election could make it stop. By the time the government started doing something, Puma's disease was already at an advanced stage. The drugs worked, but his body was so weakened that every minor infection threatened his life.

Puma opened his eyes. It took him a moment to focus, but he smiled when he recognized Fairchance. "Hey there, big man," Fairchance said. Puma didn't answer. He swallowed hard and closed his eyes again.

"He has lucid moments," the nurse said. She got up and felt Puma's forehead.

"How is he doing?"

The nurse let her eyes drop for a moment before answering. "The doctor said to make him comfortable. It's all we can do while we wait for the medications to do their thing."

Fairchance nodded. Puma's wishes had always been uncomplicated. While the rest of them would have wild fantasies about the future, Puma only wanted a house and a *mama* that would make food. Jama's face flickered in front of him. His anger at Johnny's stupidity dissipated and he went back downstairs. He found Johnny passed out on the sectional, his empty glass tipped over on the floor. Mavo had refused his help, and once Puma was gone, Johnny would be all he had left. Fairchance knew he had to take control of the situation before it was too late. He'd do this job for the Patels, he didn't have a choice, but after that they were walking away. Perhaps they could leave the city, go to Jo'burg and get in on the market there. Once the rains came and the market returned to normal they could get a really good price for the house. If they sold the house, and his townhouse, it would be enough to get them started again. He considered the angles,

building the fantasy as he drove home. They'd start small, get in on the club scene, maybe go legit. He could book live acts, maybe do a song here and there himself. He could take Jama with him. He caught himself smiling. It had been a while since he had anything to smile about. He changed lanes and exited off the highway to take the turn to the V&A Waterfront shops.

*

Fairchance's neighbor, Barry, waved at him as he pulled into the driveway of his townhouse in one of the gated communities in Milnerton, eleven kilometers north of the city. Most of Fairchance's neighbors were white, living a life of relative safety away from the city. The complex had its own borehole, the water worries of the city far removed as kids spent the summer days splashing around in the pool. Barry was a middle-aged fat man who once confided in Fairchance that he had dated a coloured girl during the apartheid years but broke it off because his parents had forced him. He probably thought that he needed to let Fairchance know that he had no problem with coloureds. Whites were funny that way. Either they treated you with barely-disguised hostility, or they wanted to be your best friend. "We were soul mates," Barry had said in a low shaky voice about the girl he had lost as his wife called him and their two children in for dinner. "I regret losing her every day, you know." Fairchance had almost felt sorry for him.

"You have a visitor I see," Barry said as Fairchance got out of his car. "Or rather, I hear! You might want to tell him not to play the music so loud. I'm okay with it, no worries, hey, but you know how people here are."

"Sorry about that. It's my nephew," Fairchance said, hoping his story wouldn't elicit too much interrogation. "He's staying with me for a while."

"Good to have company. I was getting worried about you living all alone there."

Fairchance laughed without answering as if they were sharing an inside joke, and waved Barry goodbye, dropping the jovial front the moment he turned away. He secretly expected to find the house stripped bare when he walked through the front door, but instead he found everything spotless and in its place. Jama was in the sitting room, his eyes glued to the massive television set.

"Is this what you call work?"

The boy scrambled for the remote. "Sorry, Mr. Davids. I did what you want. I made it all nice, you see?"

Fairchance made a show of scanning the room and nodded. He held out the packages he had brought in with him. "Here. Can't have you looking like that if you're going to work for me." The boy took the bags cautiously, his eyes fixed on Fairchance. "You're not going to open it? I can take it back if you don't want it." The boy carefully opened the bags and pulled out the contents as if it might break - a pair of jeans, t-shirts, socks, underwear, and a toothbrush. His eyes lit up when he opened the box with the Nike trainers. Fairchance tried to hide the delight it gave him. He remembered the first time he walked into the Ackermans to buy himself clothes, not hand-me-downs from the charity shop, but new. A security guard had followed him around the whole time and he was too scared to try anything on, so he just guessed the size and paid. Everything was too big. He was almost twenty but had burst out in tears like a child over his stupidity. He

only figured out about returning things later and waited two months to save up more money before he went back again. “Go change and throw yours in the trash. No, better burn it,” he said to Jama and went into the kitchen to fix himself a drink. He didn’t have to wait long. Jama’s smile was irrepressible as he exited the spare bedroom in his new outfit. Fairchance had often wondered if he still had the capacity to feel joy. Looking at Jama, he recognized its presence like a long-lost memory. Don’t be stupid, he told himself. This was just temporary. The boy couldn’t stay.

“I have work to do,” Fairchance said in a stern voice, trying to hide his feelings. “There’s polish and rags in the garage. Wash my car, proper this time, no shortcuts.”

Fairchance went into his study, a tidy room with a mahogany desk and a filing cabinet. He stared out of the window while he waited for the computer to start up, the view of the mountain breathtaking from this distance. It was the reason he decided to move here. Buying a house for Johnny and Puma was all he ever wanted to do, but with Johnny there was always tension, and he couldn’t stand the parade of girls, a stranger in his house every few months. When Johnny started doing well at the club, he took over the payments and Fairchance moved out. Puma stayed with Johnny to be near the hospital. Fairchance wondered what his *mama* would think of him now, living like this. Would she be proud? She would never have approved of the way he made the money, he knew that. He shook off the thought. He did what he needed to do to survive and he wasn’t going to feel guilty for being good at it. Just as he wasn’t going to feel guilty about some stranger the Patels wanted him to take care of. He opened the browser on his laptop and typed the name Alet Berg into the search engine.

Alet

A middle-aged blond woman in gum boots and a white coat stood at the entrance of the Salt River State Mortuary, a cigarette pinched between her lips. Alet felt a long-forgotten craving as she watched. Smoking or eating were your only options to pass the time on duty. She had already polished off a packet of Marie biscuits with her coffee, bought from a corner café which was still doing business amongst the boarded-up laundromats and hair salons on the street.

"Are you going to tell me what we're doing here instead of patrolling?" Riaan was getting antsy. The promise of a quick stop had turned into a twenty-minute sauna in the van.

"I told you," Alet said. "I just need to talk to someone." The blonde stamped out her cigarette. Alet was about to tell Riaan that they could go when the pathologist she saw talking to Ntongama the day before exited the building. Alet had googled Dr. Singh and recognized the plump face and tired eyes from a photograph that was probably ten years old.

"I'll be right back." Alet didn't wait for Riaan's protests. She intercepted the pathologist just as she exited the security gate and got into her car.

"Dr. Singh, do you have a minute?" There was a moment of panic on the woman's face. She relaxed when she saw Alet and rolled down the car window a few inches.

"Can I help you?"

"I hope so. My name is Alet Berg. I'm looking into the death of Lydia Mfeka."

"I'm sorry –"

"Young girl found on one of the Clifton beaches. Yesterday or the day before? You showed the body to my friend, Captain Mathebe, yesterday."

Dr. Singh's eyes darted to the insignia on Alet's shirt. "I wasn't aware security companies investigated murders."

"Murder?" Alet felt her pulse quicken. "The police said this was a shark attack."

Dr. Singh tucked a strand of black hair behind her ear and glanced back at the mortuary entrance. "*Ja*. Well…" Her voice wavered. "A lot of bodies go through here. I must be confused." She turned the key in the ignition. "I'm late for an appointment. The official report has been filed."

"Wait, can we just –"

"I'm sorry Ms. –"

"Berg. Please, Doctor. I need to find out what happened to Lydia."

"Talk to the case officer."

"He didn't –" Alet felt helpless as Dr. Singh rolled up her window. When she was still police she had authority, she could demand answers, bully her way to information if needed, but she was a private citizen now, her security uniform meaningless to the bureaucracy that surrounded death. Dr. Singh's words echoed in her mind. Lydia was murdered.

"Just tell me why you think the girl was murdered," Alet pleaded. "A young girl's life is at stake." The window stopped, a small sliver of open air between them. "Please."

Dr. Singh stared straight ahead, her voice barely above a whisper. “Be at the Regal. Tonight. Nine o’clock.” Alet opened her mouth to respond, but the glass barrier between them sealed shut. Dr. Singh pulled out of her parking spot and drove past Riaan, who had gotten out of the CapeSec van.

“Are you going to tell me what you’re doing?”

“Nothing. Helping a friend.”

Riaan crossed his arms. “There’s another alarm at that Russian’s place.” His back was already turned to her. “Probably ghosts again.”

“Do we know what’s going on?”

“Must be the wiring on that unit. I’ll check it if he lets us in.” Riaan got in the van, his neck stiff, his chest puffed up at the prospect of a rematch with Tutterov. Alet felt bone tired of the display of masculinity. The plot rarely changed, the level only escalated depending on the weakness of the egos in the room.

Stephen waited in front of Tutterov’s house, his face knotted with tension. The security gates stood open, the house eerily quiet. Alet had the same feeling she had on their previous encounter, as if something had just happened, but the participants had disappeared from the scene.

“I knocked, nobody answered.”

“Did you call the police?”

Stephen nodded. Alet tried Tutterov’s number, but it went to voicemail. Pop. A shot went off inside the house. Riaan was at the front door before she could get out of the van, his gun out.

"Wait!" she shouted, but Riaan was already forcing his way in. Alet pulled her gun out of its holster. Riaan had managed to break the lock, a clumsy effort that left his face red, his shoulder obviously injured from the impact with the door. He gave the door a last kick to get it open. There was a surreal moment amidst the confusion where Alet saw the three of them as actors on the set of some kind of action movie, under attack by the pretend bad guys. She almost convinced herself that someone would yell cut and everything would be okay as two more shots went off. The impact of the bullet hitting her vest sent her flying back. There was a dull thud, pain that reverberated through bone as she hit her head on the concrete. She must have lost consciousness for a moment, she wasn't sure. Another shot went off. There were footsteps near her, the cocking of a gun. Alet's hand clenched around the butt of her own gun and fired two shots blindly, hoping it was enough to scare the gunmen off.

Alet rolled on her stomach, slowly working her way off the ground. Breathing was painful, her chest squashed in a vice. She got herself to a sitting position and leaned against the wall. Stephen lay a few feet away from her. His eyes were open, the brown glass dull.

"Riaan?" The sound of her own voice reverberated through her skull, blurring her vision. "Riaa –" His name stuck in her throat when she saw his body on the ground near the front door. What had happened? She had heard the shot. Riaan went down. Then the blow to her vest. After that things went blank. She struggled to her feet. There was no pulse beneath her fingertips when she crouched down and held them to Riaan's neck. A noise came from inside the house. Somebody, a woman, cried out. Alet found herself

inside the house before she had a chance to think about it, her gun extended in her trembling arms. The place looked sterile in its sparseness, the furniture expensive, barely functional sculptures rather than practical objects. Every step she took through the large living room left a sticky echo on the bare tile floors.

Alet found the first body in the kitchen. A man in jeans and trainers, lying on his side with a bullet wound in his cheek. There was still a gun in his hand. She found the next one in the hallway and had to step over it to get to the main bedroom. Heavy blinds allowed only a promise of light through and she couldn't find the light switch. The bed was unmade, an animal stench emanating from the room. Clothes spilled from a carry-on bag at her feet. At the far end of the room was another doorway. A staircase descended from it into a dark passage that must have been cut into the mountainside, built around the natural boulders that she could see protruding from the wall. The air became noticeably cooler with each step she took. She was aware of sirens outside. Their whining masked something else, a sound trying not to be heard, uncontrollable like a thought. In the dark, her free hand found a door in the rock face. She tried the door handle.

Wood splintered next to her face. Alet dove to the ground, rolled onto her back, and returned fire, the movement automatic, the ease with which she did it surprising her even as she emptied the magazine. Her fire was not returned, only the sound of footsteps and faint voices upstairs could be heard. Flashlights shone down the passage, accompanied by disembodied hands with guns. Alet squinted into a policeman's backlit face.

"About time," she said, dropping the gun. The world felt soft around her, the sounds fuzzy. The policeman kicked her gun aside while other officers forced open the door. Alet thought she saw the shadows of children in the room before everything went black.

*

Mathebe hovered outside Alet's room in emergency care while she was being checked out by a string of nurses and officious residents. She gestured for him to come in. The lines of his face looked deeper than that morning, exaggerating the downward droop of his eyes.

"They're just waiting for the x-rays. I told them I'm fine. Bruises and scrapes." She held up her right hand to show him where the skin had been shaved off along the side. She had no recollection of how it happened, she only realized it was there when the nurse started cleaning the wound. As a matter of fact, she couldn't remember much of anything too clearly, which bothered her.

Mathebe winced. "You do not look fine, Const – Alet."

"That stupid vest saved me, but nobody tells you how bloody much it hurts hey." Alet ran her hand over her chest where the bullet hit and winced at her own stupidity more than the pain.

Mathebe just shook his head. "Your partner is in intensive care."

"He's alive?" Alet felt momentarily relieved before she became angry. "Dumbass. He should have waited." She had never liked Riaan, but he was barely more than a boy. It looked cool in the movies, risking your life for glory, but in the real world, heroism was

for idiots. She realized that Mathebe was giving her a disapproving look. “How’s he doing?”

“He is in critical condition. The doctors will not say more.”

Alet nodded. She wondered if the news had reached their boss, Jan Marais, yet and if they’d contacted Stephen’s family. She didn’t know much about Stephen, only that he had lived in Khayelitsha and hid the fact that he was a security guard. He told his neighbors and friends that he got money from recycling cans and bottles.

“Miss Berg.” Ntongama gave a perfunctory knock at the door. He looked over at Mathebe and gave him a nod. “I need to take a statement from you.”

“One of your constables already took my statement. Wouldn’t even wait for the doctor to check me out.”

“You are all right?”

“As I’ll ever be.” Alet didn’t know why she disliked Ntongama, but she couldn’t help herself. There was an arrogance about him, a way in which he cloaked his intelligence in practiced stupidity to make people dismiss him like the other incompetents in the police. People made mistakes if they thought their opponent was stupid. It was a strategy that worked well for her when she was still police. But the fact that Ntongama was giving *her* the overworked and under-trained bit made her distrust his motives.

“Would you excuse us, Captain?”

Mathebe got up, but Alet stopped him. “He stays. I think he needs to hear what you found in that room.”

"Ms. Berg, a serious crime was committed here. Four men died. Maybe five if Riaan van der Merwe doesn't make it. And you are responsible for at least one of those deaths."

"That *fokker* was doing target practice through a closed door. What was I supposed to do? Wait for him to find the X between my eyes?"

"Alet –" Mathebe looked at her with concern. Alet threw her hands up.

Ntongama sighed. "You fired six shots into the door. One of them fatally wounded Mr. Igor Tutterov, a Russian citizen. You also endangered the lives of two young females inside the room."

"Mr. Tutterov and his men killed my colleague. I'm sure he wouldn't have had a problem doing the same to me."

"Nothing has been confirmed."

"Who were the girls? They were very young."

Alet saw a flicker in Ntongama's eyes but he didn't break character. "Your magazine was empty. Where did the other two bullets go?"

"I fired them after I got hit, I think. I thought there was someone there, I don't know."

"Did you kill the two men in the house?"

"What? They were already dead."

"How do you know your two bullets didn't hit Mr. Van der Merwe or kill Mr. Thobela?"

Alet was fed-up with Ntongama's bullshit. "If you had proof it was my weapon that killed any of those men, Detective, I'd be under arrest right now. So, what is your problem?"

"It was the same caliber. We are waiting for ballistics."

"It won't be a match." Alet met Ntongama's eyes defiantly. "Answer me. Who were the girls with Tutterov?"

"I am not discussing the case with you, Ms. Berg." Ntongama's eyes shot over to Mathebe. Alet almost jumped out of bed to hit him, but the moment her feet touched the floor the room started spinning. Mathebe grabbed hold of her before she fell and set her back onto the bed.

"You bloody well tell us what's going on, Detective," Alet muttered weakly. For the briefest of moments, she wished she still had her father, a Rottweiler to threaten him into submission, to see fear and respect. Ntongama seemed to read her thoughts.

"I know who you are, Ms. Berg. Who you used to be. I wouldn't make demands in your position." There it was. Out in the open, any pretense between them laid bare. Ntongama knew about her father. His shame was hers, the name Berg tainted in perpetuity, his legacy inseparable from hers. They had become the unclean in this country, the reviled.

"Please, Detective." Mathebe was as composed as always, but Alet heard the tension in his voice. "If you have any information about my daughter, let me know."

Ntongama considered for a moment, his tone softer when he spoke to Mathebe. "The room was a holding cell. Tutterov kept girls in there."

"Celiwe?" Mathebe could not conceal his hope.

"We are not sure."

"What do you mean, you're not sure?" Alet tried to keep her temper at bay, for Mathebe's sake.

"The girls were drugged, frequently moved. They could not tell us anything for certain."

"But there is a possibility?" Mathebe tried again.

"One of the girls in the room told us about another girl who tried to escape a few days ago." Ntongama hesitated. "The girl's description matches your daughter, Captain Mathebe, but we are not sure We will show them pictures of missing girls, your daughter's as well. But they need to be cleared by a doctor first."

"When did the girl escape?" Dread seeped a cold certainty in Alet as she thought of the alarm they responded to at Tutterov's earlier in the week. She was right there, a few meters away from girls being abused, perhaps Celiwe or Lydia. She shouldn't have been intimidated by Tutterov. She should have followed protocol and insisted that they inspect the house.

"She didn't. The girls say that Tutterov's men caught her. They do not know what happened to her after that. The room the girls were kept in had no windows. They have no idea how long they had been there."

"What was he doing with the girls, Detective?" Mathebe's voice was barely above a whisper now. He was police, he knew what went on in these places. Alet realized he was desperate for this to be the exception.

"Tutterov trafficked girls. He used the house to break them in." Alet knew what that meant, that Mathebe knew too. "The two girls in the cell were in bad shape," Ntongama continued, "but they confirmed information we had."

"You knew about Tutterov?" Alet said in disbelief.

"We were aware of him."

"And you did nothing?"

"He is part of a bigger investigation, Miss Berg. And even that is on hold right now."

"You tell this man," Alet pointed at Mathebe, "that his daughter's safety is on hold."

Mathebe remained quiet, his back stick straight and rigid, his eyes trained on Ntongama.

"We have no proof that Lydia Mfeka was killed by Tutterov. The girls were assets. If he killed her he'd be out of money."

"Wait. Who triggered the alarm today?"

"Tutterov's prints were found on the button."

"And the person I shot at?"

"We found no trace of another person on the scene."

"Could we talk to the girls, Inspector?" Mathebe said. Ntongama shook his head. "Detective," Mathebe tried again, "They may be able to help us."

"The girls are traumatized, as you surely understand, Captain. Besides, this is a matter for Cape Town Metro. I am only sharing information with you as a courtesy. And

I warn you," Ntongama looked over at Alet," that your interference in an ongoing investigation will not be tolerated."

"I thought you said it's on hold," Alet said tartly.

"The rains will come in winter."

"Celiwe is missing now, Detective. A man has the right to look for his daughter."

"And what rights do you think you have in all this, Miss Berg?"

"I have a right to help my friend."

It didn't take much for Alet to persuade a resident to discharge her. Protesters injured in a standoff with police near parliament were being rushed into the emergency room and her potential concussion was no longer considered a priority.

"What time is it?" Alet slid into the passenger seat of her Toyota. Mathebe had refused to hand over her keys, and as her body protested every microscopic shift, she felt thankful for that. "We have to go to the Regal."

"I do not think drinking a good idea, Alet." Alet started to laugh at Mathebe's sincerity, but pain shot through her skull.

"I'm not going for a drink, Johannes," she grimaced. "I'm meeting the pathologist that handled Lydia's case."

Mathebe frowned. "Why did you not meet at the office?"

"Because Dr. Singh knows something, and I bet Ntongama's ignoring the inconvenient truths. He doesn't need to know we're going behind his back."

"Perhaps he is protecting an investigation, as he has said." Mathebe hesitated. "Or perhaps it is worse than he told us."

"This is not about sparing your feelings. We're police. We know how this works; how sick people can be. And if he's as stretched as he said, he should be putting us in the loop."

"A lot has changed, Alet." Mathebe was right, of course. Being police wasn't a matter of honor and brotherhood any more. It was a way to a job in a country with a staggeringly high unemployment rate. And once you had that job, the pressure was on to provide for all those you left behind. Families pooled resources to get one child through school and to a job. Once that was achieved, a return on their investment was expected. With so much pressure on a constable's salary, and their own expectations of the middle-class dream, how could there not be corruption? Alet felt brief sympathy for Ntongama. It quickly changed into suspicion when she thought about it. It was hard, close to impossible, to rise to the rank of Warrant Officer at his age and not be dirty or connected.

A group of homeless children huddled near the Slave Lodge Museum on Adderley Street where they parked the car. Alet handed them some loose change from her pocket when they approached. Telling them no made them more persistent, but she'd learned that they'd go away with the smallest of tokens. The paved walkway between shops on St. George's Mall was long deserted by the workday crowd. Alet had never been to the Regal. She understood why the moment the doorman opened the heavy ornate doors to the marbled lobby. The hotel dripped with opulence, every detail screaming money. Serious money. Uniformed bellmen carted Louis Vuitton bags to the elevators

behind men in Armani suits and women with perfect hair. The thick brocade of the window drapes reflected a rich wine color in the pattern of the carpets and upholstered chairs. The décor had a vaguely colonial feel to it, a rigidity meant to impress and stifle. You were expected to behave here, be no less than inconspicuous. The hotel was an insulated world. The mayor had pledged that the CBD's water would not be shut off and the crisis on Cape Town's streets seemed of little concern to the tourists who packed the lounge, their creature comforts guaranteed, provided they kept spending money.

They sat at the main bar, their coffee order delivered with ritualistic refinement. Alet felt a pang of longing for Freddy's sticky chairs. Mathebe also looked ill at ease in this environment, small somehow. Alet wondered what the other patrons thought about the pair of them, she with her untidy ponytail and worn t-shirt and jeans, Mathebe with his rigid posture and perfectly creased pants.

"Did you manage to find anything?" The events of the day had almost made Alet forget that Mathebe had been doing his own investigation.

"Yes." Mathebe's worry lines softened a bit. "Ms. Zanele Mfeka was picked up by a man when she left C-Section."

"You got this from the shebeen queen? I thought she was going to hit you with that beer bucket the last time we were there."

Mathebe shook his head. "Mr. Dumi made inquiries."

"Probably for a hefty service charge."

Mathebe clasped his hands in his lap. "Mr. Dumi's friend said that the man didn't live in Khayelitsha by the looks of him. I believe he called the man a coconut."

"Do they know this mystery man's name?"

"Mr. Dumi's friend thought he might belong to a gang."

"That's not helpful. Half the bloody township belongs to a gang."

Mathebe held his hand up. "He overheard the man talk about a Norinco shipment."

"Those cheap Chinese firearms that were seized a few years back?" Alet said. Mathebe nodded. "He may traffic in a number of things then." Alet finished her coffee and checked her watch. It was nine-thirty and there was no sign of Dr. Singh. A man in a dark suit had taken a seat at the black piano in the corner. With a dramatic swirl of his arms he started playing something that sounded like elevator music to Alet. She motioned for the bartender, a young man with the name Kenneth on his tag.

"The bill, madam?"

"*Ja.* Thanks. I was also wondering if you've seen a woman in here. We were supposed to meet. Short. Indian. Long hair, on the… round side?"

Kenneth smiled discreetly. Alet wondered if humoring the clientele's indelicacies was part of his training. "I'm afraid not, madam," he said. He returned moments later with a bill that made Alet's palms sweat. The coffee was good, but she didn't think it was worth selling her kidneys on the black market for. Mathebe waved away her objections and paid.

"I have made arrangements to stay at Mr. Dumi's mother's bed and breakfast tonight."

"Why? You're staying with me."

Mathebe searched for the right words. “I appreciate the offer, Alet,” he said. “But the situation with your roommate is delicate. I believe it will be better this way.”

“Did Maryna say anything to you? I’ll talk to her, don’t worry.”

Mathebe started to protest, but he focused on something behind Alet. She turned in her seat to see what he was looking at. A group of people had just entered the hotel lounge. Alet recognized a couple of the faces from the newspapers. Parliament was across the street, so the Regal was probably where the ministers came to pad expense accounts. A small group of men did not enter the lounge but walked through the lobby to the hotel elevators. It took her a moment to isolate the familiar form among them. He had lost weight and had grown a beard, but the confident gait and the steadfast stare was unmistakable. It was true then. Adriaan Berg was out of prison.

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