# From Postcolonial Rewriting to Contemporary Rereading: Coetzee to the Contemporary

## *The Albertsburg Judgement: A Novel*

**Matthew Douglas Blackman**

University registration number: 100137645

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## Abstract

This thesis attempts to trace the progressive nature of 'the post-colonial rewrite'. That is from the method of dialectical correction of a monologic reading of the originary work towards a more open dialogical acceptance of the 'parent' text. The thesis follows the progress from J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), a rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*; to Juan Gabriel Vasquez's *The Secret History of Costaguana* (2010) a rewriting of Conrad's *Nostromo*; to Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013), a rewriting of Camus's *The Outsider*. It argues that the rewrites have relied on a critically mediated reading of the text on which an intimated 'correction' is based. At the centre of these critical readings is, I suggest, the notion that the 'parent' work is one rooted in realism – the idea of realism popularised by Ian Watt. This, it is argued, is true in the particular case of Coetzee's *Foe*. However, both Vasquez and Daoud, in their more recent post-colonial rewrites, intimate a notion of a 'rereading' of the 'parent' text, a rereading that opens it to a Bakhtinian dialogical interpretation. This twist in the rewrite goes some way to abjuring the more monologic realist readings that inspire the notion of 'correction'. It also suggests something a little more than simply the *correction* method of *rewriting*. The creative work, *The Albertsburg Judgement*, although not a rewrite of a singular novel, is in many ways a rewrite (or as I have framed it a 'rereading') of several colonial and post-colonial texts. Many of the characters in the novel are based on, and appropriated from, colonial and post-colonial fiction. In these ways I have tried to theoretically engage with my critical work, bringing in voices dialogically from other novels and allowing them to converse with each other so as to be reread.

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## From Postcolonial Rewriting to Contemporary Rereading: Coetzee to the Contemporary

## Introduction

The post-colonial rewrite which ostensibly began with Jean Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), has variously been termed 'writing back', 'counter-discourse', 'oppositional literature', 'con-texts' and 'postcolonial rewriting' (Thieme, 2001, 1). The rewrite can be situated in long histories: in its central conceit it is much like Procopius of Caesarea's *The Secret History*, which offered a correction to the official history of the Roman Emperor Justinian's rule and which became the model for a genre of biographical, historical and fictional writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Unlike the post-colonial rewrite's close cousin the 'adaptation', which clings to an ideal of fidelity to its parent text, it aims at contesting or correcting rather than colluding. That is, this particular process and form of 'writing back', unlike contemporary adaptations, does not, as Imelda Whelehan puts it, seek to 'realize what are held to be the core meanings and values of the originary text' (Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999, 3). Instead the rewrite is said to reject its 'parent'.

As will be discussed below, the post-colonial rewrite operates supposedly on two fronts: at once offering an alternative to the narrative of the 'parent' text, while at the same time further establishing itself as a correction of the colonial author's ideology. As such rewrites are not simply, as John Thieme points out, 'contesting the authority of the canon' (2001, 1) but are also contesting the author's ideological (and historical) representation of a time, place and culture. In this regard, post-colonial rewrites speak 'at' rather than 'with' the 'pre-text' or 'parent'. As the feminist theorists Monika Kaup and Rachel Blau DuPlessis have suggested, with regards to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the rewrite goes 'beyond' the ending of the plot. That is, Rhys's work corrects or 'resists the patriarchal "ending" of marriage in its inter-text, *Jane Eyre*' (Allen, 2001, 147). As such, these texts are *dialectical* responses. And it is this notion of a dialectical correction that will be important for my arguments in what follows.

This idea of the dialectic brings with it several questions or hidden assumptions as to *what*, precisely, is being engaged *with*. As Rhys once put forward, the impetus to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* came from the belief that Charlotte Bronte had left the character of Rochester's first wife as 'such a poor ghost' (Thieme, 2001, 77). Post-colonial rewrites as such emerge out of what Edward Said referred to as the 'contrapuntal readings' of the text. What such 'contrapuntal readings' do is to:

> take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the text to include what was once forcibly excluded – in *L'Etranger*, for example, the whole previous history of France's colonialism and its destruction of the Algerian state. (Said, 1993, 66-67)

In other words, much like the 'secret history' genre, the post-colonial rewrite engages with what the thesis of the 'originary' or 'parent' author left out. But this argument presupposes a number of issues: first, that one can simply identify what is *in* a text; and second that one can simply identify what is missing from it. Moreover, it is the *method* of 'leaving out' or excluding that postmodern writers such as J.M. Coetzee and indeed Said have been interested in.

It is worth noting at this juncture that the theorists who will be discussed in this thesis all expressed an idea which accords with the dialectical impulse – an impulse that motivated the 'rewriting' of texts that will be discussed. Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Edward Said and Ian Watt all made the claim, at various moments in their writings that will be dicussed and referenced below, that the ideology or moral pattern underlying the European realist novel, influenced by the rise of capitalism and rational enlightenment thought, corresponded to, in the words of Bakhtin, 'a single and unified authorial consciousness.'[1] And it is precisely this, as will be discussed, that is the 'first term' or 'thesis' that the postcolonial rewrite seemingly 'opposes' or 'corrects'.

Rewrites, their authors seemingly submit, rely on the notion that the realist 'parent' novel is a stable ideological representation that is rooted in the author's social position. The rewrite thus assumes that its pre-texts are formed from the singular ideological voice of what Bakhtin called a 'monologic' consciousness. In Barthes's terms, they are 'readerly' works, offering a 'reality effect' or a single consumable meaning. Rewrites, in this sense, seem to base their ontology on the idea that their parent texts are attempts to produce a singular truth that reinforces the cultural myth of the society to which they belonged. That is to say insofar as the post-colonial rewrites I intend to explore offer themselves as a dialectical correction, it must follow, in Roland Barthes's terms, that they seek to produce the *para-doxa* that disrupts or corrects the 'common opinion' which is the *doxa* of the colonial work. In Marxist terms, they aim at correcting the ideology or the 'false conceptions about themselves' that these colonial texts produce.

The idea that the novel in general and the colonial novel in particular arises from the singular ideological position of the author is confirmed by the Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton. As Eagleton argues, a novelist's language and devices are 'saturated with certain ideological modes of

[1] Bakhtin, it should be noted argued in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that a certain tendency towards monologism had existed in the European realist novel before Dostoevsky. However, in the essays he wrote later and that appear in *The Dialogic Imagination* he would go on to qualify this idea suggesting that it was at times only a tendency and that no novel could, by its nature, be wholly monologic.

perception, certain codified ways of interpreting reality' (1989, 25). In fact Eagleton encourages his reader, in the footnote attached to the above quote, to 'see R. Barthes' for a fuller understanding of the ideology suffused in a novelistic text. And as Michael Gardiner puts it, Barthes argues that novelistic realism has an 'interest laden ideological character' (1992, 151) that needs to be exposed, or, as I have termed it, 'corrected'. What is paramount, however, to my argument is that Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) agrees that the novel is ideological in nature. That is to say, Watt argues that the realist novel was a repository of the European middle class's philosophy and aspirations.[2]

As I will argue, the postcolonial rewrite views its colonial 'pretext' or 'parent' on Barthes's, Eagleton's and indeed Watt's terms. It takes, at the very least an initial position, that the 'pretext' is 'monologic'. The 'dialectical correction' model presupposes that all aspects of plot, characterization and dialogue are the product of the will, or singular consciousness, of the author. And what is more that this singular consciousness reproduces the monologic ideological code of their class and/or race. Several consequences can be drawn from this position. The rewrite, thus understood, denies that the realist or colonial writer's texts (or signs) are the site of dialogic ideological struggle. That is, it denies the realist or colonial writer is conscious of language's plurality. Or as Bakhtin put it, that 'each living [singular] ideological sign has two faces, like Janus' (Voloshinov, 1973, 23-4).[3] It is with these denials and assumptions that my thesis is concerned. As my arguments here already suggest, in what follows I will counterpose a model of 'rewriting', understood as dialectical *correction*, with a more complex account of the interplay between a 'pre' or 'parent' text and its rewriting, in which the first text is understood *already* to operate 'dialogically'. It is this idea of dialogism, the idea that the 'parent' novel has at the very least 'two faces', that the rhetoric around – and overt stance *of* – the rewrite seems to reject. On these terms, the rewrite denies Bakhtin's thesis in 'The Discourse in the Novel' that the ontology of the novel is 'a diversity of social speech types' and that each of these speech types 'functions as one ideology among other possible ideologies' (2014, 334).

For Bahktin the dialogic contestation of the diversity of voices within the novel is what distinguishes the novel as a genre. As such, Bakhtin argues that a supposed *doxa* or ideology of the author is internally and intentionally undermined in the novel. From this we might deduce that the *para-doxa* that the rewrite seeks to produce is in fact a property of the parent novel already. There

[2] See page p.58 in *The Rise of the Novel* (2015). Also Michael McKeon's criticism of this idea on pages 3-4 in *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (1987).

[3] I am following Michael Holquist assertion that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was published under Voloshinov's name but that it was in fact written by Bakhtin. I should note that I do not have a particular stance on this controversy but in this thesis I simply follow Holquist's convention for ease of understanding.

is always in the novel, Bahktin argued (and rewrites seemingly deny), ideological contestations between author, narrator and character. Or to put it another way, because of the presence of 'the other' or non-author, multiple ideological positions in the novel are never entirely written out of the picture.

Ironically this 'writing out of the picture' of the other ideologies contained in the 'parent' text is precisely, I will argue, what post-colonial rewrites *themselves* have tended to do. That is, they have failed to acknowledge the presence of any other ideology besides that of the supposed author's. Or as Coetzee has put forward with regards to Daniel Defoe's other characters (besides the narrator/author) they are simply 'ciphers'. The rewrite's initial tendency is, I will contend, to deny that the *author*, the *hero* and *the other characters* have distinct ideological voices. This is contrary to Bakhtin's view, a view my readings in this thesis will bear out, that 'not a single one of the ideas of the heroes—neither of "negative" nor "positive" heroes—becomes a principle of authorial representation, and none constitute the novelistic world in its entirety' (1984, 25).

A further observation of Bakhtin's will also be borne out in what follows: namely that monologism (although an inherent feature of the 'singular national language' of the epic) is not inherently an attribute of the novel (see footnote 1 above) but, most often, a construct of the critic. I will explore the idea that the *doxa* or ideology the rewrite 'corrects', is in fact the 'monologic' ideological *critical* reading of the 'parent' text. Monologism, as Bakhtin contends, is often an inclination, not in novelists, but in critics and scholars, who treat the dialogical or polyphonic novel as a work with a 'singular voiced worldview'. As he states, the 'traditional scholar' has often transposed 'a symphonic (orchestrated) theme on to the piano keyboard' (2014, 263). As he wrote some years earlier:

> Some critics, enslaved by the content of individual heroes' ideological views, have attempted to reduce these views to a systemically monologic whole, thus ignoring the fundamental plurality of unmerged consciousnesses which is part and parcel of the artist's design (1984, 25).

But let us move on from the big picture to a focus on specifics. This critical thesis will explore three sets of paired texts, in which the second, in each case, offers itself as a rewriting of the first. These are: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986); Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and Juan Gabriel Vasquez's *The Secret History of Costaguana* (2010); Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2013). What this thesis will address is not simply the postcolonial rewrite's now well-established format (i.e. its dialectical or corrective nature) but how this necessitates a (problematic) treatment of the parent text as monologic in outlook.

If the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century rewrites I analyse operate within what is already a relatively mature tradition of 'post-colonial rewriting', they also, importantly, operate in contexts in which their pre-texts have already been *read*, by literary critics from a range of perspectives. One of the chief findings of this dissertation is the quite specifically *critically mediated* nature of the rewrites. That is to say, I will argue, part of Coetzee's response to *Robinson Crusoe* in *Foe* is in fact not Defoe's novel – a work of deep ambiguity and a diversity of voices. Instead it is a response to Ian Watt's monologic reading of the novel as a piece of 'formal realism'; a realism that Watt claims is rooted in the empiricism and early capitalism of its time. Likewise, Juan Gabriel Vasquez's *The Secret History of Costaguana* does not (initially) respond to *Nostromo's* polyphonic interweavings, but rather replies again to Watt's idea that *Nostromo* is rooted in the 'realist' history of Columbia. Similarly, Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* derives its provenance not from its existentialist underpinnings, but rather from Conor Cruse O'Brien and Edward Said's demand that Camus' work is a piece of monologic realism. That is, certainly to begin with, *The Meursault Investigation* refuses a reading that may speak to the idea of the Janus faced dialogic character of Meursault as both 'the Other' and coloniser.

As I will go on to argue, all the above-mentioned rewrites are not corrections of the multiple interpretations and dialogical nature of their 'parent' text. Rather they (at least initially) are a response to the monologic readings that claim that the colonial and bourgeois ideology (or *doxa*) that are voiced in them remain internally uncontested as a result of their realism. That is, that they correct a supposed monologic ideological realist reading of the work that have variously been expressed by Ian Watt, Conor Cruise O'Brien and Edward Said. As such the late twentieth-and early-twenty-first-century post-colonial rewrites explored in this study are, above all, corrections of a certain understanding of the novel as formal realism with an authored worldview. What this approach denies is the dialogic nature of the colonial text. Across the three chapters of the thesis, I will also explore how this critique of the colonial novel has shifted from the postmodernist and postcolonialist attitudes of Coetzee to the more contemporary approach of Daoud and Vasquez. That is to say, I will argue that more recent approaches, although starting, like *Foe*, with the premise of dialectical correction, allow for a more multivalent reading of their 'pretext'.

However, what should be said is that my aim in this is not to defend some putative canon, and especially not a white, patriarchal, Western one – but rather to suggest that some of these supposedly 'canonical' texts are precisely not the unequivocal repository of homogenous values that both their defenders and critics tend to argue that they are. My argument, that is to say, falls on the side of the heterogeneity of literature and textuality.

## Robinson Crusoe and Formal Realism

The confessions of the castaway Robinson Crusoe, who not only labours to become the material master of his island but also becomes the master of a man he names 'Friday', have considerable literary fame, and indeed, in a post-colonial context, notoriety. While no critic today would make the unqualified claim that *Robinson Crusoe* is the 'first' novel (or even, the first English novel, or first modern English novel) its importance not only to literary history, but to canonical critical *accounts* of that history, cannot be underestimated. In particular, it is central to Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, and to his account of the origins of realism. To be sure, *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel that has received critical attention on numerous different counts, but two are significant for Coetzee's rewriting: its (supposed) narrative form and its attitude towards 'the other'. What is interesting is that both of these are linked, certainly in Coetzee's eyes, inextricably to realism and its origins.

Coetzee's dialectical correction, informed by certain strains of postmodernism and postcolonialism, is a response to the thesis, implicit in Watt's analysis and made explicitly by many subsequent critics, that Crusoe is a man capable of authoring his story. As will be discussed below, in this understanding of Defoe's work, Crusoe, the narrator, is capable not only of materially ordering his island but, like the Lockean empiricist, he is able to differentiate and arrange his sensations and experiences into a rational narrative pattern. This formal structure, Watt argued, arose from the enlightenment thinking that took root in the European bourgeoisie of England in the eighteenth century. What is more, it is this bourgeois empiricist endeavour to codify and order the world that is intimately linked to Coetzee's second concern, that is to say *Robinson Crusoe's* colonial ideology.

As Dennis Todd points out 'Crusoe's imposing order is the act of the prototypical colonist, the embodiment of the masculine, imperial impulse to go out into the world and dominate it' (2018, 143). Edward Said too argues in *Culture and Imperialism* that Robinson Crusoe is the paradigmatic example of the historical colonial invader who 'is enabled by an ideology of overseas expansion' (1993, 70) and that *Robinson Crusoe* is 'the prototypical modern realistic novel' (1993, xii). In a slightly earlier observation, Peter Hulme, writing at the same time as Coetzee was writing *Foe*, stated in his book *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* that *Robinson Crusoe* is about 'the primary stuff of colonial ideology' (1986, 186) that is to say the myth of the encounter between 'civilization and savagery'.[4] The point that Coetzee, Said and Hulme all make

[4] As we will discuss later the notion of myth and the realist novel are, according to Barthes, to a certain extent synonymous.

is that Crusoe did not conquer simply with his sword, as Engels suggests in *Anti Durring*. Rather, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, he did so with the totalising system of his colonial discourse.[5] It is important to note, however, that this post-colonial critique of *Robinson Crusoe* is in many senses dependent on a belief about the nature of realist discourse, a nature most comprehensively, expressed by Watt in his *The Rise of the Novel.*

To fully understand Coetzee's concerns with regards to realism we must, as I have suggested, understand its foundations more completely. Watt contends that the shift in literature from poetry and romance to the novel's 'formal realism', which began with Defoe's 'pseudo-biographical' writings and Richardson's epistolary novels, was directly related to a form of historical representation. The 'formal realism' of the novel is, he claims, a quasi-historical factual representation arising from the early beginnings of British bourgeois society, a class whose ideas were rooted in the philosophy of empiricism. Indeed, Defoe seems to confirm this idea in his preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, when he states that his novel is 'a just history of fact, neither is there any appearance of fiction in it' (1995, preface).

Watt, seemingly taking Defoe at his word, argues that Defoe's stated goal was to write something closer to a history than that of a fiction, whose 'reality was not the main object' (2015, 80). As Watt points out, Defoe criticised Homer in his *The History of Apparitions* for not being a more 'valuable source of the historical evidence.' Instead Defoe stated that Homer was an inveterate 'ballad-monger' who sang "'the wars of the Greeks … from a Reality, into a mere Fiction.'" (Watt, 242) Ignoring the possibility of irony, Watt contends that this goes some way to proving that Defoe understood the novel as a form rooted in a factual historical representation and that it, on certain terms, eschewed 'mere Fiction'.

For Watt, the formal realism of the novel was a movement towards the concerns of the particularity of time, place and physical environment. It set up an opposition to Aristotle who stated in his *Poetics* that:

> poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. A 'universal' comprises the kind of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain *kind* of character – something which poetry aims at despite its addition of particular names. A 'particular' by contrast, is (for example) what Alcibiades did or experienced (1987, ch9 1451b5-11).

Much like Aristotle, Shaftsbury made a similar claim. The poet does not seek, he asserted, to express particularity like 'the mere face-painter' and 'the mere Historian' but that rather they offer universality. This, Watt claims, is precisely what the novelist under the influence of John Locke's

[5] As these theorists suggest that it would not simply be a matter of, as Engels said, Friday arriving with a revolver to usurp power but an act of usurping discourse see Spivak 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's Crusoe/Roxana'"

empiricist philosophy sought to negate. Defoe and Richardson were, he repeatedly contends, simply 'content to be mere face-painters and historians' (2015, 17).

As Pam Morris says, in her survey of different conceptualisations of realism, *Robinson Crusoe*, in Watt's account, shifted literature from:

> the classical concern with universal truth to a notion of particularity. This particularised epistemological perspective, stemming from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), brought a new emphasis within literature upon individualised character, located in a carefully specified place and time (2003, 77).

Realism, in these terms, relies on accurately representing the detail of an external reality. This idea has often been associated with *Robinson Crusoe*. Italo Calvino, writing a few years before Watt published *The Rise of the Novel*, made a similar point stating that the accumulation of detail in the novel 'is aimed at convincing the reader of the veracity of his [Crusoe's] account' (2009, 99). In his monograph on narrative, Paul Cobley, states that a fundamental characteristic of the realist narrative is precisely this. That is:

> In order to maintain a felicity to the real world…a narrative must engage in a quasi-mimetic presentation which accurately *describes* details such as interior of rooms, the physical appearance of minor characters, the weather and background sounds (2014, 76).

As Cobley goes on to say, this is what Barthes referred to as the 'reality effect', which is the consequence of an almost wanton detailing of small, at times seeming insignificant, objects in order to create a 'readerly' sense of a stable quotidian world. Similarly, Watt's formal realism relies on what he states is:

> the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience and, is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms (2014, 32).

Another pervasive element of Watt's 'formal realism' is the novel's distinct theory of language and its stylistics. According to Watt, this again owes its origins to Locke and empiricism. Locke saw, so Watt proceeds, figurative language as an 'abuse' or 'pleasurable deceit'. Both Defoe and Richardson accordingly thus developed 'a fictional narrative written in a prose which restricts itself to a descriptive and denotative use of language' (2015, 29). Unlike 'the previous stylistic tradition' these two writers were intimately concerned, he states, with 'the correspondence of words to things' (2015, 28).

I will shortly connect Watt's readings of realism, and of *Crusoe*, with Coetzee's *Foe*. But before I do that the theoretical *counter-weight* of Bakhtin in my thesis must raise its head. This is

because Bakhtin too understood that a strain within realist fiction and its interpretation – what he called 'monologism' – was derived from the idea that the word 'corresponded' to a stable and unitary 'thing'. As he puts it, monologism 'materialises all reality'. Or to state it another way, there is 'centripetal force' in theory that demands that there is a denotative and singular relationship between the word and its concept. Similarly to Watt, Bakhtin states that this (mistaken) idea:

> was promoted in modern times by European rationalism, with its cult of a unified and exclusive reason, and especially by the Enlightenment, during which time the basic generic forms of European artistic prose took shape (1984, 82).

Bakhtin would go on to refer to this tendency in 'artistic prose' as 'monologic realism' which has, at its centre, a 'reifying mode of thought' which, similarly to Barthes, he claimed occurred 'under the conditions of capitalism' (1984, 62). This analysis, of the roots of a certain tendency in realism, is surprisingly similar to that of Watt's. But Bakhtin cautions in various of his writings that the idea that our relationship to reality is unmediated and direct is not 'really real' but rather an attempt 'to unify and centralize the verbal ideological world' (2014, 270). Or as Gardiner offers, it is 'a feature of ideological hegemony' (1992, 90) and what Stuart Hall, following Barthes, referred to as the 'reality effect' of ideology (see 'The Rediscovery of "Ideology"'). In other words, Bakhtin suggests that certain realist novels, produced under capitalist and Enlightenment conditions, were the repositories of a bourgeois ideology and its monologic understanding of the language's relationship to its signified.

But let us return, for the moment, to Watt. For formal realism's unifying tendencies are not simply related to a centripetal theory of language but also to the forces of rational causation that relate to the development of plot in the novel. This, Watt contends, distinguishes itself 'from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences' (2015, 22). In other words, a novel's narratives are based on the supposition that actions have causes. As Roland Barthes suggested of realist fictions, their narrated events are attached to each other 'with a kind of logical "paste"' (1993, 156). Or in the famous example offered by E.M. Forster: 'the king died the queen died of grief' grief is the 'cause' in the narrative.

However, as Watt himself points out, most, if not all, of Defoe's novels, with their episodic nature, fail to apply the 'logical paste' of causation correctly and to conclude satisfactorily. The importance of Richardson's position in the history of the novel, according to Watt, is largely due to his success in dealing with several of the major formal problems which Defoe had left unresolved. The most important of them was that of plot, and here 'Richardson's solution was remarkably simple: he avoided an episodic plot by basing his novels on a single action, a courtship'

(2015, 135). It is, Watt goes on to say, 'odd that so fateful a literary revolution should have been brought about with so ancient a literary weapon' (2015, 135). It was, after all, precisely what Aristotle stated in his *Poetics*. That is, that a plot must be a 'complete action' with a beginning, a middle and end. Or as Cervantes suggests of *Don Quixote*, the novel, that it is 'a body with all its members intact, so that the middle corresponds to the beginning, and the end to the beginning and the middle' (2005, 412). And this is precisely the model that formal realism, according to Watt, adopted via the influence of Richardson (and not Defoe).

However, there is one more component part of the realist novel's form which cannot be ignored in the context of my analysis of Coetzee's 'rewriting' of *Robinson Crusoe*. That is, that all novels in this tradition, the thesis of *The Rise of the Novel* declares, contain a 'moral claim'. Although Watt argues that formal realism is only a mode of presentation, and is therefore constructed to be objective or 'ethically neutral', he goes on to argue that the novelist's task is to reveal 'deeper [moral] meanings without any breach of the formal realism' (2015, 117). Despite the fact that the very aim of the novel seems merely the ethically neutral matter of 'holding a mirror up to nature' it is Watt's claim that the writer must nevertheless find ways in which to convey a 'moral pattern' (2015, 118).

It is Watt's further claim that Defoe's novels contain an outlook of a middle-class 'economic individualism and the somewhat secularised puritanism' (2015, 49). Watt states that: 'we must remember that he [Defoe] was in fact faced with a problem which was then new and has since remained the central problem of the novel: how to impose a coherent moral structure on a narrative without detracting from its air of literal authenticity' (2015, 117). It is in passages such as these that Watt comes close to confirming that 'formal realism' is the product of what Bakhtin calls a 'monologically formulated authorial worldview' (1984, 11). If this is indeed true then it would not be too great a leap to suggest that Defoe was attempting to convey a monologic ideology of his class and religion. Edward Said too (a theorist who plays a significant role in the latter part of this thesis) claims in his *Culture and Imperialism* that realism – like *Mansfield Park* in which Sir Thomas is very much a later equivalent of Crusoe – has an explicit 'ideological and moral' affirmation (1993, 80-97).

Now, it is one of my contentions that Coetzee's *Foe* takes as its main 'pretext' a particular reading of *Robinson Crusoe* as a realist novel: a reading indebted to Watt, or at least to the version of *Crusoe* first put forward by Watt. In this context, it is important to note the influence of Watt's thesis on Coetzee as a critic. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee, while talking of *Foe*, mentions that he has read Watt (Coetzee and Atwell, 1992, 146). What is more, in an interview with Joanna Scott, a decade later, he is more explicit, stating:

> [t]here's a good deal of truth in the account of realism—in England, at any rate—that situates it within the rise of the middle class. As you know, the famous book is the one by Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*. It dates from the 1950s, and has been queried on details, sometimes large details, but as long as one doesn't generalize too far from the group of novelists Watt was writing about, I think its outlines remain very firm … [and] very much tied up with the middle class. (1997, 97-98)

It is my contention that Coetzee never moved past Watt's singular reading of Defoe's work. Following Watt, Coetzee himself agrees, in his introduction to the World Classics Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, that Defoe is a realist 'in that he is an empiricist, and empiricism is one of the tenets of the realist novel' (2001, 22). In the same essay, he again agrees with Watt when he argues that in *Robinson Crusoe* there is a 'moral', all be it confused by, what he terms, Defoe's lack of 'execution' (2001, 23).

Indeed Coetzee seems to obediently follow Watt's views by stating that Defoe's narrator makes:

> bald empirical descriptions…when Crusoe has to solve the hundreds of practical problems involved in getting the contents of the ship ashore, or making a clay cooking pot, one can feel the writing move into a higher gear, a more intense level of engagement. For page after page – for the first time in the history of fiction – we see a minute, ordered description of how things are done. It is a matter of pure writerly attentiveness, pure submission to the exigencies of a world which, through being submitted to in a state so close to spiritual absorption, becomes transfigured, real (2001, 20).

This is of course a piece of pure Wattian theory closing with a hint of Barthes' notion of the 'reality effect'.[6] As Watt argues, it is 'the emphasis on particulars' (2015, 15) that is a defining element of the literary shift towards the novel's formal realism that began with Defoe. One such example of this is, as Watt points out, Crusoe's making of bread, a description of which, he says, goes on for seven pages (2015, 72). As Watt makes clear, it is Defoe's description of processes and the partiality of objects and settings that is at the root of realism. Certainly the above quote suggests that Coetzee's reading of *Robinson Crusoe* was allied to Watt's. But there are further aspects of *Foe* that draw it ever closer to a critique of Watt's formal realism. These will be taken up in the opening paragraphs of the next section.

## *Foe* as Realism's Foe

J.M. Coetzee's novel, *Foe*, is the chronicle of the castaway Sarah Barton's encounters with three men: Cruso, Friday and Foe. Barton, having been forced off a sailing ship for unaccounted reasons,

[6] For Barthes influence on Coetzee see Stephen Watson's essay 'Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee'.

is washed up on an island inhabited by Cruso and his tongueless servant Friday. While living with them and experiencing their bleak, inward turning lives she observes both Cruso and Friday's seemingly arbitrary routines. Then, after she is saved and Cruso dies, she is taken to England with Friday where she attempts to sell her inconclusive experiences to Foe, a penurious and evasive writer.

The claims I have been making for Watt's central role in mediating *Robinson Crusoe* to Coetzee are not entirely original. Dominic Head has argued that *Foe* is a 'writing back to Ian Watt, who established Defoe's formative role in the history of the novel in his classic work of criticism, *The Rise of the Novel*' (2009, 62). But Head's point is slightly different to mine. It is Head's contention that *Foe's* allusions and references complicate the kind of monolithic *canon* Watt set up in his *The Rise of the Novel*. However, Head does not otherwise follow through with the question of the relation of Watt's text, and its aesthetic and moral arguments, to Coetzee's rewriting, that is my concern here.

Instead Head moves off from the engagement with Watt, and simply goes on to acknowledge, as did Gayatri Spivak some years before, that Coetzee's intertextual references to Defoe are various. As Head points out, embedded within it are works from '*Robinson Crusoe* to *Roxana* to the short story/anecdote "A True Revelation of the Apparition on One Mrs Veal" (1706)'. But Coetzee's novel references and responds not only to Defoe in particular but to other novels which Watt draws on in order to make his case about formal realism. A clear instance of this is Coetzee's epistolary borrowings from Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* when the narrator, Sarah Barton, takes to writing unanswered letters to the author Foe (Defoe's actual surname at birth) about her life both with Cruso on the island and in London.

The allusions to realism in *Foe* do not stop there. The names of almost every character are all themselves references to the realist tradition. From the primary narrator's Sarah Barton, which is a splicing together of Sarah from Defoe's *Roxana* and Barton from Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, to Amy the maid retained from *Roxana*, to Jack the pickpocket, who both in *Foe* and Defoe's *Colonel Jack*, is one of the 'orphans who sleep in the ash-pits at the glassworks'.[7] Even the child Sarah, who claims (while seemingly under Foe's command) to be Sarah Barton's daughter, states that her father's name is George Lewes – the name of George Eliot's lover. Lewes was of course the author of the book *Realism in Art: Recent German Fiction* (1858) and wrote a famous review of *Jane Eyre* which expounded a theory of realism in the novel.

Importantly, this naming follows the postmodern theory of a text's relationship to textuality rather than the 'real' world. That is to say that it rejects the realist novel's convention

[7] Barton could also be a reference to George Eliot's 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton'

which ascribed names to characters, according to Watt, that were 'complete and realistic' and taken from everyday life. Instead Coetzee consciously eschews the realist tradition by having his characters names contain intertextual relationships with canonical realist works. Importantly it is this insubstantiality of the characters – their lack of relation to the empirical quotidian world – that is one of Coetzee's core concerns. Again, Head states that one of the central themes of *Foe* is its attempt to 'expose the dangers of a naive perception of realism' (2009, 127). By the same token, realism is put on the stage, as it were, as a mode to be interrogated and reflected upon.

As Stephen Watson (one of Coetzee's close colleagues and writing in the same year *Foe* was published) argues, the literature based on the realist model disintegrates in much of Coetzee's work. As Watson goes on to say, Coetzee did not wish to register the impact of colonialism as is 'customary in the realist novel, through a series of incidents or events' (1986, 373). This can clearly be seen in the antirealism that Sarah Barton offers in Part I of the novel. Much like certain historians who have, according to Hayden White, rejected realism's narrative form, Barton refuses 'to tell a story about the past…with well-marked beginning, middle and end phases' (1980, 6). Instead, when retelling of the events of her life as a castaway on the island with Cruso and Friday, Barton offers something closer to White's notion of a chronicle, which has no necessary causational links. As Barton proffers: 'I have set down the history of our time on the island as well as I can, and enclose it herewith. It is a sorry limping affair (the history, not the time itself) – "the next day," the refrain goes, "the next day … the next day" – but you will know how to set it right.' (2010, 47)

The intimation here is that the 'historical chronicle' (in Hayden White's terms) that Barton offers Foe, the realist author, needs to be 'set right' and formed into a realist story. As White has argued, the chronicle is something less than an organised 'factual' and 'fictional storytelling' in that it 'does not so much "conclude" as simply terminate; typically it lacks closure, that summing up of "meaning" of the chain of events with which it deals that we normally expect from the well-made story' (1980, 20). Furthermore the type of chronicle Barton offers lacks realist causation or what Roland Barthes suggests in *S/Z* is realism's 'logical "paste"'. The reported events of Barton's time on the island, in White's words, 'seem merely to have *occurred*', they are simply episodic without logical inductive causation.

As Barton says to Foe when defending her retelling of these incidents '[y]ou call it an episode, but I call it a story in its own right' (2010, 121). However, as Foe explains to her, what is required in a story is that:

> we therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest of the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother. It is thus we make up a book: loss then

> quest, then recovery; beginning then middle then end. As to novelty, this is lent by the island episode – which is properly the second part of the middle – and by the reversal in which the daughter takes up the quest abandoned by her mother (2010, 117).

It is Watt's claim, that the realist form, which Richardson perfected, is premised on a single subject or 'action' with the Aristotelian beginning, middle and end. Barton herself makes direct reference to this form, and her rejection of it, when she says to Foe of her recounting of her ordeal on the island is a 'narrative with a beginning and an end…[but it] lacks only a substantial and varied middle' (2010, 121).

As White argues, chronicles, unlike realist narratives, offer simple episodic events without conclusion because there is 'no central subject *about which* a story could be told.' (1980, 13) It is perhaps interesting to note here that this is precisely the problem that Watt has with Defoe's novels. That is to say that they are episodic and lack the form of a complete action. This, as we have stated earlier, was in fact, according to Watt, only perfected by Richardson. Coetzee regularly implies that Part I of *Foe* is a writing back to formal realism's organising principles. As Coetzee says, in his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, 'one can see Defoe trying – with incomplete success – to bend the story of his adventure hero to fit a scriptural pattern of disobedience, punishment repentance and deliverance.' (2001, 19) As Gardiner points out – in his book on Bakhtin and ideology – attempts to pattern experience or structure reality 'are a potent site of the reproduction of bourgeois ideology' (1992, 147). As he goes on to point out this is precisely what Barthes' notion of the 'reality effect', found in both myth and realism, attempts to impose. However, in *Foe* this organising into a 'pattern' is broken down. The motivations and reasonings behind the actions of both Cruso and Friday remain inconclusive in Barton's handling of her story and the 'ethic' or 'meaning' of their lives retold remain obscure.

Cruso, in Barton's retelling, is a man who builds farming terraces on a deserted and otherwise hostile island for no comprehensible reason. He has no seed to plant, nor is there any cause to believe, as he seems to, that there will be 'those who come after us' (2010, 33). As Head argues, the ethic of Defoe's Crusoe is that of the 'archetypal imperialist, governed by economic self-aggrandisement' (2009, 114) while Coetzee's Cruso, with his 'sterile' work and his silent, seemingly acquiescent, servant seems to offer no specific ethic.[8]

Friday's character too is inscrutable, not least because he has no means of communicating through language, due to the cutting out of his tongue – a brutal literalizing of his silencing

[8] Dominic Head claims that Cruso stands in as the archetype of exhausted imperialism and as such Coetzee reveals him as a 'postcolonial figure'. Just how this functions within the text remains obscure to me and I would argue that no simple one-to-one relationship like this exists. In fact as my argument suggests Coetzee consciously attempts to defy classification although clearly he draws some analogies with Cruso and the apartheid government.

suggested by Defoe's text. Friday's actions also defy definitive interpretation. He is seen by Barton to swim out on a plank to a specific place in the sea and spread petals on the water for reasons unknowable (although it is suggested, but never proved, that it is perhaps the location of their shipwreck). What is more, neither Cruso nor Friday show the slightest desire to recover their previous lives, nor do they elicit any hope of returning to where they originally came from. Cruso, Barton says, 'had no stories to tell of the life he had lived as a trader and planter before the shipwreck … When I spoke of England and of all the things I intended to see and do when I was rescued, he seemed not to hear me' (2010, 34).

Here Coetzee's stylistics are underpinned by a literary movement antithetical to Watt's identification of realism. Instead it is far closer, as Watson points out, to Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* (Watson, 1986) – stylistics that seek to disrupt the literary realist modes of the past. For Barton Cruso and Friday's position is, in Camus' sense, absurd.[9] Simply put they seem, unlike in realist fiction, incapable of fully exhibiting any human motive or reason for their actions in relation to the world that surrounds them. As Camus formulated the idea of what he termed 'the absurd', they live in exile 'deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land' (2000, 13).

Both Cruso and Friday have seemingly divested themselves of reasons for their actions within their location. They are in a position of Camus' actors, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, who have become divorced from their setting. That is to say they are people who have stepped outside the reasonings, motivations and the ethic authors, and indeed we, ordinarily impose on our lives and those of others. And so narrative's rationalizing or resolving 'middle', which White and indeed Watt claim is the necessary foundation of realist narrative, is absent.[10] As such *Foe* exposes the implications of the realist's monologic approach to causation.

In other words, the 'absurdist' quality in *Foe* underlines, and throws into relief what Watt calls the 'moral theme' of realism, as well as its ideological connection to colonialism. As Watson argues, while discussing Coetzee's earlier work, Coetzee is aware that realism has had a role to play in colonialism. That 'it is through language itself, through the conventional representations which come to be accepted as either 'natural' or 'universal', that we are colonised' (1986, 374). In response to the monologism of realism, Watson says Coetzee 'wants to create what Barthes would have called a 'writeable' text…one which does not attempt to reduce the potentially multiple plurality

[9] Here it is perhaps interesting to note that Stephen Watson in his essay 'The Heart of Albert Camus' suggests that certain elements of Camus' absurd were intimately linked with the colonial condition.
[10] It is perhaps interesting to note that their position is not dissimilar to Camus' Sisyphus although their reasoning for being 'happy' remain entirely obscure.

of the text, by fixing one single meaning for it' (1986, 374). Certainly the intimation throughout *Foe* is that realism is a monologic form which attempts to produce a monist meaning.

Implicit in Coetzee's critique of realism, is a critique of a particular view of language. Barton acknowledges that the words and language of Foe, the realist author, are monologic in that they reject her as a substantial and psychologically plural being with, in Bakhtin's sense, a subjective 'ideological' position of her own. As she states, 'now all my life grows to be a story and there is nothing of my own left to me.' (2010, 133) In Bakhtin's terms Foe never offers a 'sideways glance' at Barton's words and language as she expresses them. He never acknowledges the idea of the heteroglossia, the instability of language or differences in the (ideological) meaning words can have in the mouths of others. Instead Barton is simply reified into the language of the author. This results in Barton asking 'who is speaking me?' (2010, 133). Here Coetzee's postmodernist influences suggest a theory not unlike Bakhtin's, that words have no stable reference or signified. That is that the words Barton offers Foe are different in their signified (ideological) meaning from those that Foe writes down. However, the distinction between Bakhtin and Coetzee is that Coetzee's intimation in *Foe* is that the realist author is engaged in an attempt to bend the other's word into 'his' (sic) ideological singular meaning. That is, words are not, in the realist mouth, as Foe suggests near the end, simply 'a puff of air' (2010, 149).

The attack on what postmodernists termed logocentricism, what Bakhtin identifies with monologism and what Watt claims is the 'Lockean' theory of the language of the realist novel, is central to Foe. As Watt and Coetzee have noted, realism attempts to connect the word with reality and truth by its 'method of bald empirical description…of pure writerly submission to the exigencies of a world which, through being submitted to in a state so close to spiritual absorption, becomes transfigured, real' (2001, 20). As Barton tells of Cruso on the island:

> The truth that makes your story yours alone, that sets you apart from the old mariner by the fireside spinning yarns of sea-monsters and mermaids, resides in a thousand touches which today may seem of no importance, such as: When you made your needle (the needle you store in your belt), by what means did you pierce the eye? When you sewed your hat, what did you use for thread? Touches like these will one day persuade your countrymen that it is all true, every word, there was indeed once an island in the middle of the ocean where the wind blew and the gulls cried from the cliffs and a man named Cruso paced about in his apeskin clothes, scanning the horizon for a sail (2010, 18).

That is to say the (supposed) realism of Defoe, what Barthes called realism's 'reality effect', seemingly tries to deny that words are 'a puff of air' but are instead attempts to assert that they have a direct relationship to the empirical world. This 'reality effect' that realism proffers is, of course, directly related to the economic individualism that Watt argues is at the centre of the rise of the novel in general and *Robinson Crusoe* in particular.

Both Coetzee and Watt are seemingly in agreement with Watson's argument, following Albert Memmi, that 'the motive force of colonialism was essentially an economic one' (1986, 374). As Coetzee puts it, Crusoe's 'getting the contents of the ship ashore, or in making a clay cooking pot', (2001, 24) are not simply realist empiricism but also, as Watt puts it, 'detailed descriptions of economic life' (2015, 72). Economic individualism, Watt goes on to say, 'and its associated ideology' explains much of Crusoe's character (2015, 74). Of course this economic life of early capitalism, as described in *Robinson Crusoe*, is directly related, Coetzee argues, to 'the extension of British mercantile power in the new world and the establishment of new British colonies' (2001, 24). It is important to note that the economics of capitalism which resulted in colonialism has, according to both Coetzee and Barthes, a direct link to empiricism and realism's 'reality effect'.[11] That is to say, realism is related to and is a manifestation of a society that was informed by capitalism and its colonial practices and imperatives.

As such, one of the central concerns of Coetzee rewriting in *Foe* is Defoe's 'realist' handling of Friday. The Friday, who much like Barthes' 'Negro who salutes' in his essay 'Myth Today', is, as Spivak states in her essay on *Foe*, 'the prototype of the successful colonial subject' (1990, 14). As Spivak argues with regards to Defoe's Friday 'he learns his master's speech, does his master's work, happily swears loyalty, believes the culture of the master is better, and kills his other self to enter the shady plains of north-western Europe.' (1990, 14) This is of course not only Spivak's reading of Friday but Coetzee's too as when he states in his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe* that Friday is a 'cipher' who 'lacks autonomy' and 'is seen through Crusoe's eyes alone, and treated with self-congratulatory paternalism.' (2001, 25)

In *Foe* Friday is seemingly again seen only through the eyes of the narrator (in this case Barton), he is again a subaltern that does not speak his words but he is rewritten in the words of the author/narrator. However, Barton, in a passage that is remarkably similar to Spivak's argument in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', realises the implications of this position when she states: [12]

> Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence he is a substantial body he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us), what he is to the world is what I make of him (2010, 121-122).

[11] See Barthes's 'Myth Today'.

[12] Spivak's point in her essay that western intellectuals have made logocentric assumptions about highly complex and heterogeneous people in a culture and that they have taken it on themselves to speak for the subaltern rather than allowing them to speak for themselves is a position seemingly close to that of Coetzee's.

Here we see Coetzee's criticisms of realism and the realist assumptions about *character*. As I have stated, Coetzee intimates that realist fiction, with its Lockean underpinnings, lays claim to being able to differentiate and arrange a person's sensations and experiences into comprehensible narrative form. But here, the motivations and individual experiences that lie behind Friday's actions and his inner life remain entirely obscure to both Barton and the reader. With this the author's ability to produce significant realist form entirely collapses. As Brenda K. Marshall has put it '[u]ltimately, *Foe's* text 'refuses' to represent Friday's story, it refuses [in the Barthesian sense] readability.' (1992, 125) Of course, the intimation of both Coetzee and Marshall is that the realism of *Robinson Crusoe* is monologic with a singular colonial/capitalist ethic or *doxa*. And it is above all the early capitalist ethic of the eighteenth century, with its foundations in empiricism, that produces Friday in the mode of an identifiable colonial subject.

Coetzee in this sense refuses to simply rewrite Friday into a new realist (postcolonial) form. This is, after all, the very notion that Coetzee's novel seeks to correct and he seemingly does not wish to recreate realism. As such Coetzee's Friday does not speak and represent himself in the language of the colonial. And in these terms he remains unknowable. For despite both Cruso and Foe's attempts to give Friday 'words to live by', like 'dig' and 'ship' and 'Africa' 'there will always be a voice within him to whisper doubts, whether in words or nameless sound or tunes or tones.' (2010, 149) Although Foe, the realist author, demands that 'we must make Friday's silence speak', no clear picture of Friday's internal life (or indeed his ideological position) can be offered nor, it would seem, should it be offered. As Spivak suggests both Barton and Foe wish to 'father' Friday's narrative. They both try to coax a story out of him and attempt to create a narrative 'pattern' from his mere presence.

Derek Attridge argues that '[i]n Foe's view, Friday's silence is simply a riddle that must be resolved.' (2007, 82). Coetzee, Attridge continues, acknowledges that the 'dominant language' (or monologic language) of the 'literary canon' wishes to pattern the language and speak for the silenced. In this sense Coetzee offers a dialogic response to what Bakhtin would call the 'official language' of the canon. In other words, in both Foe and Barton's failure to form a narrative for Friday, Coetzee rewrites or 'writes back' to the British realist novel's tradition and its organising principles as argued for by Watt. Coetzee in this sense does not 'write back' by giving a voice to the voiceless. As such *Foe* is a very different kind of rewrite to that of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which gives voice to certain silenced fictional characters of its parent. Coetzee intimates that 'writing back' in a realist format may simply collude with rather than correct, if not the work, then at least the form. Instead the novel implicitly acknowledges that to do this is to efface the historical conditions of voicelessness itself. To be sure Coetzee in doing this avoids recreating the motives

of monologic realism but this comes at a cost. This cost is that it again excludes, although seemingly it does so for the right reasons. For to include would be in a sense to impose on the narrative both a monologic meaning and pattern.

As we have stated, as Gardiner points out, in his book on Bakhtin, that attempts to pattern experience or structure reality 'are a potent site of the reproduction of bourgeois ideology' (1992, 147). Coetzee, Bahktin and Barthes all adumbrate that the realist discourse that arose from certain enlightenment thinking was ideological in nature in that it attempted to overlay a pattern on 'reality'. Watt's arguments in *The Rise of the Novel* go relatively far in confirming this thinking. Watt, after all, agrees with Coetzee, Bakhtin and Barthes on two counts. One, that authors with the help of empiricist philosophy 'imposed a coherent moral structure on a narrative'. And, two, that the empiricist theory of language insists that there is a singular and unmediated relationship between the word and the outer (real) world. Coetzee's rewrite *Foe* seems overtly aimed at 'correcting' and exposing these notions. That is to say it denies that the author's words contain the singular power to signify 'the other' and secondly that a narrative causational pattern can be imposed on the episodic chronicle of Barton and the unknowable motivations of Friday. In other words Coetzee offers the athithesis to the thesis that is monologic realism.

So far I have explored Coetzee's rewrite of *Foe*, emphasizing in particular how it offers a critique and correction of the ideological assumptions it finds in *Robinson Crusoe*. I have further suggested that, in addition to being informed by post-colonial readings of *Crusoe* of various kinds, it is also indebted to a long tradition – beginning with Watt, whose work and theory Coetzee knew and accepted – which reads the novel as realist, and which espies in its very realism a set of ideological commitments. One of the major contentions of this thesis is that each of the rewrites with which it is concerned shares this stance towards realism, and towards the putatively monological realism of its 'pre-texts'. But here – as in each subsequent chapter – is also where I want to pause and ask some questions. First, are realist novels really monologic? And second, is the text being rewritten – in this case *Robinson Crusoe* – really realism?

It is here that we must once again turn to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. For although we have used him and borrowed his language to confirm the notion of a monoligic realism it must be conceded that this was not his thesis with regards to the ontology of the novel. Instead it was his claim that the realist monologic strain in discourse is simply representative of an authoritative tendency and does not reflect reality (properly so called). As he put it:

> Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments

> and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (2014, 276).

In his essay 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin argued that the novel as a genre was the 'decentralising' site 'of the verbal ideological world' (2014, 368). In fact Bakhtin's argument is that characters that are inherent to the novel – the adventurer, the fool, the outsider and those of the carnival – are not ciphers (as Coetzee states Defoe's Friday is) but that all fulfil the role of undermining the official authoritative language of those who hold power, the 'priests and monks, kings … *scholars* and jurists' (italics are mine). As he states elsewhere 'the language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe it as a singular unitary language' (2014, 47).

If this is a valid interpretation of both language and the novel then it has some dramatic significance in relation to Coetzee's 'anti-thesis' of realism. Of course Coetzee, like Barthes, would not deny the underlying premise of Bakhtin's theory of language, which is that language is 'enveloped in an obscuring mist' of plurality. What perhaps they would reject is that classical or colonial writers were conscious of this or that, if they were, they forcefully worked against this notion. Although Barthes suggests in works like *S/Z* that the classical realist works are riddled with the roots and tendrils of plural implications, he also argued (at times) that these works were readerly or monologic.[13] What Coetzee implies in his rewriting is that Defoe in particular, and realist authors in general, were writers either unaware of the dialogism of language or that they were ordained ideologues, or both.

The other implication of Coetzee's critique, certainly with regards to his notion of Friday, is that it seems to suggest, in Bakhtin's terms, that the author is unable to access the decentring language of 'the other'. This at the very least suggests that the postmodern author much like the realist author is doomed only to reflect their own single-voiced ideology – although the postmodern author is at least partly cognisant of this failure. In cutting out the tongue of Friday, in Bakhtinian terms, Coetzee simply replaces (or rewrites) the formal realism of Defoe with a postmodern monologism of its own. The silence of 'the other' in this sense becomes monolithic (rather than monologic) in that its presence is characterless and without nuance. As such Coetzee returns the novel to a singular-voiced formalism.

As Coetzee expresses in discussions in *The Good Story* and in *Doubling the Point,* this is perhaps not something he is necessarily uncomfortable with considering, as he argues that fictional

[13] See Barthes' argument in 'From Work to Text'

construction of this nature is very much part of our everyday life. But Coetzee in *Foe*, despite his slightly limp-limbed shrugs towards a relativism elsewhere, is offering a correction. That is to say he is suggesting that at the very least there is something inherently mistaken in (monologic) realism. But this correction, as correction, will fall somewhat flat if realism in general and Defoe's work in particular are not premised on Watt's formal realism with its unitary and essentialising (what I have called 'ideological') imperatives. That is if Defoe's work is not really realist, in Watt's sense, then Coetzee is simply correcting Watt's reading of Defoe rather than the grander claim of correcting the ideology of bourgeois colonialism that is inherent in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Or as Bakhtin puts it, Coetzee is responding to Watt's reduced theme written 'on the piano keyboard' while 'ignoring the fundamental plurality of unmerged consciousnesses' in the novel's symphony.

## Daniel Defoe and Dialogism

Thus far we have explored Coetzee's rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe* as offering a critique of the novel insofar as it obeys the tenets of novelistic realism – and insofar as these are caught up with a set of problematic assumptions about selfhood, language and the relation of these to capitalism and colonialism. In this, we have suggested, Coetzee's account is mediated by, and critically endorses, that of Watt. That is to say, he treats the novel and the realism of Watt as both valid and deeply problematic. What he *does not* problematise is Defoe's novel's appurtenance to the category of formal realism.

What is at least peculiar with regards to ascribing formal realism's provenance to Defoe is, as Watt himself concedes, how seldom Defoe's novels conform to the tenets of the theory. One of the most obvious examples of this is the fact that none of Defoe's novels have a clear 'beginning, middle and end'. That is to say, rather than offering a 'realist narrative' they are far closer to White's idea of history being the mere movement of one episode to the next. Although there is, to a certain degree, the idea that present action was caused by past experience, the pre-texts of *Foe* – *Robinson Crusoe, Roxana* and *Colonel Jack* – are episodic in nature. To be sure there is nominally an arch of causation acting within, in particular *Robinson Crusoe*, where, as Coetzee puts, there is the narrative arch of 'disobedience, punishment, repentance and deliverance'. However, even Coetzee admits, Defoe manages this with 'incomplete success'. Or as Ian Watt acknowledges, the singular moral pattern of realism in Defoe was often 'crowded out of the picture' (2015, 108). Both Watt and Coetzee, then, fall into the trap (or at least pattern) of reading the novel against some realist 'ideal', in relation to which it falls short. As Watt opines, Richardson (not Defoe) resolved the 'formal

problems which Defoe had left unresolved' by introducing the Aristotelian imperative of avoiding 'an episodic plot by basing his novels on a single action' (2015, 135).

Indeed there are many occasions within *Robinson Crusoe* where Barthes' 'logical paste' or the realist causational links, which, as we have discussed, are an inherent aspect of realism, are circumvented. Defoe certainly at times simply resorts to something far more like White's notion of a chronicle without causation. The most obvious example of this is Crusoe's diary when he states:

> Dec. 24. Much rain all night and all day; no stirring.
> Dec 25. Rain all day
> Dec 26. No Rain, and the earth much cooler than before, and pleasanter

Here, far from Watt's 'formal realism', Crusoe's account is much like that of Sarah Barton's 'the next day … the next day' in Part I of *Foe*. Furthermore, examples such as Friday's encounter with the bear in the Pyrenees at the end of the novel are strewn throughout the book offering episodes that have little connection with the rest of the novel. This is not, in the words of Coetzee's Foe, how we make (realist) books. As Foe states 'how we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end' (2010, 117).

There are, however, other interesting elements with regards to the diary entries.[14] As I have stated above, Coetzee, in his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, follows Watt in suggesting that Defoe was attempting to create a monologic or singular moral pattern. This, so Watt's argument goes, is the result of Defoe's empiricist understanding of the supposed stable relationship between language and the world. However, it is Peter Boxall's claim that the intervention of the diary entries subverts this 'realist' stability of the 'reality effect'.

Perhaps the paradigmatic example of this are the two different descriptions of Crusoe's washing up on the island. The first account of the event is in the mode of formal realism:

> I walked upon the shore, lifting my hands, and my whole being, as I may say, wrapt up in the contemplation of my deliverance, making a thousand gestures and motions which I cannot describe reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul saved but myself; for as for them, I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their hats, one cap and two shoes that were not fellows. (1995, 52)

However, the beginning of his diary reports events in a distinctly different narrative mode:

> And now it was that I began to keep a journal of every day's employment; for, indeed, at first I was in too much hurry, and not only hurry as to labour, but in too much discomposure of mind; and my journal would have been full of many dull things; for example, I must have said thus: "Sept. the 30th. After I had got to shore, and escaped drowning, instead of being thankful to God for my

[14] Peter Boxall points this out in his discussion on novelistic realism in *The Value of the Novel* (2015) see p.54

> deliverance, having first vomited, with the great quantity salt water which had got into my stomach, and recovering myself a little, I ran about the shore wringing my hands and beating my head and face, exclaiming at my misery, and crying out, 'I was undone, undone!' till, tired and faint, I was forced to lie down on the ground to repose, but durst not sleep for fear of being devoured." (1995, 73-4)

Here the diary stands in a dialogic relationship with the Crusoe's more formal realist narrative in a manner that, as Boxall rightly points out, 'undermines this effect' (2015, 54). That is as Bakhtin would say of 'the fool's' discourse in the novel, Crusoe's diary 'makes strange' the more official and stable discourse of the professed 'confession'. No mention of the cap and shoes are made in the diary and the calm steady reflections and contemplations are replaced by untrammelled fear and confusion.

This is where we glimpse, I think, the blindspot in Coetzee's rewrite. Coetzee, does not seem to consider the idea that Defoe's work might be dialogic or writerly. And perhaps this is precisely what cannot be acknowledged for a rewrite as 'correction' to be possible. Coetzee states in his essay on *Robinson Crusoe* 'characters in Defoe's I-centred fictions tend to be ciphers' (2001, 25) This seems to echo Bakhtin's idea that monologism is an 'I-centred' act without the presence of 'the other'. As Bakhtin wrote:

> With a monologic approach (in its extreme and purest form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness and not another consciousness…monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materialises all reality (1984, 292-3).

Now, it is certainly true that Crusoe lives in an 'otherless' world on his 'Island of Despair' for a great part of the novel. However, Bakhtin suggests that in speech, and particularly in prose discourse, there is never a time where 'the other' is not present in some capacity. For 'the self' to exist Bakhtin argues that it must be always held in a dialogic relationship with 'the other'. As Holquist puts it, life and being in the world is 'a multiple phenomenon of essentially three elements' the self, the other and the relationship between them. Bakhtin, Holquist continues, takes 'the implications of dialogue to their radical extreme and assumes that at no level where communication is possible is the subject ever isolated' (1990, 57). Or as Bakhtin states 'two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence.' (1984, 252) In this sense the monologism of a single syntactic whole is nothing more than myth and self-delusion. As he says of Dostoyevsky's *The Double* there is a 'collision and interruption of various accents within the bounds of a single syntactic whole, that is, precisely by the fact that this whole, while being one, accommodates in itself the accents of two voices' (1984, 224-225).

Returning to our reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, we can see one moment where the bounds of Crusoe's syntactic whole is interrupted during his isolation. That is when the 'I' encounters itself as a plural or double-voiced phenomenon, when Crusoe falls asleep only to be:

> awaked out of my sleep by a voice calling me by my name several times, "Robin, Robin, Robin Crusoe: poor Robin Crusoe! Where are you, Robin Crusoe? Where are you? Where have you been?" (1995, 109).

The voice as we discover is that of Poll, his parrot, who is literally parroting Crusoe's lamentations of despair. Much like when the diary reveals the unnarrated voice of Crusoe's inner life, the reader, and indeed Crusoe himself, is made aware that a dialogic relationship is at play. That is to say that there are two narratives and two Crusoes – the novel in this sense is polyphonic. It is here that an objective version of Crusoe is presented that is in stark contrast with the more empirical subjective descriptions of *homo laborans* the reader has been 'subjected' to. It is here also where the singular ideology of the early capitalist in complete mastery of his world is ruptured revealing the duality of Janus.

Of course, the importance of otherness with regards to *Robinson Crusoe* cannot be ignored without considering Friday. It is, in many ways, not surprising that Coetzee reads *Robinson Crusoe* as a monologic work. For, as he says, it contains the 'rationale that Western colonialism offered'. Furthermore, Coetzee goes on to state that Defoe is implicated, by his descriptions of Friday, in affirming the totalitarian nature of the race societies that developed under colonialism. As Holquist states monologism is, at its core, the totalitarian monistic imperative that offers an 'official discourse' as a singular absolute language.

Of course within a South African context this was precisely what the apartheid regime attempted to produce by introducing a law, in 1974, that would effectively make Afrikaans the singular medium of instruction. This would of course lead to the Soweto uprising in 1976. Coetzee follows this line of thought by having Sarah Barton and Foe, like Defoe's Crusoe, attempt to instruct Friday in the monologic language and written form of the coloniser. However, as Holquist says, Bakhtin argued that such 'an extreme monologism is both theoretically and practically impossible: dialogism is a realism' (1990, 53). And there is certainly an argument that instead of supporting the monologic singular ethic of colonialism *Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe go some way to denying it.

Although some critics have taken issue with Friday's failure to speak English correctly, Friday's hybrid creole formulations can be read as precisely the heteroglossia that Bakhtin argues is at the centre of the novel's form and the dialogic act.[15] There is a strong argument that can be made that in speaking the way he does, Friday affirms the triadic nature of dialogism. That is to

[15] Spivak makes the rather peculiar point in her essay, considering her own arguments, that she can speak 'better' English than Friday.

say, Friday's presence and his speech within the novel allows for Crusoe to reflect upon his own Europeaness.

Crusoe states, after all, that Friday's voice is 'pleasant to hear' and he admits that 'the pleasantest year of all the life I led in this place' was when 'Friday began to talk'. He says that Friday's 'unfeigned honesty' is something he begins to love (1995, 164). Although Friday is converted to Christianity by Crusoe he never fully takes on European patterns of language and thought. In doing so he offers an ideological opposition and a rational counterpoint to that of Crusoe. As Friday says on one occasion: 'if God much strong, much might as the devil, why God no kill the devil, so make him no more wicked?' (1995, 167) This is a question Crusoe cannot fully answer and he admits 'I pretended not to hear him' (1995, 168). As Homi K. Bhabha, in a theory not unlike Bakhtin's, says the effect of mimicry by the colonized of colonializers' authoritarian discourse is 'profound and disturbing …and produces another knowledge of its norms' (2004, 123).

However, this is not to deny that Defoe's works are filled with references to the master/servant relationships, to 'cannibals' and to 'savages' whose practices produce an 'abhorrence at the very thought of [them]'. (1995, 197) But this, at least, should be mediated by the other ideas Crusoe expounds. One such idea occurs during the dialogic exchanges where it appears Friday's thought, personality and language is morally superior to that of Crusoe and the other Europeans one encounters in Defoe's novels. Where Crusoe, in one of the early episodes of the novel, shows a decided disloyalty to his first servant by selling him into slavery, Friday is described and proves to be 'faithful', 'loving' and 'sincere'. As Max Novak, a prolific scholar of Defoe, states 'these were qualities Defoe admired above all' (1996, 52) and they are values which are often placed, Rousseau-like, in stark opposition to the corrupt Europeans that Defoe depicts.

As Dennis Todd in his recent essay, '*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism', argues, Crusoe's attitudes undergo a 'radical transformation' after the arrival of Friday on the island. This is because Crusoe realises that Friday:

> seems hardly savage at all but kind and loyal, a good son (unlike Crusoe himself), and "the aptest scholar that ever was". The line between civilized and savage, colonizer and Other, increasingly becomes less and less definite. Cannibals, Crusoe comes to understand, are not the monsters he originally thought. They possess "the same powers, the same reason, the same affections, the same sentiments of kindness and obligation … the same sense of gratitude, sincerity, fidelity, and all the capacities of doing good" that civilized Englishmen possess (2018, 146).

As Novak argues: '*Robinson Crusoe* is less of a defence of colonialism than it is a direct attack on the treatment of the natives by the Spanish in their conquest of America' (1996, 51). Certainly in *Colonel Jack*, which we should not forget is another of Coetzee's pre-texts, the eponymous

narrator, who is himself enslaved in Virginia, argues that 'Negroes', like all Europeans, 'are to be reasoned into things' (1967, 160). As Jack repeatedly states, black men and women should not be beaten into submission as they were in the colonies. Although many of Defoe's utterances with regards to the early beginnings of colonial rule may not be ideal to the modern ear and in many cases are offensive, Novak again argues that Defoe's thinking was 'certainly in advance over most contemporary thought' (1996, 52).

To sum up the fruits of my reading then: what can be said to emerge out of *Robinson Crusoe* is not one ethic or moral pattern but rather a polyphony of values many of which are expressed in the mouth of Friday. That is to say, there is a dialogic contestation between past and present, between the I and the other's ideological codes. The plural sense of values are, in *Robinson Cursoe*, openly played out between old Christian doctrine, those of an emerging capitalist ethic and those held by the colonised.

As again Novak states:

> *Robinson Crusoe* is a work of prose fiction that lends itself to the kind of multilayered analysis that Roland Barthes provides in *S/Z*, a fiction that resonates simultaneously on many levels, providing the reader with divergent codes of significance and leading him forward with a variety of enigmatic questions that demand answers. The variety of structures – spiritual autobiography, traveller's narrative, do-it-yourself utopia political and economic allegory – fuse into a unity under the *realist surface* of narrative but provide a text that opens itself to a myriad of possible readings (1996, 49). (italics mine)

I believe that a far more consistent reading of Defoe is to understand his works in much the same way as Bakhtin reads Rabelais, where his characters are in a dialogic relationship 'between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other' (2007, 23). Coetzee, like many theorists following Watt, instead reads Defoe's work as stable monologic expression of economic individualism that was to lead to many of the great injustices of colonialism. It is above all this idea that Coetzee is responding to in *Foe*. However, it is one that ignores, and I dare say excludes, the multivalent and dialogic nature of *Robinson Crusoe*.

However, with regards tp the 'correction' in the notion of rewriting, it must, I have argued, ignore the dialogic nature of its 'parent'. One of the avowed or implicit intentions of a rewrite is to 'correct' a parent text. What I hope to have shown in this chapter is that Coetzee does not, primarily, 'correct' the parent text, so much as a particular, mediated, *reading* of that text – a reading we might track back to Ian Watt, in particular. Rewriting, we might say, borrowing Bakhtin's formulation, corrects not the symphony but rather the critic's transposition of it onto the keyboard. Coetzee is seemingly deaf to the dialogic sounds and sweet airs that the singular realist reading represses. And so his rewriting risks reproducing similar forms of deafness to those he claims to be correcting.

In these terms it could be said to simply be replacing one monologic ideological discourse with a different one, one equally ideologically unitary. As I have stated above, Coetzee does not see this as necessarily problematic. But if the parent novel is not monologic, this surely is a cause for literary concern because then a representation of diverse ideological worlds would be replaced (or corrected) by a singular one. Of course it is Coetzee's intimation that the author cannot adequately represent the ideology of the other. As I have argued above, this Bakhtin would disagree with. He instead would argue that even 'within the bounds of a single syntactic whole' there lies the two voices of the dialogic. As Bhabha has argued within 'the other' or colonised's mimicry there is a 'double vision', or as Bakhtin puts it, the two faces of Janus.

Of course, neither Coetzee, nor his novel, claim to be the last word, or simply a replacement of what is written back to. In fact, if his fault is to be a little-too-indebted to the readings of prior literary critics, then perhaps my warning is directed, rather, at critics of Coetzee's own novel and aims to avert the risk that *they* take his *Robinson Crusoe* as the single truth of that novel. All of this said, it might be argued that Coetzee's rewrite does, after all, take as its pretext a novel which – dialogic or not – has many claims to be realist. But what of rewrites whose parent texts are even *on the face of it* more complex and plural? In the next chapter, I will go on to evaluate just how some more recent contemporary rewrites have handled this problematic.

## *Nostromo* and Realism

More than twenty five years after *Foe*, in 2010, Juan Gabriel Vasquez published his novel *The Secret History of Costaguana*. This too is a post-colonial rewrite, and this too is written (unlike earlier rewrites such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*) in full consciousness of a set of post-modern and post-colonial theorisations of language, representation and power. At least on the face of it, however, it presents us with a rather different situation from Coetzee's novel, insofar as the novel it rewrites – Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* – has most frequently been taken as an early, and complex, *modernist* text, rather than a realist one. Vasquez's project, it would seem, faces a harder challenge in offering a 'corrective', insofar as its pre-text is complex, playful and impossible to stabilise into a monologic voice or point of view. Let us begin with an account of *Nostromo*, and its reception, before we proceed to *The Secret History of Costaguana*.

Conrad's South American tale of the captain of the stevedores who negates his reputation of incorruptibility by opportunistically stealing the silver of his employers has been variously described. As Watt points out many have directed at Conrad's 'greatest achievement' the epithets 'difficult, confusing, boring', 'an astonishing failure'. (1988, 21) *Nostromo* contains a diffuse rambling narrative whose 'discourse' must be steadily unpicked before it can be reassembled (or

rewritten) into a chronological 'story' with a beginning, middle and end. These observations alone suggest that something significant has happened between the formal realism as described by Watt and that of Conrad's modernist writings. The scene too has changed, for in *Nostromo* we are not at the beginnings of colonialism but almost at its end. Or, at the very least, in the case of South America, where the novel is set, at a new stage of American economic colonialism mixed with the internecine struggles of the vestiges of the liberated colonies.

Unlike the story of Crusoe, which begins definitively with his refusal to take the advice of his father, *Nostromo* 'begins' in three different places with different retellings of the revolutionary riot enacted by the supporters of General Montero in the town of Sulaco. What is more, the shifting of narrative perspective from Captain Mitchell, to the Nostromo's interior thoughts, to several pages of dialogue between Dr. Monygham and Nostormo (1996, 390-393), to pages from Martin Decoud's notebook, to an omniscient narrator, refuse, in Coetzee's terms, an 'I-centred fiction'. It is this that makes it seemingly the quintessential example of Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic novel. That is to say, *Nostromo* 'permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships' (2014, 263).

This use of perspective, of versions of a story, of the failure to delineate a chronological plot, seemingly grates against all the tenets of formal realism. In the words of the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo* expatiates a set of 'inconclusive experiences' whose moral pattern or ideology is confused if not entirely irreducible. It is this that makes *Nostormo* far closer to certain aspects of Coetzee's *Foe*, and the post-modern novel, than to any example of realism. Indeed this is perhaps why it has gained so much attention over the last fifty years in critical studies. However, as I shall show, the conceit of Vasquez's post-colonial rewrite in fact denies the dialogism of *Nostromo* just as forcefully as *Foe* does that of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Once again Ian Watt's readings of the novel seem themselves to be a powerful intermediary between Vasquez's novel and his 'parent' text. And it is interesting to note here that Vasquez himself states that it would 'be dishonest not to mention' that Ian Watt's readings of Conrad played an important role in his writing of *The Secret History Costaguana* (2011, 304). Watt, in his monograph on *Nostromo*, makes it quite clear that Conrad's work in general and *Nostromo* in particular is, in many senses, a movement away from formal realism. As we have stated already, Conrad's refusal to retain a chronologic form is an important break from realism. It is indeed Watt's contention that Conrad is a 'modern' writer and was consciously not a realist. As Watt points out, Conrad himself, in the Preface to 'The Nigger of the Narcissus', stated that 'Realism…must…abandon him' (1988, 85) as a writer. What is more he consciously identified himself, in a letter to Blackwood, as 'a *modern*'. But – remarkably – Watt in his monograph on *Nostromo* will not quite give up on the

idea that there is more formal realism within Conrad's novel than meets the modernist reader's eye. As Watt insists 'Conrad was influenced by the French Realists' (1988, 84). Indeed, the very premise of his monograph is that *Nostromo* is a historical novel based on real events.

Ironically, considering what will be discussed in the next chapter, Watt's main argument is directed against Edwards Said's view of *Nostromo* as expressed in *Beginnings: Intention and Methods*. That is to say, Watt disagrees with Said's claim that *Nostromo* eschews realism and that 'the novel is essentially "no more than a record of novelistic self-reflection"' (1988, 74). 'For Said, then,' Watt continues, '*Nostromo* is too internal, self-critical and self-conscious a work to allow itself to be interpreted as a responsible mimetic representation' (1988, 75). Instead Watt argues that *Nostromo* is a patchwork of historical references as well as the accurate description of individuated and particular things and experiences. This, as he argued in *The Rise of the Novel*, is precisely what the formal realism of the novel contained and what distinguished it from other genres and literary forms. That is to say, formal realism distinguished itself 'by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment' (Watt, 2015, 18).

It is precisely this idea of Conrad as 'historian' (as 'face painter') that Watt spends his first two chapters explicating. Here Watt produces an account of *Nostromo's* rootedness in history and the 'real' world. As Watt reports, Conrad's imaginary Costaguana was reliant on his meeting with Santiago Perez Triana. As Watt states: 'Triana was probably the 'principal authority' for much that Conrad showed happening in *Nostromo*, and particularly its closest contemporary parallel, the American promotion of the secession of the Panama Canal area from the state of Columbia' (1988, 10). Watt continues that Conrad despite his wish to give 'a picture of the broader pattern of capitalist imperialism [occurring in South America]' (1988, 78) he lacked direct experience. As Conrad wrote in a letter 'I just had a glimpse [of South America] 25 years ago'. And so, Watt argues, Conrad, like the historian and Defoe, ended up resorting to biographical accounts to aid him in his construction of Costaguana. Watt identifies several texts from which Conrad clearly borrowed and goes on to argue that the work is rooted in the history of its time and place.

To be sure, Watt is right in saying that the story of Nostromo and his silver has several sources both textual as well as from direct experience – the question is how one construes the novel in the light of this. As Watt points out, Conrad based the story of Nostromo's theft of the silver on a tale he had heard while sailing in the Caribbean on the *Saint-Antoine* in 1876. It was a story that he reencountered when 'I came upon the very thing in a shabby volume picked up outside a second-hand bookshop' (1996, xxxviii). Although, as Conrad goes on to explain, he was not interested in writing about crime qua crime. Conrad also points out in his Author's Note that

'Nostromo is what he is because I received the inspiration for him in my early days from a Mediterranean sailor' (1996, xli). Later the name of the inspiration for the character of Nostromo is revealed as Dominic Cervoni. As Conrad affirmed: 'Many of Nostromo's speeches I have heard in Dominic's voice' (Watt, 1988, 5). Cervoni was the sailor who, with a youthful Conrad, had, supposedly, run guns from Marseilles to South America – much like journalist Martin Decoud in *Nostromo*. As Watt states in *The Rise of the Novel* formal realism's break from other literary forms was that it was often 'based in part on a contemporary incident' (2015, 15).

It would, of course be deeply misleading to suggest that Watt is proposing that *Nostromo* is based on a singular identifiable history. As he goes on to say that 'we know that *Nostromo* is a fiction and not literally a history' (1988, 20). However, he is not entirely convinced that this means that a chronology and a geography cannot be, in some manner, established. And as the map of 'Sulaco and Environs' that appears in Watt's book suggests, he is convinced by 'the reality effect' that Conrad produces. Furthermore, Watt claims that both a chronology and an actual time can be established. As he states, in his estimation the closing scenes of *Joseph Conrad: Nostromo* can 'be dated 1900' (1988, 20).

Watt does not stop worrying at the notion that underneath the surface of *Nostromo* lies realism. He goes further to say that *Nostromo* is in fact 'a study of the process of contemporary history' (1988, 20). He also makes much of Conrad's own claim that *Nostromo* was 'more true than any history I ever learned' (1988, 20). However, as Watt confesses at the end of his first chapter, *Nostromo* leaves the reader 'without any very clear lead as to where we should place the thematic centre' (1988, 20). That is to say that the formal realist ethic or moral pattern (what I have been equating with an ideology) is not initially clear. This difficulty, Watt later admits, is largely due to the fact that Conrad adopted multiple viewpoints (one could say a dialogism) within the narrative. Watt worries that these viewpoints, in particular those of Gould, Decoud and Nostromo, do not display an ethic but instead they show a human fallibility and a Heraclitian flux towards ruin. The story, Watt agrees, is certainly one of corruption but he will not conscience Michael Wilding's summation that Conrad avows that 'political action is just one of the many ways to corruption' (1988, 77). Instead he concludes that within *Nostromo* there *is* ultimately a discoverable realist moral pattern. His final concession on this matter is that Conrad's own personal beliefs are really at the centre of the text. As he states:

> Conrad does not pretend to have a political solution; what he has, perhaps in common with other writers of great literature, is a belief in various traditional moral values such as selflessness, courage, resolution, kindness, and *intellectual realism*. These are the virtues which most readers can observe emerging from the way that they agree on the obvious attractiveness of such people as Emelia Gould, Monygham, or the chief engineer (1988, 79) (italics mine).

Here Watt seems to ally Conrad with the values of progress and the 'virtuous' coloniser. As he goes on to suggest, it is Conrad's descriptions of geographical permanence and the 'historical scene's dedication' to progress that contains a positive 'lesson for us' (1988, 80).

So, while it seems that to rewrite *Nostromo* is to face rather different problems from rewriting *Robinson Crusoe*, insofar as it overtly evades realism and refuses to be authored by a single voice, it is not only possible to give an account of it as unitary, stable and formally realist, but this has in fact been done. As we have seen, Coetzee's rewriting of *Crusoe* was in great part a rewriting of a monologic, 'realist' *reading* of *Crusoe* mediated by Watt's criticism of the novel. Now the question becomes, is Vasquez's approach and treatment of *Nostromo* one that allies with a Watt-like reified reading, and does it in this manner follow Coetzee's?

## The Secret History of Joseph Conrad

Juan Gabriel Vasquez's *The Secret History of Costaguana* traces the secession of Panama from Columbia through the eyes of the son of a one-time journalist and liberal propagandist, Miguel Altamirano. And what underlies much of the novel is the Watt-like claim that Conrad's fictional country of Costaguana, that makes for the setting of *Nostromo*, was factually based on this story. This is despite the fact that Conrad, in a letter to William Blackwood, wrote 'I am writing fiction not secret history – facts don't matter' (cited in Jasanoff, 2017, 135). The nominal conceit of Vasquez's *The Secret History of Costaguana* is that Conrad's *Nostromo* does contain facts and that these facts do matter. That is to say that Vazquez, like Watt, suggests that *Nostromo* is a real representation of the world and that Conrad 'stole' (like Nostromo did the silver) both Jose Altamirano's story and Colombia's history.

As such Vasquez seems to be offering a correction to Conrad's distortion of the use of these facts. Yet the status of this 'correction' is treated a little sceptically: the narrator, Jose Altamirano acknowledges that, as a storyteller, he, himself, is inclined to distort facts, something which he accuses Conrad of doing. 'Yes, I confess,' Vasquez's narrator says, 'I had been tempted to [make my father's birth] coincide with independence…I know that I can go astray, but I soon return to the narrative fold, to the difficult rules of accuracy and truth' (2011, 7). So, the novel acknowledges that its own claim to offer a single counter-truth might itself be received skeptically; while continuing to insist on the 'truer truth' it is telling.

In his presentation of 'Conrad', who he meets in person in London and nearly meets in Panama many years before, Jose Altaminaro re-presents Watt's version of a man gleaning and reprocessing real events. Altamirano in fact presents the same case as Watt does, mentioning the same 'facts' and influences. This is not surprising considering that Vasquez mentions in his

author's note that he read, amongst others, Ian Watt 'in order to write this' and that it would be 'dishonest not to mention this'. It should not go without mention that much as in *Nostromo*, *The Secret History of Costaguana* is a quarry of quotes and historical facts. These have all been reprocessed (one could say rewritten) from histories, biographies and, perhaps most importantly with this thesis in mind, literary criticism. As with *Foe*, we can speculate that Watt's reading of *Nostromo* in fact holds considerable sway in mediating the parent text to its re-writer.

Just as Watt recorded, so we discover in *The Secret History of Costaguana* that 'Conrad—would use the sailor—calling him not Cervoni, but Nostromo' (2011, 73). Jose Altamirano also presents the same story mentioned by Watt of Conrad asking the Colombian exile Santiago Perez Triana for help. Another duplicated quote is Conrad's admission in a letter that he was unclear of Panama's reality: 'I am dying over the curst *Nostromo* thing. All my memories of Central America seem to slip away. I just had a glimpse 25 years ago – a short glance. That is not enough' (Vasques, 2011, 246, Watt, 1988, 15). And like Watt, Altamirano uncovers *Nostromo's* origins:

> [Conrad] reads the maritime memoirs of Fredrick Brenton Williams and the terrestrial memoirs of George Frederick Masterman. He reads Cunninghame Graham's books (*Hernando de Soto*, *Vanished Arcadia*), and books that Cunninghame Graham recommends: *Wild Scenes in South America*, by Ramón Páez, and *Down the Orinoco in a Canoe*, by Santiago Pérez Triana (2011, 247) (see Watt pp11-15).

To be sure, within *The Secret History of Costaguana* it is Conrad's meeting with Jose Altamirano in London that affords him the last pieces of information he requires in order to proceed with *Nostromo*. But for Jose Altamirano, as for F.R. Leavis, Conrad is 'The Great English Novelist' (Vasquez, 2011, 3) and a novelist who transforms 'Colombia into a fictional country, a country whose history Conrad can invent with impunity' (2011, 246).

It is this 'impunity' or appropriation that Vasquez's narrator, Jose Altamirano, takes issue with in the novel. But before we get to a discussion of this, the relationship between characters and Conrad needs some mention. For, as with *Foe*, this is a rewrite that brings a characterisation of the *author* of its parent text into its own pages. There is an interesting triadic connection between Miguel Altamirano (Jose's journalist father), the journalist in *Nostromo*, Martin Decoud, and Conrad himself. This is not least because Conrad tried to kill himself as a young man in the same manner as Decoud, by shooting himself in the heart, but because they are all involved in a similar writing practice of 'refraction'. In the case of Jose's father, Miguel Altamirano, it surrounds his work with regards to reporting the progress of the building of the Panama Canal.

> It would frequently happen that the engineers would say adieu at the end of an afternoon, arranging to meet the next morning at the excavations, only to discover the next morning that one of them had been admitted to hospital … Few survived … My father (or rather his strange Refractive pen) wrote that: 'the rare cases of yellow fever that have presented among the heroic artisans of the

> Canal' had been 'imported from other places'. And since no one stopped him he carried on writing: 'no one denies that tropical plagues have been present among the non-local population; but one or two deaths, especially among the workers who came from Martinique and Haiti, should not be cause for unjustified alarm.' His chronicles/reports/articles were only read in France and they're in France the relatives of the Canal read them and were reassured and shareholders kept buying shares because all was going well in Panama… in this lay his extraordinary gift: in not being aware of the gap – no: the immense crater – between the truth and his version of it (2011, 140).

Of course the implication there is that Conrad too had a refractive pen. As Jose Altamirano explains, this is demonstrably true with regards to the scar on Conrad's chest. A scar which Conrad claimed was from a duel, but that biographers have discovered (or corrected) was from a botched suicide attempt.

> It's true, Readers of the Jury, that on Conrad's chest was the scar of a bullet wound; but the similarities between Conradian reality and real reality end there. As in so many other cases, real reality has been left buried under the verbiage of the novelist's profuse imagination. Readers of the Jury: I am here, again, to give the contradictory version, to dispel the verbiage, to bring discord into the tranquil house of received truths (2011, 111).

But there are more anxieties at the root of Vasquez's work with regards to Conrad, and these concern, once again, the supposed 'moral purpose' of a novel or novelist. For the question is, who is Conrad sympathetic to in his writings. As discussed above, Watt's contention is that the ethic of *Nostromo* is one most closely related to the position of 'Emilia Gould, Monygham or the chief engineer' (1988, 79). Watt argues that Conrad is, as such, associated with the more virtuous side of 'material interests', what Albert Memmi would call the 'coloniser of good will'.

Vasquez, or at least Jose Altamirano, takes a slightly harsher and more conservative view of Conrad's colonial affiliations. Conrad, as Vasquez portrays him, is said to be a gun runner who ran guns with Dominic Cervoni for the 'Conservative General Juan Luis De la Pava'.[16] As such Conrad, like the gun running journalist Martin Decoud of *Nostromo*, is on the more disreputable side of material interests and of neo-colonialist meddling. Here the view of Conrad as representative of the 'imperialist world-view', as many critics from Achebe to Said have suggested, falls into a harsher light.

*The Secret History of Costaguana* seems ostensibly here to make its claim to rewriting or correcting the ethic or the ideology of *Nostromo*. That is to say that, the novel appears to be an attempt to uncover and expose the hermeneutics of suspicion that has been attributed to Conrad within certain post-colonial criticism. Conrad is certainly placed in *The Secret History of Costaguana*

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[16] And of course we should be aware of Vasquez's own refractions for as John Stape states in his *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad*:
Perhaps–a large 'perhaps'–the possible gunrunning in Columbia (*if* that occurred) was being reworked [by Conrad in his ambiguous biographical confessions] to give a tinge of adventure to a period that involved considerable routine work. In the end, unless new documents turn up (highly unlikely given the meticulous archival sleuthing has been done) this is all that can be said. (p.30)

as an agent of material interest and his gun running for the Conservatives has direct and observable repercussions. Jose Altamirano goes on to trace out the history of just one of the Chasseport rifles Conrad supposedly brought to the continent and tells of the role it played in the war against the Liberal Government.

However, it is this internecine fighting between Conservative and Liberal, between the ideologies of reaction and progress, in which Conrad plays his part, becomes the leitmotif of Vasquez's work. And here we see emerge a much more sophisticated idea of rewriting – one which acknowledges, rather than seeks to repress, the dialogic nature of textuality.

> The gathered parents of the two chubby-cheeked and already spoiled infants, those two little boys smelling since birth of vomit and liquid shit, agreed that the calmer of the two would be given the name Conservative. The other (who cried a little more) was called Liberal. Those children grew up and multiplied in constant rivalry; the rival generations have succeeded each other with the energy of rabbits and the obstinacy of cockroaches (2011, 89).

This sense of dialectical twinning is also at the heart of the relationship between Jose Altamirano and Conrad, who is said to be the narrator's 'twin soul' and 'shadow' at various points of the novel.[17] Throughout the novel there are constant references to 'versions' or twin stories between Liberal and Conservative. Throughout there is a sense that we are heading towards a confrontation between Jose Altamirano and his European 'twin' Joseph Conrad, whose imagined republic of Costaguana in *Nostromo* bears a refracted resemblance to that of the 'facts' of Altamirano's story of Columbia.

The notion of twin, one could say 'dialectical', stories transpires when the narrator relays the two versions of the burning of the city of Colon. As he states:

> The inconsistent angel of history gives us two different gospels, and the chroniclers will carry on banging their heads against a brick wall till the end of their days, because it is simply impossible to know which deserves the credence of posterity. And thus it is that there, at the Altamiranos' table, Perdo Prestan splits in two (2011, 158).

In what follows, two descriptions are reported; one which vilifies 'Prestan one', the other that defends 'Prestan two'. However, although within these versions it is said that it is impossible to know which one 'deserves the credence', it is noted, not without irony, that at the end of both narratives two 'different' men met with the identical fate of being condemned to death.

That is to say, that on the known and established facts the two stories coalesce into one no matter who is telling it. Here the two stories are played off against one another but their relativism is acknowledged as part of their ideological consciousnesses. That is 'Prestan one' is the

[17] Here there seems at least the suggestion that like Conrad's short story 'The Secret Sharer' there is some almost inexplicable relationship between certain human beings.

'charismatic and anti-imperialist leader' while 'Prestan two' is a 'resentful murderer'. But there is no Hegelian dialectical sense of synthesis or correction, the stories, despite their agreement on a fact, remain ideologically heteronomous. It is certainly a reminder of the argument raised in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* that 'each living ideological sign has two faces, like Janus' (1973, 23).

With this we see the Bakhtinian notion of the endless clash of 'unmerged souls'. We see the 'construction of a multiplicity of diverse yet interconnecting ideological worlds.' (Gardiner, 1992, 25) Here *The Secret History of Costaguana* takes, what Bakhtin refers to as, 'dialogic form' (1984, 214). These ideological voices are further supplemented by that other unmerged voice, that of the narrator, who refuses to speak for either liberal or conservative. In doing so, by withdrawing into a public silence, Jose produces his own ideological voice of the personal that offers its own distinctive quietist ideological position. It is one that ultimately becomes 'treasonous' when he fails to warn General Tovar that he is heading into the Panamanian separatists' trap.[18]

Although Jose refuses to be drawn in to the dialectical battle between liberal and conservatives there is still, however, the question of his dialectical relationship with Conrad. Much like in Dostoyesky's *The Double,* which Bakhtin argues is the story of singular identity that proffers two distinctive ideological language worlds, so there is still that matter of Jose Altamirano's encounter with his double 'Joseph Conrad'. It is precisely the notion of the dialogical ideological difference between these two figures, that we encounter when Altamirano begs Conrad at the end to withdraw *Nostromo* from publication. 'This is false. This is not what I told you,' Jose Altamirano stresses. Here *The Secret History of Costaguana* does suggest that it is going to produce the idea of dialectical correction. But Conrad replies:

> 'This, my dear sir, is a novel.'
> 'This is not the story I told you. This is not the story of my country.'
> 'Of course not,' said Conrad. 'It is the story of my country. It is the story of Costaguana.' (2011, 298).

Here one of the claims of the novel becomes clearer, which is that novels are refractive by nature and their voices are distinct from the narratives of history. In this sense at least the intimation is that the novel denies attempts at the very least to correct them historically: that they are, as Conrad stated in his letter to Blackwood, 'not a secret history' and not therefore beholden to facts. Altamirano opines that the Republic of Costaguana is a place where he does not exist, a place

[18] His positon here is not unlike that of Albert Camus who as Tony Judt says: 'As France and Algeria alike grew ever more polarized over the issue, Camus' search for a liberal compromise came to seem forlorn and irrelevant. He withdrew into [public] silence.' Further more we will discuss this very idea of silence having an ideological voice in the next chapter in relation to Camus' *The Outsider.*

where he has been 'erased like an unmentionable sin, obliterated without pity like a dangerous witness' (2011, 298-299). Altamirano seemingly becomes like the silent erased native subalterns of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* who Chinua Achebe famously argued had had their language and voices 'withheld' (and indeed Camus' Arabs which will be discussed in the next chapter). Unlike in *Foe* where Barton rejects Foe's representation because her words are bent into an unrecognisable realist form and where Friday fails representation because of his 'unknowablity', Altamirano demands representation. He has after all offered 'Conrad' his words and wishes to see them faithfully appear in Conrad's pages.

But Conrad belays these anxieties, for when Jose Altamirano asks how the history of Costaguana ends he states:

> I am afraid you know that, my dear Altamirano…It's all here in this chapter, and it might not be what you're expecting. But there is nothing, absolutely nothing that you don't know…I can read it to you if you like. (2011, 300)

Here there is a suggestion that the 'diverse yet interconnecting ideological worlds' that Altamirano has described, which includes his own, remain dialogically active in *Nostromo*. That is to say that Altamirano's description of the dialogical nature of the ideological voices are still retained within *Nostromo*. And finally, as 'Conrad' begins read to him the novel, Altamirano is said to 'feel safe'. Although he is aware that this could be a false sensation and he begins to contemplate just what role Eloisa, his daughter, who he has left behind in the now independent Panama, will occupy 'in the unfortunate history of Costaguana.'

## The Dialogism of Costaguana

The kind of reading, and rewriting, that *The Secret History of Costaguana* offers is based, I think, on the assumptions about meaning, textuality, and dialogism that we have just elicited from the exchange between Jose Altamirano and Conrad at the end of the novel. Altamirano's initial claim, much like Watt's, is that Conrad has appropriated history and translated it into a realist fiction. What is more he suggests that his distinctive voice has been erased from it. And indeed the overall conceit of Vasquez's novel, as rewrite, relies on these ideas. Much like Coetzee's implicit claim that there is a stability or singular thesis within the parent text that needs to be corrected in some manner, so Vasquez's narrator makes the initial claim that Conrad robbed him of the story of his country, distorted it and in the process wrote his (Altamirano's) voice out of the story. This he demands 'Conrad' correct. But as the end of *The Secret History of Costaguana* suggests, this is precisely not what Vasquez's Conrad does, and for two reasons. Firstly, although Conrad may well have

used history and biography to create *Nostromo*, there is – Vasquez implies – no direct one-to-one relation to that of Columbia or indeed any other South American country, the country is Conrad's creation. And secondly there is, as 'Conrad' suggests, absolutely nothing in the novel that Altamirano 'doesn't know'. That is to say that at least some of Altamirano's voice intermingles and is represented in some manner.

In the conclusion to *The Secret History of Costaguana* we therefore find an acknowledgement that the parent text, *Nostromo*, was itself dialogic. Correction and rewriting therefore emerge as ways of allowing the voices in the 'original' to be heard differently, rather than being imagined as the restitution of voice to the silenced (or, as in the case of Coetzee's Friday, the making legible of a silencing). In other words this twenty-first century rewrite seems to conceive itself rather differently from its predecessors.

At this point, in our reading of *Foe*, we returned to the parent text in order to uncover the dialogism in it which Coetzee had to some extent repressed, by taking Watt's reading of the novel for the novel itself. Vasquez seems to have forestalled us here, acknowledging the dialogism of his parent text. But nevertheless, a return to *Nostromo* – and to critical accounts of that novel other than Watt's – is instructive. Thus far, we have seen that Vasquez acknowledges the dialogism of the novel in his rewriting of it. But why, then, is there a need for rewriting at all? Presumably, it is because certain voices in a dialogue are understood to prevail (perhaps unfairly) over others. Now, this in itself is not a million miles from Watt's argument that realist novels (including *Nostromo*) are normative in nature – that whatever their apparent heterogeneity, a single moral view point prevails in them. The question is, considering Vasquez's conclusion, is this true of *Nostromo*?

The first defence against a realist reading of *Nostromo* might well be the point raised by F.R. Leavis in his *The Great Tradition* in the chapter on *Nostromo*. As Leavis proffers, characters in literature are not necessarily 'true to life' and should not be considered as lives 'living outside of the book'. As 'Conrad' asserts in *The Secret History of Costaguana* the story of *Nostromo* is 'about' Costaguana, which is a fictional country created by an author. As Conrad (the person) pointed out, *Nostromo* is not a secret history. That is, it is not Columbia or the breakaway province of Panama, although it might well contain some resemblances to these.

But the model of the literary work implied in *Nostromo* is not that assumed by the New Critics, of a text with a life of its own, cut off from the world which may have informed it. In his *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* Ford Madox Ford writes that Conrad agreed with him that a novel is 'not a narration, a report' of reality and that 'life did not narrate' (2013, 72%). As they both agreed that a sense of a finite complete and ordered understanding of life that previous 'realistic' novels had effected was simply inaccurate. As Said argues, Conrad:

> produced a novel (and novels) implicitly critical of the beginning premises of all earlier [realist] novels. Instead of mimetically authoring a new world, *Nostromo* turns back to its beginning as a novel, to the fictional, illusory assumption of reality; and thus overturning the confident edifice that novels normally construct *Nostromo* reveals itself to be no more than a *record* of a novelistic self-reflection (1997, 137).

'Man,' as Said says, 'is never the author, never the beginning of what he does, no matter how wilfully intended his program may be.' (1997, 133) In other words, Conrad wrote against the very notion of Watt's 'formal realism' with its defined beginning, middle and end.

Although *Nostromo* seemingly offers a sense of beginning with its opening 'In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards, the town of Sulaco…' Captain Mitchell's sudden intervention into the narrative propels the reader to somewhere in the middle of the chronology of events, to the time when Nostromo saved Don Vincente Ribiera from the 'rascally mob already engaged in smashing windows' (1992, 14). As has often been noted, Conrad does not impose a realist structure on events. Its opening chapter is simply one of the many narrative clippings that form the novel.

Here we arrive at our main concern: for it is the muddled chronology that creates the sense of a non-realist approach but also the polyphonic nature of the novel. As has almost tirelessly been observed by critics of *Nostromo*, there is what some have called a 'narratorial mobility' to it. For not only do the narrators change from an omniscient, to a situated third person,[19] but Decoud's letter to his sister is used, as well as the first person of accounts by Captain Mitchell. It is not only this technique of the direct narration in the novel but also the employment of free indirect and direct speech that creates the voices and ideological positions of a miscellany of characters. As Watt himself points out, free indirect speech is used with Hirsch, Sotillo, Charles Gould, Decoud as well as Nostromo.

Wayne C. Booth says of the dialogic novel in his introduction to Bahktin's *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that it derives from: 'the ability or willingness to allow voices into the work that are not fundamentally under the "monological" control of the novelist's own ideology.' (1984, XX) This notion of the novel being a manifestation of voices contains an echo of how Conrad's Marlow perceives Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. As Marlow states when he realises that he might never meet

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[19] Conrad begins Chapter 8 with a narrator who seems to have both lived and witnessed events in Sulaco and is privilege to certain information that the other characters are not:

> 'Those of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can remember the steadying effect of the San Tome mine upon the life of that remote province.'

him: 'I didn't say to myself, "Now I will never see him," or "Now I will never shake him by the hand," but, "Now I will never hear him." The man presented himself as a voice' (1993, 66). Much like Kurtz, Conrad's other characters are not people 'living outside of the book' but rather they are 'voices'. And most importantly they are voices in a dialogic contestation with the author. In Said's words '*Nostromo* is masquerading as an ordinary political or historical novel. The real action, on the other hand, is psychological and concerns man's over ambitious intention to author his own world' (1997, 118).

All of the voices of Decoud (the separatists journalist), Charles Gould (the mine owner), Holroyd (the American Financier), Captain Mitchell (the port manager), Don Jose Avellanos (the historian and aristocrat), Gorgio Viola (Garibaldi's faithful soldier) and even Nostromo (the captain on the stevedores) are, as Bakhtin suggests of dialogism in the novel, 'just as fully weighted as the author's' (1984, 7). As Guimond and Maynard argue in their essay 'Polyphony in the Jungle: A Bakhtinain analysis of *Heat of Darkness* and related works':

> characters like Martin Decoud and the English financier, Sir John, Italian sailors and old revolutionaries like Nostromo and Giorgio Viola, barbarous warriors like General Monteiro, idealistic Creole aristocrats like Don Jose Avellanos, and cultural hybrids like Charles Gould can all speak, mingle, and do battle. (Guimond and Maynard, 2001, 325)

As they point out, Gould becomes the voice for the 'ideology and methods of multinational capitalism' when he states to his wife that 'law', 'good faith', 'order' 'security' and 'justice' will follow only after 'material interests' have been asserted. Gould's capitalist views are widely condemned throughout the novel by a series of characters including: Decoud, Cardinal Corbelan, Dr Monygham, and finally his wife, Emilia Gould. But as Guimond and Maynard point out:

> [h]owever, the persons making these criticisms do not become new, authoritative centres for the narratives, since Conrad represents them as also being flawed or limited in various ways and therefore they (or their ideologies) do not simply displace the discredited hierarchy with another one. (2001, 327)

Here, though, we reach a crux in literary critical accounts of the novel – for several critics suggest that, for all this heterogeneity, one moral point of view perforce prevails. It is Watt's belief that Emilia Gould's voice and ethic remain untainted. As he argues the 'realism of the portraits of Dr Monygham and Mrs Gould are not wholly pessimistic in the values they imply' (1988, 79). Edward Said too argues that Mrs Gould is 'the only character in the novel with a really accurate vision' (1997, 107). Emilia Gould is, after all, one of the few who recognises her husband's slide from a liberal idealist to being yet another slave to the material interests of the mine. On the other hand, Guimond and Maynard add Emilia Gould's voice to those that are undermined. She is, after all, loath to admit to Dr Monygham that he is right when he states that her husband's ideology of

'material interests' 'shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back' (1992, 463). 'How can you say that, Dr Monygham?' Mrs Gould cries out, and in so doing it surfaces that her voice too is tainted with, if not the fraudulence of some of the others, then at the very least a desire for denial, emission and elision.

Literary critics, then, focus on Emilia Gould as the locus for debates about the ultimate monologism, or dialogism, of *Nostromo*'s moral point of view. I would like to add a further analysis here. Much as in *Robinson Crusoe*, it is the mimicking of a parrot that offers up the Janus-faced nature of Emilia's unspoken and largely unrecorded world. This occurs long after her marriage when the Goulds speak to each other near their parrot's cage and the bird calls out the name of her servant, '"Leonarda! Leonarda!" in imitation of Mrs. Gould's voice' (1992, 66). The bird is then said to suddenly take 'refuge in immobility and silence.' In this moment, the reader is offered an authentic version of Mrs Gould's voice, her position is revealed as mistress of the house much as her husband is master of the mine. We have here a reminder that the world of the servants as well as the miners' voices – for all the novel's plurality – are largely unrecorded and unnarrated in *Nostromo*.

Here Jose Altamirano's claim in *The Secret History of Costaguana* that certain people have been written out of the story seems to raise its head. As Edward Said would agree in the introduction of *Culture and Imperialism*, there are 'crucial limitations in vision' in *Nostromo*. Even though Conrad's novel might mock and critique the imperialism of Gould and Holroyd there is still seemingly a voice missing. But here again the parrot operates dialogically, for moments before it calls out with Emila Gould's voice we are told:

> A big green parrot, brilliant like an emerald in a cage that flashed like gold, screamed out ferociously, "Viva Costaguana!" (1992, 66).

Just whose voice the bird is mimicking is impossible to establish. But it is important to note that this is certainly not the call of the Gould's but rather a cry aligned throughout the novel with the anti-blanco revolutionaries and the masses. Later Pedro Montero, the half 'Indian' younger brother of General Montero who leads the revolution against the supporters of material interests, described as 'parrot-like'. The scene also comes at an important moment when Charles Gould discusses with his wife the inevitability of the victory of 'material interests' and as such operates in a dialogical mode of speaking back to the dominant ideology.

What is more, the parrot's voice is far from being the only one rooted in the indigenous culture of Costaguana. Perhaps most importantly the narrative persona that offers up some of the telling of the story, although seemingly omniscient at times, is almost certainly a native of the country. There is a constant use of South American words like 'llaneros' and 'leperos' which

suggest that the voice is a local one and is fluent in its language and culture. One should also consider the importance of General Barrios, whose military intervention saves Salaco from the Monterists, is a man from a village and is said not to 'frequent the higher society of the town'. There is also a revolutionary 'Monerist Press' that speaks out against 'the "miserable Ribiera," who had plotted to deliver his country, bound hand and foot, for a prey to foreign speculators' (Conrad, 1992, 135).

This at least suggests that Conrad's 'crucial limitations in vision' and the silencing of the other's voice are not complete. As Guimond and Maynard argue, Conrad often gave minor nameless characters 'whose language and ideology is the opposite to that of the proclamatory characters' (2001, 335) the final word. As they point out:

> As Nostromo, the champion of Gould's imperium, lies dying his last companion is the nameless, 'pale photographer' who is the avowed enemy of Gould and his 'material interests.' He reminds his 'comrade,' Captain Fidanza, 'that we want money for our work. The rich must be fought with their own weapons. (2001, 335)

As Tony Judt said of Albert Camus, who is discussed in the section below, Conrad had no 'polished worldview' to offer. We should remember that this is precisely what Bakhtin demands of the polyphonic novel. That is, that it contains no 'ultimate position' of the author or any other character. The dialogic novel, Bakhtin adumbrated, allows the voices of many social classes to intermingle and oppose each other without ever overshadowing or becoming an absolute presence, and this seems certainly to be the case in Conrad's *Nostromo*. There can be little doubt that Conrad's interests lay in the interactions of the Europeans and the Blancos whose focus was centred on 'material interests'. But from this interest came no authoritative centre. What is more, although there is a certain silence of the marginalised, it is not, as some have suggested, complete. In fact at times, as Guimond and Maynard have pointed out, their voices occur in places which undercut the main voices of the text in what Bahktin refers to as 'dialogic-oppositions.'

Although *The Secret History of Costaguana* initially relies on and represents 'Conrad' as a gun running agent of the conservatives, when the time comes, at the end, to hold him to account his image slips out of that mode. The author 'Conrad', in Vasquez's representation, is distinctive from Coetzee's Foe – who never stops in his attempt to author and bend Sarah Barton's narrative. Instead Jose Altamirano finds 'Conrad' willing to share with him the finished version of the 'curst' novel whose narration, until meeting Altamirano, had slipped from him due to a lack of feeling for place and culture. But as 'Conrad' suggests, simply because he needed these details does not make it monologic or a 'secret history'.

As the 'Conrad' of *The Secret History of Costaguana* states, even though he has written Jose Altamirano out of the story, Altamirano can still expect versions of his own dialogical story to

appear. Or as 'Conrad' puts it, there is 'absolutely nothing that you don't know' contained within *Nostromo's* pages. As Vasquez's book suggests, when 'Conrad' begins to read *Nostromo* to Altamirano, what is needed is not a dialectical correction of *Nostromo's* ethic or Conrad's politics but instead a rereading of the text in order to discover its pluralities. As Said points out, *Nostromo* reflects 'the tension he felt between opposed positions on any given matter' (1997, 106). As such, *Nostromo*, far from being a realist novel with a singular monologic ethic or ideology, remains almost bafflingly dialogical. And it is something Vasquez seems able, unlike Coetzee, to concede.

## The Real Albert Camus

Much like *Nostromo*, Albert Camus' work in general and *The Outsider* in particular were interpreted by early critics as either modernist or existentialist works that were, as Edward Said put it, read 'as parables of the human condition' (1993, 175). However, by the time of the French Algerian war, critics had begun to read Camus' works as the realist expression of a *pied noir* – a French Algerian colonial. It is important to note here that whereas Ian Watt has been the presiding critical reader of the two previous chapters, we will now shift focus to two particular post-colonial critics of Camus, namely Edward Said and Conor Cruise O'Brien. However, as I will show, these critics' readings of Camus rely on certain of Watt's formal realist assumptions.

Perhaps one of the first such 'realist' criticisms of *The Outsider*, came from Camus' fellow Algerian *pied noir* Henri Kréa who wrote, shortly after Camus' death, that Meursault's – the hero or anti-hero of *The Outsider* – infamous killing of an Arab on a beach was the 'realisation of the obscure and puerile dream of the "poor white" Camus never ceased to be' (cited in Foley, 2008, 15). This idea, that there was a more tawdry realism to Camus' work, was of course brought to the fore in the English speaking literary world by Conor Cruise O'Brien's small monograph *Camus* (1970).

For O'Brien, Camus was never anything other than the spokesperson for, as he put it, his 'tribe', that is to say the French European Algerians. As such his novels are, O'Brien argued, simply an extension of the monologic nature of this national discourse, a discourse which placed a primacy on representing the *pied noir* community while at the same time silencing the Arabs. As he says of Camus' second novel, *The Plague*, the Arabs are 'passed over in total silence.' (1970, 48) Pursuing our ongoing concern with the notion of the dialogic nature of novels, we can say that O'Brien's position implies that *The Outsider* and *The Plague* are hardly novels, in a Bakhtian sense, at all. Instead O'Brien suggests that they contain all the elements of what Bakhtin claims are the provenance of

an 'epic' where the national language is 'closed' and 'deaf' to any other that it might encounter (2014, 12).

In O'Brien's reading of Camus' *The Outsider*, Meursault, in Bakhtinian terms, 'does not have any particular ideology that functions as one ideology among other possible ideologies…. [the] discourse is not ideologically demarcated…it merges with the author's discourse' (2014, 334).

As O'Brien famously put it:

> Everyone – Meursault himself, the court and the author – treats the actual killing [of the Arab] and the sordid transactions which prepare the way for it as irrelevant. But it is not easy to make the killing of a man seem irrelevant; in fact it can hardly be done unless one is led in some way to regard the man as not quite a man…The man who was shot has no name and, his relation to the narrator and his friends is not that of one human being to another. He looks at them as if they were 'blocks of stone or dead trees'. When the narrator shoots down this blank and alien being and fires 'four shots more into the inert body, on which they left no visible trace', the reader does not quite feel that Meursault has killed the man. He has killed an Arab (1970, 25).

For O'Brien, Camus is only capable of creating 'silent, nameless and faceless Arabs' (1970, 45). But he goes further, even denying that *The Outsider* is, as Camus suggested of it, a story of a man who is condemned by a colonial court for not crying at his mother's funeral rather than the actual murder of an Arab. O'Brien's post-colonial critique denies that *The Outsider* can be read as an ideological critique of the monist French rationalist Christian judicial system that imposes a singular morality on all who live under it. 'What appears,' O'Brien states, 'to the casual reader as a contemptuous attack on the court is not in fact an attack at all: on the contrary, by suggesting that the court is impartial between Arab and Frenchman, it implicitly denies the colonial reality and sustains the colonial fiction.' (1970, 23) So, O'Brien's post-colonial criticism of Camus' novel depends on a particular set of assumptions about how ideology works in relation to literary fiction – assumptions which it might be worth exploring.

Now, thus far in this thesis we have traced the alliance between a particular mode of ideological critique and two assumptions – one, that the work in question is a work of realist fiction, and two that realist fiction (as in Watt's definition thereof) contains a singular authorial underlying ethic. O'Brien certainly argues that Camus espouses a single and univocal ethic, arguing that he 'reveals himself incapable of thinking outside any other categories than those of a Frenchman' (1970, 12). O'Brien, as David Carroll points out, suggests that Camus' *The Plague* and *The Outsider* 'follows a different logic…and can have different historical and political implications than an historical and realist novel.' (2007, 50) Instead, O'Brien suggests that the text is a myth or fable. O'Brien argues that Camus removes the Arabs from his landscapes because they are simply irrelevant to his novelistic aim of creating a 'fable' or 'myth' that speaks to and for his western

French 'tribe'. As O'Brien puts it, with regards to *The Plague*, 'the strategy of the fable [as opposed to the realist novel] requires the disappearance of the Arabs.' (1970, 47)

So although O'Brien suggests that Camus' work has the ethic and monologic or readerly quality of realism, as identified by both Watt and Barthes, he does go some way to suggesting that Camus is not at his core a formal realist writer in Watt's complete definition. That is to say that although Camus produces an ethic, unlike Defoe he does not take the historian's approach in the sense of mimetically depicting his society like the 'face painter'. However, as Barthes pointed out in his *Mythologies*, it 'is well known how often our "realistic" literature is mythical' (1972, 136). It is Barthes' claim that much of pre-modernist realist literature was not necessarily realistic in this historical sense. Instead he argued that, like myth, realism's 'reality effect' sought to impose a dominant ideology on the reader. As Gardiner argues, Barthes' claim in *Mythologies* is that the role of the critic of myth and realist fiction is 'to decipher the myth semiotically and expose its interest-laden ideological character' (1992, 151). This idea of Barthesian exposure as we have mentioned before is a close relation to what we have called the post-colonial rewrite's 'correction'. And this kind of exposure or correction can only occur if Camus' work is of this particular closed, monologic and realist (or in Barthes sense 'mythological') genre of writing.

For a further consideration of the relationship between a post-colonial criticism of Camus, and his texts' generic status, we need to move on to another critic: Edward Said. For Said, O'Brien's criticism does not go far enough and ultimately, as he puts it, O'Brien lets Camus 'off the hook' (1993, 173). As John Foley says, Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, 'is usually understood to have completed the task that Cruise O'Brien began' (2007, 1). Said points out that O'Brien is correct when he notes that Camus' work is an ideological attempt to justify French rule (1993, 174). He also confirms that Camus' deference to his tribal affiliation was at the expense of Arabic culture and language. As Said goes on to say (although he does not offer any particular direct evidence for this) Camus gave 'lasting currency', like French Minister Chautemps, to the idea that Arabic in Algeria was a 'foreign language' (1993, 180). As Said states, 'Camus' most famous fiction…in many ways depends on a massive French discourse on Algeria, one that belongs to the language of French Imperial attitudes and geographical reference' (1993, 181). But more importantly Said claims that Camus' 'clean style' and his 'language and form' was taken from the French realism of Flaubert and Constant. So, Said's criticisms of Camus, while not vastly different in political substance from O'Brien's, extend the conversation into explicitly linguistic, stylistic and generic questions, which depends upon a reading of the novel as realist.

In fact Said makes several references to Camus and his relationship with realist novels. With regards to the issue that critics have simply overlooked or wished away Camus' unedifying imperial overtones Said insists that:

> As was Jane Austen a century earlier, Camus is a novelist from whose work the fact of imperial actuality, so clearly there to be noted, have dropped away; as in Austen a detachable *ethos* has remained an ethos suggesting universality and humanism (1993, 172).

As Alice Kaplan stated, in her recent *Looking for The Outsider*, Said in fact 'made a bold move by dismissing the reading of Camus as an 'existentialist,' and reading him through his political context…[Said suggested that] the murder [of the Arab] on the beach could be reduced to a page from recent history' (2016, 203).

Although, as Watt pointed out, Said in his *Beginnings: Intention and Method* was prepared to read *Nostromo* as an attempt at 'novelistic self-reflection' he will allow Camus no modernist leeway. As he states:

> Camus' writing is informed by an extraordinary belated, in some ways incapacitated colonial sensibility, which enacts an imperial gesture within and by means of a form, the *realistic* novel, well past its greatest achievements in Europe' (1993, 176). (Italics mine).

Like O'Brien, Said argues that Camus' work is far from being a critique of the French metropole, with its 'rational' judicial discourse. Instead it is, as they both suggest, a justification and an affirmation of the French and their political system. But, unlike O'Brien, Said insists Camus' work is that of a realist whose colonial setting is at its root. As he goes on to say:

> The structure of civil society so vividly presented – the municipality, the legal apparatus, hospitals, restaurants, clubs, entertainments, schools – is French, although in the main it administers the non-French population. The correspondence between how Camus writes about this and how French schoolbooks do is arresting: the novels and short stories narrate the result of a victory won over a pacified, decimated Muslim population whose right to the land have been severely curtailed. In thus confirming and consolidating French priority, Camus neither disputes nor dissents from the campaign for the sovereignty waged against Algerian Muslims for over a hundred years (1993, 181).

Said's claim here is that Camus' writing is one rooted in the monologism of imperialism. That is, as Guimond and Maynard say of the imperial monologic voice, that Camus sought 'to silence contending viewpoints.'

What is perhaps interesting to point out here is that this 'monologic' attitude in critics is precisely what David Carroll accuses the likes of Edward Said of engaging in. As Carroll states, in his illuminating *Albert Camus the Algerian*, in response to Said's claims about Camus' *The Outsider* mentioned above:

> critics have tended to underplay or simply ignore the devastating picture *The Outsider* provides of what Memmi has called the 'colonial relation,' a hierarchical relation of oppression, forced dependency and violence that is evident in the microstructures determining everyday relations

> between coloniser and colonised as in macrostructures determining the political, economic, and cultural domination of the colonisers over the colonised (2007, 26).

However, slightly ironically, it is Alice Kaplan, who reprimands Said for his realist historical reading of *The Outsider*, who offers the last piece of the puzzle for those who wish to confine Camus' work to a model of monological realism. For Kaplan in *Looking for The Outsider*, by painstakingly researching the real events and people that informed Camus' story – in particular the origins of the altercation on the beach – also takes to situating *The Outsider* as a piece of realism. And so, with O'Brien's claim that Camus' work contains a singular authorial ideological ethic, Said's demand that Camus' work is a realist representation of colonialism and Kaplan's investigation into the actual sources of *The Outsider's* events, Camus' works quickly lose their existentialist and modernist underpinnings and become readable, monologic and Watt-like works of formal realism. It is the implications of this generic 'fixing' of the novel for the project of rewriting that I will now go on to explore.

## Daoud's Correction and Collaboration

Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* is organised around the narrative of a man named Harun, an ageing Algerian Arab who sits at a bar in Oran relating his story to an unnamed and unrecorded western student. Harun, it turns out, is the brother of the murdered Arab of Camus' *The Outsider*. The motivation of the rewrite arises from seemingly two similarities with the famous post-colonial critiques. One, is O'Brien's conflation of Meursault's political and ethical viewpoints with Camus'. The other, is Said's assertion that Camus consciously produced a realist account of colonial Algeria, which is, Said continues, the antithesis of the work of decolonizing writers such as Frantz Fanon.

Whereas O'Brien almost unthinkingly conflates Camus' position with that of his protagonist, Daoud makes this merger a strong polemical point by naming his narrator, in the original Algerian edition, 'Albert Meursault' – a man who is both a murderer and a writer. Although the 'Albert' was deleted in French and English editions, due to a disagreement with Camus' executors, the omission of the forename in the text does not rid the book of this conceit and Albert Meursault remains the character of Daoud's focus. Here Daoud actively seems to make the same assumption as O'Brien, that Meursault is a simple proxy for Camus' supposed colonial ideological viewpoint. In doing so, much like what Bakhtin says of certain critics of Dostoyevsky, Daoud initially seems to follow Said and O'Brien in squeezing 'the artist's plurality of consciousnesses into a systematically monologic framework of a single worldview…[they] surgically removed [other] ideological theses, which they arrange in dynamic dialectical series' (1984, 9).

Furthermore Daoud, like Camus' postcolonial critics, implies that the absence of the murdered Arab's name in *The Outsider* and the Arabs' silences, in the rest of Camus' work, is the signifier of the colonial subjects' status. As Daoud's narrator insists, Albert Meursault, the writer, created a book where the murdered Arab has no name and Arabs have 'no language except the sound of a flute' (2015, 2).[20] So it is as an act of dialectical correction that Daoud names the Arab, who was killed by Albert Meursault both literally and figuratively. 'Who knows Musa's name?' Harun asks. He then answers. 'He was my brother. That is what I am getting at. I want to tell you the story Musa was never able to tell' (2015, 4). This idea of correction is, of course, brought home with the first words of the novel 'Mama is still alive today', a line which replaces the canonical opening of Camus' *The Outsider*, that begins with 'Mama died today' (2015, 1).

So, we seem here to have a post-colonial manoeuvre that we have noticed already in this thesis. That is to say, that *The Meursault Investigation* is seemingly offering a dialectical, post-colonial, correction to *The Outsider*, in which a particular, monologic, reading of the latter is reified in order to be over-turned. Daoud, however, goes further than simply usurping the story as well as the post-colonial criticism of Camus' most famous work. Much like Coetzee did with Defoe's work, Daoud uses all of Camus' fictional *oeuvre* as a literary quarry, taking the building blocks he needs to construct his correction. Harun states, not without a sense of irony, that he was going to do what was done in Algeria after Independence.

> I am going to take the stones from the old houses that the colonist left behind remove them one by one and build my own house, my own language (2015, 2).

The use of 'my own language' is important here in that it references the monologism of Camus' failure to produce the language of the Arabs of Algeria.

Although writing in French and not Arabic, which as we will discuss later has its own significance in a contemporary Algeria, Daoud constructs the novel from various elements of Camus' works. Perhaps one of the most important of these is that the novel's *form* is taken from the one-sided monologue of Jean-Baptiste Clamence in Camus' *The Fall*. Then there is also the fact that *The Meursualt Investigation's* setting is Oran, rather than the Algiers of *The Outsider*. This is a reference to Camus' *The Plague*, which was set in a rat-infested Oran. As Harun states, Oran is a place 'I love…despite the rats' (2015, 40). What is more, Daoud's narrator, Harun, like Jean-Baptiste Clamence, is named after a prophet, this time not from the Bible but the Koran. And even though Harun's brother Musa (Moses) is the very contradiction of the introverted and godless

[20] It is perhaps interesting to note here that Coetzee in *Foe* also creates an image of the colonized as speechless and whose only sound is produced by the means of a flute.

Meursault – he is gregarious and bears a tattoo which states 'God is my support' – as Brozgal points out, Musa's name bears a phonetic similarity in French to Meursault's.

It is important to stress that these appropriations of Camus' work are not, certainly at first, constructed as a simple 'reworking or imitation'. Instead they are very pointedly a dialectical correction to the monologic and monotheistic French colonial Christian regime which Camus was accused by O'Brien and Said of supporting. Daoud, in the naming of his Arab characters, references the Arabic Muslim traditions of Algeria as opposed to those of the French. Harun in the Koran is, after all, the brother of Musa (Moses) and Meriem. Meriem, as we discover later, is Harun's educated girlfriend (the binary opposite of Meursault's 'girl Friday' Marie). It is Meriem who will introduce Harun to the author and murderer Albert Meursault's book. There are also important appropriations from the Koran these further establish the dialectical correction suggested by Camus/Daoud, western literature/'marginal rewrite', Colonial/Postcolonial, France/Algeria, Christian/Muslim, Meursault/Musa, Jean-Baptiste/Harun, Marie/Meriem.

At the root of this correction, however, is the production of a 'counter' silence and a namelessness that is the antithesis of Camus'. The first most obvious example of this is that Harun's western interlocutor remains unnamed and his language is withheld. And one also quickly discovers that the silent Arabs in Camus' work are replaced by the silent *colon* or *roumis*. The 'reality' of Camus' colonial world is effectively turned on its head and is replaced with one seemingly influenced by the postcolonial ideas of Frantz Fanon. As Jeffery C. Isaac points out 'Fanon is a kind of interlocutor in the novel' (2016, 149) and Harun's narrative monologue produces one saturated with the notion that it is the colonised role 'to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence – in a word to put him out of the picture' (Fanon, 2001, 34).

'[W]e were the ghosts,' Harun states, and then goes on to say, drawing explicit attention to the novel's strategy of dialectical *reversal* '[a]nd today? It is just the opposite!' (2015, 11). The ex-colonials who return to independent Algeria to see what they once had are then described as: 'mute spectres, they watch us – us Arabs – in silence' (2015, 11). But this silencing, of placing the settler 'out of the picture', occurs even before independence. An example of this is when Harun's mother, having discovered what she thinks is the house of Albert Meursault, screams curses at the woman who she thinks is Meursault's relative (2015, 44). The colonial woman is said to be incapable of responding. She is muted (much like Camus' real mother whose deafness rendered her mute and silent) and she simply collapses before the tirade. What is more, as he and his mother leave, Harun hears only the Arabic word for 'police'. That is to say, the colonial French language is removed – this is despite the fact that they are in the poor *pied-noir* district of Belcourt.

Furthermore, on encountering the Frenchman that Harun later kills, there seems to be a reversal of descriptions. Whereas in *The Outsider* the Arab that Meursault kills is rendered almost indefinable and silent by 'the cymbals the sun was clashing against my forehead' so too is the *pied noir* that Harun later kills. As Harun states when he first saw the Frenchman, Joseph Larquais, the sun was 'big', 'heavy' and 'blinding', rendering his colonial victim silent. What is more, Larquais is said to be almost unidentifiable amidst a group of *pied-noirs* who are seeking the protection of Algerian officials close to the end of the Algerian War of Independence (2015, 82).

Camus' literature, with its silent unnamed Arabs, is seemingly read by Daoud much as Said reads it.[21] That is, as the latter suggests, Camus' work was 'counterpoised to the decolonizing literature of the time' (1993, 185) written by the likes of Fanon. Fanon is of course for Said the one outstanding decolonizing theorist who understood that colonialization and imperialism had turned the colonised into 'inhuman and non-conscious objects.' This is what Fanon refers to as the colonial 'contact', a perfect example of which is the killing of Musa by Albert Meursault. This violent 'contact' of coloniser with the colonised leads both Harun and his mother to live deeply psychologically traumatised lives. As Harun relates to the silent nameless European sitting with him at the bar, 'so I had a ghost's childhood [under colonialism]' (2015, 46). And Harun's mother, after finding a job as a housekeeper in Hadjout (the town previously known as Marengo where Meursault's mother lived in an old age home), spends her time there waiting 'with me perched on her back, for Independence' (2015, 29). In Hadjout Harun finds that his status is locked in what Fanon referred to as 'thinghood'. Even amongst the Arab community he is simply recognised as 'the dead man's brother'. As Harun goes on to suggest, the colonial 'contact' of Musa's killing render him as 'an object' to his mother, 'not her son' (2015, 39).

Both Harun and his mother are presented as being completely without agency in this period. They are without any sense of liberty either personal or political. The only two processes that can seemingly bring any meaning to this void are the newspaper article, which recounts the murder of Musa by Meursault, and the return of Musa's body. The article, written in French which Harun's mother cannot read, only increases a sense of Otherness, and their status under French colonialism 'as not quite human'. All the while the constant rereading of the article that his mother demands of Harun will reveal nothing to them. Much like 'Albert Meursault's' book, the article is written in an alien language and it fails to name Musa. The search for Musa's body too offers only emptiness and silence. The only escape from this status is to learn the coloniser's language. As

[21] Coetzee too suggests in *Foe*, with the cutting out of Friday's tongue there has been an active silencing of the colonised. This is not unlike Said and O'Brien's argument – indeed there is perhaps a reference to *The Outsider* in *Foe* as both Friday and Camus' Arab play a reed flute as their only act of represented expression.

Harun admits, in the first half of the book, he can only 'survive' through the fraught acts of assimilation, which Fanon famously warned would only be met with rejection.

Their sense of suffocation seems to come to an end, however, when Harun is woken in the middle of the night by a Frenchman, Joseph Larquais. Larquais is seeking shelter in the house that Harun and his mother have appropriated during the War of Independence from their colonial 'masters'. Harun knows that he can walk away and that this man is no threat to him or his mother. But as he says: 'Mama was there, forbidding any attempt of mine to dodge away, and demanding what she couldn't obtain with her own hands: revenge' (2015, 84). Harun fires twice, hitting the Frenchman once in the belly and once in the neck, killing him instantly.

It is at this point that there seems to be reference to, as Said puts it, Fanon's 'quasi-Hegelian move' of dialectical synthesis or overcoming that will arise from the colonised's 'counter-violence'. From the moment the bullets enter Joseph's body the changes begin for both Harun and his mother. Ever since Musa's death his mother is said to have been hardly able to breathe: however straight after the murder Harun notices that her breathing had 'calmed down and suddenly became soft.' (2015, 76) The moon outside, bright and full (as opposed to the sun in Meursault's eyes), seems to 'soothe the earth' and Harun describes his emotions as if a cathartic act has altered them:

> Basically I felt relieved, unburdened, free in my own body…Like a flash – a shot! – I had a sense of immense space, I grew dizzy at the possibility of my own freedom… It was as if perspectives were opening up and I could finally breathe. Whereas I'd always lived like a prisoner until then, confined within the perimeter established by Musa's death and my mother's vigilance, I now saw myself standing upright, at the heart of a vast territory (2015, 77).

This sense of 'overcoming' through an act of violence mirrors Fanon's revolutionary dialectical claims, in line with his reading of Hegel. Fanon argued that the opposition between colonial master and colonialized slave could only be overcome in a fight to the death where the 'native' goes '[o]ne step more, and…is ready to fight to be more than the settler.' (2001, 35) Fanon agrees with Hegel's assertion that it is only through the death of the master that freedom can be realised. And this can only be achieved by "'dialectical" or better, revolutionary, overcoming of the World that can free him' (1969, 29). [22]

But it is important to note that this overcoming, or what I have called here dialectical correction, relies on the reading of Camus' work as the 'thesis' or a monologic realism with the ethic or ideology of the author. However, with Harun's killing of Joseph Larquais this monologic

[22] Here I am using Kojeve's lectures on Hegel for two reasons. One because as Foley argues Kojeve's were by far the most pervasive interpretation of Hegel in France at the time and secondly it avoids some of Hegel's obscure terminology which would require a much longer explanation.

reading of Camus begins to be questioned. Perhaps the first sign of this occurs when Harun says to his silent and nameless western interlocutor:

> The Other is a unit of measurement you lose when you kill. Afterwards I felt an incredible, almost divine giddiness at the thought of somehow resolving everything – at least in my daydreams – by committing murder. The list of my victims was long. I'd start with one of our neighbours, a self-proclaimed "veteran mujahid" (2015, 90).

Here Daoud seems close to expressing something similar to that which is at the root of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. That is to say, as Michael Holquist put it, 'there is no way that 'I' can be transgredient to another *living* subject' (1990, 33). The monologic world where 'the other' as a unit of measurement is put 'out of the picture' can, according to Bakhtin, simply not exist. There is according to Bakhtin, as Holquist points out, 'a necessary multiplicity of human perception' (1990, 22).

This sense of being able to live in a vacuum, in a monologic world without the 'I's' dialogic relationship to 'the other', is soon contested after the murder. After this Harun's narrative begins to mirror more directly that of *The Outsider*. It moves away from ideas of a divided and antithetical world and the postcolonial begins to look more like a distorted duplication of the colonial. Some days after the shooting Harun, like Meursault, is arrested. At first, much like in Meursault's case, the officials are said to be uninterested. Later when a Frenchman in the same holding cell asks Harun what crime he has committed, Harun replies that he killed a Frenchman and this, like the almost identical incident in *The Outsider*, is followed with silence.

Although Harun is let off, largely due to his mother's pleading with the officials, he nevertheless draws ever closer to a duplication of 'the other' that is Meursault. Even Meriem, who enters Harun's life bringing Albert Meursault's novel, bares a strange biographical similarity to Camus. Meriem is, after all, bookish, she studies at the University of Algiers and is from Constantine, the city nearest to Camus' birth place. But it is on reading the work of Albert Meursault, which Meriem gives to him, Harun states that: 'I felt insulted and revealed to myself…and what I found there was my own reflection, I discovered that I was practically the murder's double' (2015, 131).

This claim, that Harun is in a relationship of a double or twin rather than the dialectical antithesis of Meursault, becomes more pronounced with the description of Harun's distinct distaste for organized religion. In this 'turn' in the novel, in which anti-thesis turns out to be a form of uncanny doubling, we might argue that Daoud implicitly reflects on the act of post-colonial rewriting itself. To what extent can it oppose or correct the text in relation to which it stands as a critique, and to what extent must it be understood as a replication of that text, echoing

it (and even its violence)? Certainly the final scene of *The Meursault Investigation* transforms itself into an almost identical version of *The Outsider*. As Huran confesses:

> A priest visited [Meursault] in his cell; in my case, there's a whole pack of religious fanatics hounding me trying to convince me that the stones of the country don't only sweat with suffering and that God is watching over us (2015, 139-140).

Like Meursault, Harun grabs the cleric who comes to offer him the message of God and, like Meursault, Harun rejects him stating that his vision of salvation is the 'face burning with desire' of the woman that was his girlfriend Meriem/Marie.

To be sure there *is* still a distinction between the Albert Meursault, the coloniser and the indigenous population. This simply does not coalesce because Meursault and the Arabs bear some similarities. But their correspondence equally cannot be overlooked. Meriem's life does bear similarities to that of Camus' own, while Harun's increasingly resembles that of Meursault's. As Valerie K. Orlando points out, 'Meursault is part of Moussa, Haroun is part of Camus and they are all caught in a perpetual trap of "entre-deux"' (2015, 876).

The novel ends with a claim that hardly seems fathomable at the beginning. In his final words to the unnamed western listener Harun asks if he knows what the word 'Meursault' or *El-Merssoul* means in Arabic. The answer is 'the messenger'. With this acknowledgement that Albert Meursault is both prophet and foe, the notion of antithesis or correction through opposition is destroyed. As Camus himself argued in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* the conflict between identities will never be overcome. Along these lines Daoud seems to suggest that 'Camus the colonial' and 'Camus the messenger' will always remain, the synthesis of the colonial and postcolonial worlds is seemingly impossible in that they remain both different and at times identical. As such no true rewrite of correction can be implemented. The rewrite can only seemingly act as a dialogic supplement.

Perhaps the most important aspect to this notion is the fact that *The Meursault Investigation* was written in (Algerian) French rather than in Arabic. As Orlando has suggested, writing in French in Algeria is a challenge to the monologism of the single official language of Arabic in Algeria. As she states, Daoud's writing in French affirms 'the concept of cultural plurality' (2015, 866). In Bakhtin's terms Daoud's act of writing in French affirms the importance of the heteroglot, not only as a way of dialogically challenging the monologic tendencies of Algerian Arabic nationalism but also that of the French colonials. As Orlando concludes:

> The French language, wielded by the Algerian pen, may have been engendered from colonialism, but over time this language has morphed into something other, as Daoud remarks: 'un français rêvé, celui de la littérature, de la liberté, de la justice' (a dreamed French, that of literature, of

> freedom, of justice). For [Daoud] French opens Algeria to the floodgates of ideas, philosophies and ways of Being-in-the-world, as Haroun states towards the end of *Meursault: contre-enquête*: 'La langue française me fascinait comme une enigma au-delà de laquelle résidait la solution aux dissonances de mon monde' (The French language has fascinated me like an enigma beyond where resides the solution to the dissonances of my world) (129– 130). These dissonances have always been, and will forever be, best expressed somewhere *entre-deux*, between French and Arabic, France and Algeria, colonial history and postcolonial present (2015, 881).

Furthermore, Daoud by appropriating the names of his characters from the Koran (which are themselves replicated in different forms in both the Torah and the Bible), along with all his other metafictional play with reference to various of Camus' fictions but also to Fanon, Hegel and, even points to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Don Quixote,* suggests a notion of collaboration rather than correction. In doing so Daoud goes some way to denying that he and other post-colonial writers are dominated by a purely 'western' colonial matrix to which they must 'write back' or correct. Instead *The Meursault Investigation* suggests that they are involved in a matrix that has within it cross-cultural, pluralistic and dialogical collaborative underpinnings.

It is important to note that Daoud allows 'existentialist' and liberal humanist readings as well as a post-colonial one to be at play in *The Meursault Investigation*. This dialogic approach supports Bakhtin's argument that the novel, as a form, is 'decentered' and without a 'primary or stable system of ideology behind it – religious, sociopolitical or philosophical' (2014, 373). Certainly as Camus' own philosophy of 'limits' suggest there was no one philosophy of life, no one ideology. As Camus once wrote, he never believed himself to be 'in possession of truth'. This suggests that his own works were far more dialogical or writerly than O'Brien and Said would allow. This is certainly what Daoud seems to intimate and what will be discussed below. It is also interesting to note that after a religious fatwa was declared on Daoud for blasphemy, after the publication of *The Meursault Investigation*, he was quoted in an interview saying: 'It was a fictional character in the novel who said these things, not me. If we judge people on the basis of characters in their books, we will be facing dark times in Algeria' (MEMRI, 2014).

## The Dialogicism of Silence in Albert Camus

In the first section of this chapter, I traced post-colonial criticisms of Camus' novel by O'Brien, and Said, each of whom suggest, in different ways, that the novel espoused a monologic, singular, colonial ideological position. I then moved on to suggest how Daoud's novel, *The Meursault Investigation*, begins by seemingly offering a dialectical counter position to Camus', before turning and reflecting on this dialectical model itself. Daoud's novel in this sense becomes a slightly more complex rewriting than both *Foe* and *The Secret History of Costaguana*. That is it goes further than

both of those texts in acknowledging its complicities as well as foregrounding its confrontation with Camus' texts. But is it true to say that Daoud honours Camus' own complexities? Or to put it otherwise, is *The Outsider* itself more than a monologic text – is it dialogical and writerly?

Dialogism, and the heteroglot that creates it, would at least seemingly demand that the silent Arabs (the subalterns in Spivak's sense) would need to speak. This they do not. Even when Meursault encounters Arab prisoners, after he is arrested, they laugh at him but fall silent when he tells them why he is there. But here Daoud might shed some light. In Daoud's work there is the intimation that, as Camus once said, 'silence is not a *negative* attitude'. Although Daoud, like Camus in *The Fall*, silences his interlocutor, in a Bakhtinian sense this unnamed and silent character is not unknowable. For Harun and Jean-Baptiste Clamence's responses are created by the silence of the other. They are not acting in a void. Harun and Clamence are only capable of retelling their stories by another's presence. Although the narratives may be described as monologues, as indeed could Meursault's, they, like I have argued with regards to the solitary Robinson Crusoe on his island, are not monologic. Harun and Clamence's responses are created by the questioning presence of the other. And although all of these characters might not be named or have a written presence they are inherent to their texts.

Furthermore, the very idea of silence in the work of Camus has never fully been examined. Other critis such as Emily Apter in her essay 'Out of Character: Camus's French Algerian Subjects' (1997) have simply accepted the post-colonial criticism of O'Brien and Said without fully investigating the meanings that silence has in Camus' work. As quoted above, Camus believed that silence was not necessarily a negative position. And in almost all of his work it plays a distinct, one could say, 'moral' role. As Stephen Watson, in his essay 'The Heart of Albert Camus', points out, Camus' deaf and mute mother was a Christ-like figure in Camus' religionless world (2010, 200). As Camus would note in various places it was above all his mother's silent resignation to her lot as a 'domestique', living in poverty, that would elevate her, in his mind and in many of his essays, to something of the only messiah he deserved. In his unfinished semi-autobiography, *The First Man* (1995), there is a note about 'the mother':

> She, silent most of the time, with only a few words at her disposal to express herself; he constantly talking and unable to find in thousands of words what she could say with a single one of her silences (1995, 247).

This idea that, not only is silence a virtue, but that its virtue is the binary opposite of a mendacious bureaucratic verbiage is an often-noted element of Meursault's character. What is surprising about O'Brien's attack on *The Outsider* is that even he states, 'that the narrator's feelings are not directly indicated but various blanks and silences show that his feelings are not those that are expected of

him' (1970, 14). Although O'Brien does not make the leap, it seems clear that those who expect words from him are the French colonial system and its society. What is more it is Meursault's 'blanks and silences' that distinguish him from that society. As Patrick McCarthy puts it 'Meursault the character is frequently silent' (1988, 18), a taciturnity that is a 'protest against the wordiness of the lawyers' (1988, 18). John Foley too points out that the 'trial stages a confrontation between the simple and direct language of Meursault…and the false bombastic language of the state' (2008, 17).

But this simplicity and silence is not one merely ascribed to Meursault. It goes further than this, often becoming in Camus' work a representation of both the *pied noir* and the Arab Algerian condition. What Camus referred to as the *pensee mediterranee*. As McCarthy notes with regards to the Arabs, they 'barely speak at all. Yet since the Arabs do not themselves oppress, their silence is a mark of authenticity' (1988, 18). This notion, of silence as the marker of truthfulness and authenticity, would again appear in Camus' short fiction 'The Silent Men' (*Les Meuts*). This story – which is not mentioned by either O'Brien or Said – of coopers who come back to work after a failed strike, is important for its theme as well as its representation of the Arab worker.

These working-class men, both *pied noir* and the Arab alike, are said to be filled with 'an anger and helplessness that sometimes hurts so much that you can't even cry out' (1958, 79). The Arab cooper, whose name is, ironically, Said, is clearly the worst affected by the failure to secure a pay increase. This results in Yvar, the *pied-noir* protagonist, sharing his sandwiches with Said, the Arab, as they wait for the confrontation with the boss, which takes the form of a refusal by the coopers to speak to him. Silence here, as in *The Outsider*, far from being a negative attitude, is both a voice and a locus of resistance. Harun, in *The Meursault Investigation*, too suggests the Arabs' silence was an act of passive rebellion, 'nobody responded to them [the colonials], people clammed up (*se taisait*) in their presence, leaned on the wall, and waited [for them to leave].' (2015, 60)

But the silence in Camus is not only the voice of the excluded, the voice of Meursault, the Arabs and the working class, it is also an inherent part of Camus' writing. Sartre, in his famous review of *The Outsider*, would call it 'an obsession with silence' which offers a 'new technique' of silence with words (2001, 11). Roland Barthes would later state, in his essay 'Writing and Silence', that 'writing degree zero' was 'a transparent form of speech, initiated by Camus' Outsider, [which] achieves a style of absence' (1967, 77).

This form of neutral writing or silence, this writing at the zero degree, has a further significance to the argument that Camus' text is not the authored monologic realism that Edward Said intimates. As Barthes stated, the notion of degree zero was 'a late phenomenon to be invented only much later than Realism by authors like Camus, less under the impulse of an aesthetics of

escape than in search of a mode of writing which might at last achieve innocence' (1967, 67). Camus' writing is above all, according to Barthes, a reaction against the 'engaged' realism, what he would later refer to as 'writerly works', 'where form was supposed to be at the service of content' (1967, 57). John Cruickshank also observes that *The Outsider* represents a 'revolt against what Sartre called (in *Situations II*) "a vocabulary that has been dislocated, vulgarised, softened and stuffed with 'bourgeois-isms' by 150 years of middle-class domination"' (1959, 155).

But Barthes and Sartre were not the only critics to have noted that Camus' work, and in particular *The Outsider*, was a reaction against the 'closed' language and style of the realist writing of the nineteenth century. As Patrick McCarthy points out, Camus' language in *The Outsider*, with its use of the perfect (or *passe compose*), rather than the past historic, was a distinct break from the realism of the likes of Balzac. As McCarthy writes:

> [the past historic] can masquerade as a causality. So the past historic conveys to the reader the sense that the events narrated could not have unfolded in another manner, that this sequence possesses a certain legitimacy. And that behind the key of the main character stands the divine narrator who comprehends the universe…. By contrast, the perfect is closer to the present and renders the action for itself. Each actor becomes an event that is being lived rather than a segment of a greater whole indeed the concept of a whole is thus rendered problematic because events occur rather than being created…Camus along with other twentieth-century writers, is endeavouring the shape the ideological [bourgeois] presuppositions upon which the traditional novel rests (1988, 22).

Daoud's novel, with his inclusion of what Alice Kaplan calls an 'existentialist' reading, might remind us of this. (2016, 203) That is to say that Camus was writing against the tradition of realism. But this does not simply eliminate the notion that Camus' work is not a representation or mimetic of an Algerian state of affairs. Of course, the accusation that both O'Brien and Said laid at Camus' door was that he was effectively a collaborator in the installation of the monologic language and culture of the French State in Algeria. But Meursault, much like Harun, as noted above, 'constructs his own language' from the elements and fragments of the culture around him. Meursault's language is not only the degree zero or *l'ecriture blanche* but is the simple, one could say the realist, representation or mimesis of a *pied-noir* patois that is distinct from that of France's metropole. As Camus proffered in his essay 'Summer in Algiers' (1939):

> In Algiers you don't say "to go swimming" (prendre un bain) but "to dive in for a swim" (se taper un bain). I won't insist. People bath in the port and rest on the buoys. When you go close to a buoy on which a pretty girl is already sitting you shout to your friends: 'I tell you it's a seagull.' (1979, 82).

This very kind of language and incident are recreated in *The Outsider* after Meursault returns from his mother's funeral:

> I wondered what to do with myself and decided to go for a swim. I caught the tram down to the bathing station at the port. I dived straight into the narrows. It was full of young people. In the water I met Marie Cordona…I helped her onto a bouy (1998, 18).

Cruickshank notes that Camus was critical of the new 'anti-literature' of various of his contemporaries, because in their attempt to 'portray man in such general philosophical terms…[they] lose all individuality and human particularity' (1959, 148) Raymond's violence towards his mistress and the fight with the Arab contain distinct Algerian language and dispositions. The very same language and disposition of a fight that Camus transcribed word for word in 'Summer in Algiers'. A fight where the same demands that Meursault makes for a fair contest are recorded and in which people are 'thumped' (*tapais*) and 'hit' (*donner des coups*).

*The Outsider* might not be a piece of realism in Watt's sense, but, like all novels, it is a representation of life – although the mirror held up to nature has in a sense been shattered and fragmented. Certainly, it can be argued that Meursault does represent a certain *pied-noir* sensibility. He speaks and records a life very different, culturally and linguistically, to that of the metropole. In this regard Meursault is, in many ways, a representation of 'the first man' or colonial that Camus was writing about at the time of his death. He is representative, as Camus wrote, of 'a man with no heritage handed down' operating at a cultural degree zero. As such *The Outsider* is, no doubt, also a portrayal of this community's violence. The violence that the *pied noirs* inflicted on the Arab population and the reciprocating violence that was their response.

But while noting this, one should not confuse the violence of Raymond and even that of Meursault with the historical person Albert Camus. As he himself ironically observed in a collection of essays gathered under the title *L'été* (1954):

> but, after all, you can also write about incest without having necessarily hurled yourself on your unfortunate sister; and I have nowhere read that Sophocles ever thought of killing his father and dishonouring his mother. The idea that every writer necessarily writes about himself and depicts himself in his book is one of the puerile notions that we have inherited from Romanticism. It is by no means impossible, on the contrary, that a writer should be interested first and foremost in other people, or in his time, or in familiar myths. Even if he does happen to put himself in the picture, it is only very exceptionally that he talks about what he is really like (1979, 144).

Like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Nostromo*, *The Outsider* is, as Bakhtin argued of the novel in general, 'not permeated with a single ideology and single artistic method' (2014, 167) The book is after all filled with multiple ideologies: with the 'rational' monologic French bureaucratic system, with the violence of the *pied-noir* community, with the silences of the colonised (which is somehow coalesced into the psyche of a hybridised colonizer). It also contains the plurality of *pensee mediterranee* that rejects monotheism while at the same time allowing monotheism a re-joining voice.

Daoud in *The Meursault Investigation*, far from reducing the reading of the novel to one of these ideologies or ethics in order to correct it, encourages the reader into an awareness of the multiple dialogic ideologies that exist within Camus' work as well as their incommensurability. Or in the words of one of Camus' early English critics 'Camus is at pains to show the incoherence of existence.' (1959, 166) As Bakhtin suggested the novel in general is not 'permeated by the unity of a social ideology; it is surrounded by speech as well as language diversity, it lacks any support or centre.' (2014, 379) Furthermore, as Bakhtin would argue of Dostoyevsky, the author's voice cannot be confused with his characters', and indeed if such a thing as an author's voice can be identified, then it is simply one voice functioning amongst the dialogical imagination. Or as Camus might have put it, the novel presents a text operating 'between yes and no.' This notion is in many ways at the heart of Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*, where a post-colonial novel both replicates and stands out against a colonial one, without suggesting synthesis.

## Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to make clear the progressive nature of the post-colonial rewrite from the method of dialectical correction of a monologic reading of the work towards a more open dialogical acceptance of the 'parent' text. What we have seen in all the above rewrites' conceits is that they have relied on a critically mediated reading of the text on which an intimated correction is based. At the centre of these critical readings is, I have suggested, the notion that the parent work is one rooted in realism. Furthermore, I have argued, it is the idea of realism popularised by Ian Watt, but also seen in the arguments of Roland Barthes and J.M. Coetzee (who had read Watt at the time of writing *Foe* and was clearly influenced by Barthes).

Although coming from very different outlooks, all the major theorists that I have discussed, from Bakhtin to Watt to Barthes to Said and even to Coetzee (as theorist and novelist), have agreed that realism – which was a method of enlightenment discourse – is rooted in a bourgeois ideological attempt to monologise language and text. However, it is Bakhtin who insists that the novel is, by its very ontology, one of the sources of decentring this monologism. Bakhtin argues, in the collection of essays contained in *The Dialogic Imagination*, that the novel is *the* one genre whose form openly defies and contests 'monologic realism'. As he suggests, the novel is never monologic (although some realist authors may have attempted to bend it into an abstract unitary system of language and hence ideology). Instead the presence of 'the other', the 'double-voice', the 'sideways glance', the 'fool' and the linguistic 'outsider' offers up in the novel 'a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems' (2014, 288). In a word, the novel is 'dialogic'. As Bakhtin goes on to state, the novel is diametrically opposed to the monologic

discourse of the official language of the scholar, the law, the king, the philosophy of the universalist enlightenment and the unitary 'national language'.

As I have stated above, Bakhtin made the observation that rather than the author of the novel, it is '[s]ome critics, enslaved by the content of individual heroes' ideological views, [that] have attempted to reduce these views to a systemically monologic whole.' (1984, 25) It is precisely this kind of critically monologist reading by critics, I have suggested, that the rewrite corrects. As I have argued, Watt, Said, and Barthes all agree that only some novels are dialogically multivalent and plural, while others, most notably realist texts and those that have some of their formal structures, are fixed, closed and singular in ideology. Falling into Barthes's mode of criticism Brenda K. Marshall argues, in her discussion of Coetzee's *Foe* (1992, 123), *Robinson Crusoe* is a *Work*, that is, 'it closes on a singular signified' or concept. *Foe* on the other hand, she states, is a *Text*, it is plural, irreducible and multivalent.[23] Coetzee, in his own reading of *Robinson Crusoe* as a piece of empiricist formal realism, I have argued, ostensibly agrees with this criticism. As Barthes, Coetzee and Said all concur, in their various ways, the realist colonial and monological *Work* is rooted both formally and conceptually in the ideology of bourgeois imperialism's *doxa*. And it is this that Coetzee offers a correction of, or *para-doxa* to, in *Foe*.

Coetzee's correction, however, contains a duality of interests, because he does not simply offer a correction to the supposed colonial ideology of *Robinson Crusoe*. He furthermore 'corrects' the form or structure that it is presented in, to which the content of the ideology is inextricably linked. Not only does Coetzee point out the inherent cruelty, oppression and paternalism of colonialism but he also corrects the structure that the discourse of colonialism was framed in. That is to say, he attacks the realist empiricist and rationalist approach to discourse, with its logocentricism and its causational imperatives that formed the subjugating colonial discourse in particular and the western canon in general.

What is elemental to Coetzee's correction is that he references the silencing of the colonised voice that was at the centre of Jean Rhys' orginary rewrite in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, his approach is distinct in that, although he signs the silencing of the colonised, he does not raise their voice out of its muteness and 'allow the subaltern to speak'. Instead he suggests that representation of the colonised, in a realist from, will fail to represent its subject. This, he adumbrates, is due to the fact that the colonised will have to find their own voice which cannot be rendered in the West's discourse.

[23] See Barthes 'From Work to Text'.

In taking this approach Coetzee's correction relies on the notion that Defoe's work in particular and realist works in general are suffused in the enlightenment empiricist form as argued for by Watt. His dialectical antithesis is as such a correction of Watt's formal realism. However, I have suggested, *Robinson Crusoe* does do much, by itself (without the help of Coetzee), to undermine Watt's notion of formal realist discourse. Or as Boxall says:

> If Crusoe, as Watt argues, is charged by Defoe with the task of constructing a new means of seeing the world, developing the formal mode in which the capitalist modernity must make an image of itself, then the basis for this seeing is a deeply troubled one that completely fails to establish that snug fit between the sign and thing (2015, 51).

Or to put it another way, Defoe's work is a great deal more dialogical and decentering than either Watt or Coetzee seem willing to recognise. This, as has been argued, undermines the major premise the dialectical correctional thesis (or antithesis) and is precisely what the two more recent post-colonial rewrites seemingly take up.

Although less focused than Coetzee on the purely linguistic elements of a realist colonializing discourse, Vasquez too corrects, in a post-colonial context, the implications of Watt's formal realist reading of *Nostromo*. However, this is not to say that Vasquez ignores many of Coetzee's linguistic concerns. He too presents the Author 'Conrad' much as Coetzee does Foe. In referring to him as 'the Great English Novelist' Vasquez seemingly is making much the same point as Coetzee in suggesting that Foe has been deemed to have a singular authority. Vasquez, however, goes back to a slightly older rewrite conceit in that he wishes to give voice to the voiceless. That is, he seemingly follows Rhys in allowing the subaltern to speak in a manner that Coetzee rejects.

However, in an argument similar to Coetzee's, Vasquez does offer throughout *The Secret History of Costaguana* the idea that a narrative voice is not in itself enough to render anything 'real'. Where Coetzee's Barton cannot represent effectively the causes and meanings of the 'absurd' inner life of Cruso and Friday, narrative voices in Vasquez, like the author Foe, are involved in 'refraction'. As Jose Altamirano offers, there are two narrative 'voices' in South America, that of the conservative and the liberal, who both have relativized narrative for their own ideological purposes. The intimation seems to be, to start with, that Conrad is such an agent of ideology and that he has written the voice of Jose Altamirano out of his own story *Nostromo*.

The questionVasquez seems to pose, however, is what can the novel offer? Is the novel, as a genre, in this sense always a 'secret history' of real events as both Watt and the name of the novel seem to suggest? Is it simply the rerending of the refracted voice of the ideologue? Is the realist novel simply the singular voice of 'Foe' or 'Conrad' or Miguel Altamirano, Jose's journalist

father? Will it always be rendered into the pattern of a monologising structure which excludes the voice of 'the other' – in this case Jose Altamirano? This is indeed what Vasquez seems to be suggesting at the very least of Conrad's works right up until the final pages. That is 'Conrad', until the final meeting, is seemingly like Jose's ideologue father, an agent of material interests with a refractive pen.

But this idea is often undermined by the fact that Jose (the narrator) and 'Conrad' are said to be 'twins' or secret sharers. The rewrite's correctional or dialectical thesis is further undermined when 'Conrad' points out at the end that his novel is not the narrative of Columbia, but rather of a fictional country he (Conrad) called Costaguana. That it so say, that its realism is intentionally at least one stage away from the 'real' world. In this sense Vasquez suggests that *Nostromo* is not an attempt to represent the world in the manner Watt claims formal realism does. It is a fiction, not a history. But what is crucial is 'Conrad's' final claim that this fiction contains nothing that Altamirano would not expect to be in it. Here he suggests that *Nostromo* is representative of, at the very least, various themes, or what Conrad called 'voices'. When 'Conrad' finally then begins to read the finished copy of *Nostromo* to the narrator the notion of the rewrite as correction is, at the very least partially, undermined. When 'Conrad' (who is hardly the Great Novelist but merely a man caught up in quotidian domestic issues) begins to read the novel to his 'twin', Jose Altamirano, the narrator sits down to listen to how all the elements and ideological voices of his story of Columbia have been rerendered into fiction. *The Secret History of Costaguana* therefore suggests that what is required is a rereading of the text of *Nostromo* rather than a rewriting of it.

This notion of rereading is again an important element of the most recent rewrite discussed above. In the case of *The Meursault Investigation* although the opening words seem to suggest a Coetzee and Rhys-style correction this idea is, from the very start, undermined by the novel's form. Right from the beginning of the novel we become aware that it is perhaps not in the same mode of engagement as both Coetzee and Vasquez. The fact that it is written in French of course is one such signing. The other is the fact that it takes the narrative form of one of Camus' books, that is to say is replicates the form of the *The Fall* with its single unanswered narrator. However, despite this, *The Meursault Investigation* is initially premised by the suggestion that, like Foe and 'Conrad', the Author Albert Meursault has silenced the colonised in the manner that Conor Cruise O'Brien suggested.

In doing this Daoud follows the thinking of Said in suggesting that Albert Meursault created an imperialist 'reality effect' that wrote the colonised out of the picture. It is to this the narrator Harun claims to be speaking back, and in doing so offering his antithesis. However, this breaks down when the collusion that *The Meursault Investigation* offers become clearer. Here Daoud

suggests, unlike Coetzee, that the relation between the 'I' of the colonising author and 'the other' of the colonised share some aspects of their identity while at the same time being distinct. Here, like Vasquez, Daoud offers a revision of the notion of the rewrite as correction and instead suggests the parent text as more dialogical than post-colonial critics and Coetzee have allowed.

Instead of offering a correctional rewriting both Vasquez and Daoud, in their more recent post-colonial rewrites, intimate a notion of a 'rereading' of the parent text, a rereading that opens it to a Bakhtinian dialogical interpretation. This twist in the rewrite goes some way to abjuring the more monologic realist readings that inspire the notion of correction. It also suggests something a little more than simply the *correction* method of *rewriting*. Indeed this notion of rereading rather than rewriting falls in line with two ideas argued by the contemporary theorists Peter Boxall and Rita Felski – firstly that the notion of the novel's realism was far less of a stabilising and essentialising discourse as some theorists would have had us believe; and secondly the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' or critique or 'reading suspiciously' that claimed to be uncovering the partisan ideological positions of certain authors 'should not be taken as the ultimate horizon of thought' (2015, 192).

As a student schooled in early post-apartheid 'suspicious reading', what troubled me was always a sense that there was more to the text than appeared in its critique. That is, that the marginalised voices in these works were of more importance and held greater sway than was being acknowledged. I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to not only defend these marginalised voices in the above texts but also to find common cause with a group of post-colonial writers who are not afraid to engage with the dialogical nature of the 'colonial' novel. As I have stated in the introduction, my argument is not one that defends a Western, white, patriarchal canon but rather one that falls on the side of the heterogeneity of literature and textuality. It is one, I hope, that acknowledges the marginalized voices of colonial texts and raises their importance in a manner that allows the subaltern's voice to have equal sway to that of the colonizer.

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# Preface to *The Albertsburg Judgement*: its relationship to the critical work

Although *The Albertsburg Judgement* is not a rewrite of a singular novel, which is the form I focus on in my critical work, it is in many ways a rewrite (or as I have framed it a 'rereading') of several colonial and post-colonial texts. Many of the characters in the novel are based on, and appropriated from, colonial and post-colonial fiction. One example of this is the character of Boetsman whose character is a development of that of Conrad's Nostromo. The name of Boetsman, like Nostromo, plays with a mixing of translation and a South African *patois*. In Afrikaans it could be read to mean of 'boatswain' or 'brother man' which is, as Ian Watt points out, much the same as Nostromo – which could mean either 'boatswain' or 'our man'. As such Boetsman is both Conrad's 'incorruptible' stevedore, while at the same time wanting to correct his deeds from a previous novel.

This appropriation or rewriting/rereading continues throughout the novel. Albertsburg's head of police, Mandel, too is taken more directly from Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Mandel's history with regards to the torturing and killing of the local population is much the same. This motif of the torturer and murderer, which runs through many colonial and post-colonial texts, is again referenced by Doctor Eloff's presence – he bears the same name as Damon Galgut's character in *The Good Doctor*. Eloff, in Galgut's work as in *The Albertsburg Judgement*, is witness to a similar torture and killing to the one Mandel and Joll perform in Coetzee's work.

What is more throughout the text there are borrowings from Camus's *The Plague*, with the journalist De Lambert (rather than Rambert) appearing. And he is again confronted with a similar set of dilemmas to those he faced in plague ridden Oran. De Lambert is also a reference to the journalist Martin Decoud of *Nostromo* who suffers from a similar existential crisis when placed in a solitary confinement. The novel also recasts certain more generic colonial figures like the judge/magistrate and the engineer, rereading them into a postcolonial condition.

What I have attempted to do is to rewrite all of these characters into both a contemporary southern African world, while at the same time referencing their originary 'voices'. This in some ways accounts for the 'out of contemporary time' feel to the text. However, the novel also attempts to create the nature (or reality) of southern Africa whose chronotope and languages still cling to slightly older forms and are distinctive to that of the developed world's. Language, and what Bakhtin referred to as the 'heteroglot', too plays a significant role and I have tried to include words

and grammatical constructions directly from the various southern African *patois* I grew up amongst, live with and indeed speak.

In these ways I have tried to theoretically engage with my critical work in my novel, bringing in voices dialogically from other novels and allowing them to converse with each other and to be reread. The three narrators is another element that coalesces with the critical work's concerns and the dialogism or the polyphonic nature of the novel as a genre. I have tried to make this explicit with the division of narrators, each bringing with them their own ideological and ethical positions with regards to the exigencies of the southern African postcolony.

# The Albertsburg Judgement

By

Matthew Blackman

*Justice and law, Mr. Du Toit, are often just ... well they're, I suppose they can be described as distant cousins. And here in South Africa, well, they're simply not on speaking terms at all.* – spoken by Marlon Brando in the film *A Dry White Season* (1989)

Dear JC,

I am sending you three manuscripts for possible publication. They were discovered by myself amongst my aunt's (Dr Jean Albertson) possessions. She died with her husband in a car accident some years ago on her way back from the now ghost town of Albertsburg.

I believe they were edited by my aunt, who was an art historian at the National Gallery and who worked at the Technical University. I have read all the three manuscripts and believe them to of historical interest and ask you to please consider them for publication.

Yours sincerely,

Athi Jordaan

Part I

The White Paths of Towerkop

Part II

The Ruin of the Valley

Part III

The Strand

# Chapter 1

In the courtroom, his dark eyes were watching me. Beneath him lay his black umbrella, which he slid to the side with his foot as his lawyer came to sit down next to him. But not for one moment did he take his eyes off me. And as mine briefly caught his, his lips stretched horizontally into a thin smile. Reclining against his wooden seat he looked as if he was convinced that my court would find him innocent. And I am sure that, back then, I too shared this opinion. But I should have known that justice would be difficult to uphold in the current environment. Yet, I remember sitting there, despite the troubles that surrounded us, believing in my ability to enforce the law without prejudice.

That day the court was abnormally filled with the people of Albertsburg. The air was heavy with a heat that is not easily ventilated by the few small windows in the courtroom's 'clearstory'. But we are not unaccustomed to this. For although the courthouse is insulated by thick concrete and its amphitheatre-like design sits deep in the earth, the building is not unaffected by Albertsburg's climate. Despite our famous rainy spells, we are still subjected the Karoo's heat, whose plains stretch out around our mountains.

Three fans are usually employed, on such occasions, and I sometimes excuse myself and go into my chambers to remove my skirt, which is, due to my black robe, surplus to requirements. But that day was different. About six hundred people – a substantial section of the dorp's population – were crammed into the court, their black umbrellas piled at the exit. Only Jean, at her bakery just outside the building, and a few infirmed members of the community were not present. Even the children were there on the top deck, looking down on us. I noticed with concern that they sat perspiring and crying in the intense heat while nannies, dressed in scarlet overalls, fanned them with white aprons. Their parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and older siblings, sat below with their eyes directed at the accused, ignoring the wailing above.

I had walked into the court that day to be met with this wall of heat. An expanse of newspapers, books, tablets and aprons – anything that could force some movement in the air – were rising and falling. Above it all a constant calling for quiet was being issued, unsuccessfully, by Captain Mandel's policemen. It was only the accused – the engineer – who sat motionless and silent. And as I looked across the court I noticed, not for the first time, that his sharp penetrating eyes were resting on me. With this I quickly shifted my gaze. But I could still see out of the corner of my eye, as I moved to my bench, his slender figure: his square shoulders, his thinning grey hair, his large forehead, the small pointed white beard and that dark peregrine-like stare.

Sweat was already running down the backs of my legs into my heelless rubber-soled shoes as I looked out at the crowd seated in the gallery. There I noticed Albert, our mayor. He was sitting smiling uncomfortably, sandwiched between the Konstabel and the Captain. Both these men sat in full-dress uniform, while the older policemen stood in the aisle fanning them with their blue jackets and the younger toothless recruits stood in front of them waving their yellow tracksuit tops.

Just then Sarah, the clerk of the court, made her way through the crowd dragging a large heavy fan without a protective cage. Her bottle-blonde hair was darkened with sweat and her tight red skirt and leopard print Moscow-court heels restricted her movements. Mr Davidson, the stenographer, hurried to help her and she pointed out to him that the fan should be placed to cool the Captain.

'Judge,' Sarah called walking towards me scowling, 'you've got to get Clarence to cool the room.'

'I'm sure he will make a plan,' I said looking down at her.

'You can't just leave it to him. You have to tell that guy.'

'I like your shoes,' I said. 'I don't think I've seen those ones before. They suit you. Oh, and look you've done your nails to match.'

'Thank you judge. You know, I could always do yours if you wanted,' she said without the slightest tone of genuineness.

I glanced down at my own nails. They were dirty and chipped from gardening. For a second I urgently wanted to clean them and I tucked them under the court files in front of me. 'Where is he?' I said.

'Who?'

'Clarence.'

'Oh, he's supposedly working on the ventilation system.'

'Is that what that sound is?' I asked as I became aware of an underlying churning noise I had never heard before.

'That guy, as usual, doesn't know what he is doing,' she said raising her top lip with the look of disgust.

'Sarah, please, you know that's not true. And please use his name.'

'I mean how long has he worked here? Nearly forty-five years and he doesn't even know how it works. It's a disgrace.'

It was then that Clarence came into the courtroom through the dark wood-panelled door that leads downstairs to the holding cells. It was the first time that I had seen him in such a state.

The top half of his boiler suit was tied at his waste and his white t-shirt was see-through with sweat. 'Clarence,' I called to him, noticing his almost alarmingly muscular body, 'what can we do about this heat?'

He looked at me with a smile. 'I think the ventilation machine, ja, it's now working My Lady. But, you know, I'm not sure what kind of air it will blow. The generator's hot. You know, last time I used it properly was, ja well … Ja it must have been at the Roux trial. And that was, that was…Well too long ago…That was forty-five years ago. I was just in kortbroek then…And…Yo! That trial…' Clarence was shaking his head. He then dropped his eyes to the floor apologetically.

Our janitor likes retelling stories of court cases, but he never mentions this one. Few people in Albertsburg ever do. It is, I discovered, considered bad luck to talk of Dr Roux's patricide and to mention his 'demon' son.

'So, will you have it working soon?' I asked.

'Ja My Lady. It's working. I just need to pull the lever for Court One. But as I say, I don't know what will happen.'

As he said this there was a loud explosion, followed by what sounded like the back firing of a car. It sent many people in the court diving to the floor in terror. And I can't deny it set my own heart off at a rate is rarely reaches. 'I better go check,' Clarence shouted over the noise.

'Yes, it sounds like the demon has woken,' I shouted to him.

His head jerked back at this comment as if the idea had startled him. He paused for a moment. No doubt, if I had not been his boss, he would have reproached me. For Clarence is taken, like much of this dorp, with superstitions.

The machine was on the mezzanine level at the back of the court under the upper deck where the children were sitting. I had seen its huge generator in the plant room some weeks before. I had been working on a public holiday and was searching the courthouse for some papers that were missing from the Thales file. It was during this search I discovered that on the Plant Room door was a sign stating, 'filing overflow'. On entering the room I found that Clarence had for reason only known to him kept this machine's huge brass drum perfectly polished. Clarence to be fair had once run the courthouse when it had had eight sitting judges. That was before Albertsburg's asbestos mine was closed down and our bench was reduced to one. He had clearly found himself a job to do during the hours and days of the languishing inactivity of my court.

There was an absurdity about that day's proceedings. The drama of the last few months had risen to a head with the engineer's arrest. And there was a high state of tension in the room as we waited for Clarence to sort out the climate control. But I was fanning myself at my bench looking at a gardening magazine I had in a file. The engineer was still staring at me. Sarah had taken to

reapplying her make up. And Mr Davidson was struggling to get the fan to work. When he finally did he cried out with joy as if he a solved his crossword puzzle. I looked up and watched the fan's huge uncovered blades gathering momentum. But then as they finally picked up speed the fan suddenly flung a huge cloud of dust onto Captain Mandel and his men.

The absurd feeling of detachment continued when one nervous policeman, who had his back turned to it, yelled out 'attack!' and several of the constabulary dived to the floor calling for cover. One of the young recruits scrambled over the partition in the court and flung his tracksuit on top at the blades. The jacket was torn up and thrown to the ceiling and he leapt back wringing his hand shouting a stream of abuse. The children began to laugh and banged the railings in joy as the police ran at the machine and then withdrew from the blades while drawing their service revolvers. I sat there watching this scene in silence. And it was only because Mr Davidson had the presence of mind to turn the fan off at the plug that any further injuries were prevented.

Once the fan had been turned off, it took some time for the court to settle. A small enquiry was held by Captain Mandel who began poking at several members of the public with his cane. He then threatened to arrest our stenographer after the people around him pointed out Mr Davidson as the culprit. It was only Sarah's coquettish presence that convinced Mandel that it had been an accident.

This incident was, however, largely forgotten when Clarence finally pulled the leaver of the ventilation machine for Courtroom One. The sensation was like having a course hot hemp bag pulled over ones face. An explosion of hot air was propelled into the courtroom. With it came dust which poured through the vents, many of which I had never noticed before as they seamlessly fit in to the brutalist architecture of the building. This initial wave was then followed by what felt like a sand storm exfoliating my face, which brought with it the smell of burning hair.

People, myself included, began coughing and choking and some, having been slightly shaken by the first attack of dust from the fan, were calling on Mandel and his men to shoot. I, meanwhile, was shouting 'Clarence! Off! Turn the bloody thing off!'

But by then everybody was shouting and clambering over each other and breaking the furniture in a panic to get to the exit, which was half blocked by the pile of umbrellas. Children were crying out for their mothers. And nannies could be heard screaming for those lost in the dust cloud. 'Don't let the bastard out of your sight.' I could hear Mandel calling to his men. 'Grab the engineer. Vat hom!' But amidst the melee of bodies and dust I encountered, as I tried to head for the exit, the engineer sitting perfectly at ease in his chair as the dust and panic swirled around him.

I myself was yelling: 'Order! Order! Clear the court! Clear the court! Remain calm and clear the court! For the love of God stop panicking! Calm the fuck down! Order! Order!' But I might

as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind. And in truth I was not sure if I was shouting these words more to myself than anybody else.

We reconvened later that afternoon, once the ventilation was working satisfactorily and the injured had been attended to by Dr Eloff. By then the room had been thoroughly vacuumed, dusted and mopped. I took up some of these tasks myself while my husband, who had been sitting in the far corner of the courtroom reading the news on his tablet, helped Clarence with some of the heavier work. Sarah and Mr Davidson, however, went off to Jean's bakery to fight over the limited supplies of coffee and pastries, with the rest of those uninjured from the fiasco.

Finally, once the court was ready, the people settled and the engineer had once again been brought up from the holding cells, Sarah called me from my chambers. Settling down at my bench again, I could hear the unfamiliar dull hum of the ventilation machine sounding above. And although this hum was occasionally interrupted by a bang, it had, initially, gone some way to cooling the room. But it did not entirely stop the need for the fluttering of newspapers and the nannies had returned to waving their aprons.

Looking down again, for the second time that day, I noticed that the engineer was sitting in the same pose he had adopted that morning. Again, I noticed that his eyes were resting on me and I could bear his gaze no longer. I nodded in his direction in as formal a response as I could muster. After this I made certain that I acknowledged both the lawyers, Adv Hollow for the prosecution and Adv Maxwell for the defence. Then organising my papers in front of me, I nodded to Sarah to proceed with the order. This she shouted, louder than usual: 'The court is now in session Justice O'Higgins presiding.'

But I will not recount to you the story of the trial that followed: the many victories and defeats that Clarence was to have with the court's ventilation system; Enoch's strange incongruous testimony; the mayor's peculiar personal confessions concerning his rain ritual; the strident statements of the various policemen and the reticence of the accused. Instead, with the help of the court record, a simple narration of the incidents that led to 'the engineer of Albertsburg' acquiring this appellation will suffice.

Here it should be noted that till this moment no qualification, nor action, nor any affiliation with Albertsburg has ever given anyone any reason to call this man 'the engineer of Albertsburg'. Yet it is common enough to hear people call him that in the streets. What is more, throughout the trial not a single lawyer (not even his own) or policeman or witness has ever failed to call him anything but 'the engineer'. Even I have succumbed. This leaves, to my knowledge, only my husband and Jean, the mayor's wife, who continue to call him 'Mr Bain'.

# Chapter 2

The night that would set Captain Mandel on the path to arresting the engineer was one of heavy downpours. The rain, our mayor acknowledged in court, had moved over the crenulations of the Swartberg, tapping gently on our iron roofs. But only he was alarmed. No one else gave it so much as a second thought. After all, rain falls in Albertsburg's valley with such regularity as to make this entirely commonplace. And it is because of these regular downpours that everybody, adults and children alike, carry with them our dark plain umbrellas. Umbrellas that give the streets, during the rain, the look of a painting by Lowry.

Of course, the idea of Lowry becomes absurd after the clouds disappear over the cloven peak of Towerkop. For after taking down their umbrellas the town is one of men and children in khaki shorts and white and navy-blue t-shirts and of women in Dutch waxprint floral dresses. But it is the umbrella, which is carried by everybody, that is the defining feature of the region. I often look at them – and I am nowadays accustomed to carrying one myself – and think of the story of the man who came up the mountain pass on foot some twenty-five years ago. He came carrying with him in a canvass ruck sack brightly coloured compact umbrellas. And they did, by all accounts, sell out within an hour and significantly changed the appearance of the town.

However, when the winter winds came they began to break and they were thrown away and ended up littering the streets and escarpment. They stood out like small broken windmills in the brown sandy dongas and in the green fields of growing mealies. So, after these failed to last a season, the people of Albertsburg went back to buying their sombre black umbrellas from Jacobson & Daughters, the discount builder's merchant.

The story of the colourful umbrellas and its salesman did not end there however. For some months later when Kaptein Joll, who was then the chief of police in the district, and his men were sitting in the Jackal and Vel they noticed a trail of dust coming up the pass.

'Mandel, you've got the youngest eyes amongst us. What is that?' Joll said, pointing towards the pass.

'It's a vehicle.'

'Yes, I know it is a vehicle. I am asking of what variety?'

Mandel turned his pale blue eyes onto the Kaptein, his lips moved and his tongue slipped between them lubricating their dryness but no words came from them immediately.

'Should I go check?' he asked slowly.

'Yes. And take some men with you god damn it. No person is scheduled to be coming in today. Make sure they've got their papers.'

Mandel looked at three of the men who sat across the table from him and they knew without words that they had been selected. They picked their batons up off the table, got into their bakkie and drove out towards the moving cloud of dust.

'It was you! You sold us this shit last year,' a policeman said pushing into his face one of the small umbrellas he had taken from the salesman's car. Mandel and the policemen had pulled the salesman from his vehicle and had him kneeling on the gravel of the road, his hands cable-tied behind his back, his passbook lying in torn pieces on the road in front of him.

'No baas, this is the first time. I never been to this place before.'

'Liar, fucking liar,' Mandel shouted.

It is unlikely that the umbrella salesman knew what happened to him next. What some members of the dorp were brave enough to testify to in the enquiry was that they saw the man being dragged unconscious down the main street towards the police station, tied to the trailer hook of the bakkie. But it was Kaptein Joll's evidence that was representative of most of the examinations that took place in the court:

Kaptein Answer: But he was resisting arrest! No, it is not standard practice. But My Lord policing sometimes demands improvisation.

Adv Question: And why, Kaptein Joll, would there have been a need for the police to kick him and hit him with their batons while he was being dragged behind the vehicle?

Kaptien A: You will find it so tedious if I went through all the Civil Co-Operation Bureau's new established procedures for policing. And I am not even sure this happened. What proof is there, hey? No, this is bloody fake. Has anybody testified that this happened? No, they haven't … Please, I am getting tired of this [redacted] It was the same product and the same man. He was part of the criminal element, those [redacted] alien what-you ma-call-them. His [redacted] papers were not in order.

Adv Q: But the doctor claims he remembers the salesman from last year. This one, he says, has a flatter nose. And Kaptein Joll, his papers seem to have been destroyed by your men.

Kaptein A: [redacted] (offers no audible response)

Adv Q :And what of his death? How do you explain the visible signs of torture?

Kaptein A: It was the same man who sold defective umbrellas in the region last year. I could tell by the tone of his voice he was lying to me. And no, I would not agree that he was tortured. As Konstabel Mandel told you, he fell awkwardly while he was in the cell. He was not himself. He clearly had not eaten for some time, he was refusing to eat, it was a hunger strike. It could have been his low blood sugar that caused the fall. And we left him to freedom outside the police station. He just didn't want to leave. Bloody lazy [redacted]

Vultures were said to have circled overhead as he lay on the street under the palm tree outside the police station but being uncertain of the saleman's vital signs the birds had kept their distance. It was in this state, after several people complained that he was 'loitering', that he was rearrested. He was confirmed dead in the police cells by the doctor some days later. The cause of death was stated in the enquiry to be 'acute abrasions of the skin and degeneration of the intestinal wall (bad diet)'. He was later buried in a grave marked by a gravestone that states: 'In commemoration of Thales (Dates Unknown) Here lies the body of an umbrella salesman. A man who should be remembered amongst those who died in the name of freedom of trade and movement.'

I became familiar with the details of this story because when I first arrived in Albertsburg I had very little to do. The dorp (for I prefer to call it this, despite the fact that locals still refer to it as a city) had long since emptied of the migrant labour that was once drawn here by the blue asbestos mine under the peak of St Thomas. Albertsburg is no longer the administrative capital it had once been under the previous regime. And having little judicial work to perform, I took to looking through the court files that sit in my chambers and came across the name Thales. I took an interest in the case because I thought that it was perhaps a misspelling of the surname Tlali. And although I never took the name Tlali – having kept my maiden name – I am, as most people know, married to a Tlali.

And once I began to look into the enquiry of the death of the umbrella salesman, the story of Thales continued to interest me partly because of the feeling that I was in some way connected to this man. And so, on one hot spring day, about four months after I arrived here, I climbed alone up the slopes of Towerkop to the graveyard at Deacon's Dune where he is buried. The dune itself is worth the walk. It has spectacular views and its strange beach sand, brought 400km by the winds, is a well-known wonder of the Swartberg. According to local tradition it is believed to be the gateway to the Afterworld and it has been used as Albertsburg's burial ground for over two centuries. It was here that I wished to pay my respects to a man who could be one of the few

martyrs of this area and whose blood, which my son and husband may well share, was spilled on the roads of my current jurisdiction.

It was a long walk up the white sandy paths to the graveyard. I did not regret taking my umbrella, which at times I used as a walking stick, at others to shade myself from the sun or to shelter myself from the downpours. On reaching the cemetery I noticed that, although there were many ordinary plain wooden crosses, Thales' gravestone was made of Rustenburg granite and that its lettering was done in gold leaf.

As I noticed this I sank down to my knees and on crossing myself I invoked both God and my ancestors. Then, still kneeling, I raised my head skywards and prayed for the salvation of my son – which was partly my reason for coming to pay homage to this man. Then I sat down to rest on his grave – something which is not unusual in our tradition. I sat there for some time and I found myself mindlessly pushing my fingers through the silk-like sand. Its hot, almost burnished, top layer cracked as my fingers entered it. I continued sitting there, playing with it as I had done when Zané, my son, as a little boy had sat beside me on the island's beach. It had been one of the few family visits the old regime had afforded me during my incarceration there.

I am not sure how long I sat there that day, playing with the sand and thinking of my son, my back leaning against Thales' headstone. At some point I opened my umbrella so that it shaded all but my feet from the sun. Below me, through the wooden crosses, I could see Albertsburg, the town I had been redeployed to. This emptiness, with its 600 inhabitants, was where I was being forced to live out the rest of my professional life by the current president. My eyes followed its now almost deserted development down towards the abandoned mining hostels to the south east. Its rolling mountain range to the south with its twelve peaks known as 'the Apostles' seemed to me somehow to be secret sharers of the uneasiness of the valley.

I looked for a while at the dark grey scar running down the slope of the peak of St Thomas, made by the old asbestos miners whose burial place lay at its foot. While I stared out at this island town, in its sea of mountains, I was caught by a despair or what my therapist in the capital calls anxiety. My chest tightened and I wished then that the avenging Apostles would come rolling in like waves, covering me and all of Albertsburg in a graveyard of rubble. Perhaps I was simply depressed at the time, but it felt then like no one would care what became of me and my adopted jurisdiction. And I knew that this was precisely the reason why I found myself here. I had been sent into exile under the name 'redeployment' – I had been banished.

At some point I opened the lunch that I had packed for myself early that morning. I ate the hot chicken sandwiches, leaving one at the foot of the gravestone for Thales. Then I drank the last few mouthfuls of water from the bottle that hung at my side. And, sitting there after lunch, staring

as I had stared before I noticed something different. That is, that the valley is beautiful. And I noticed the care that some town planner had taken. How the brutalist courthouse, the simple neo-classical town hall and the small neogothic cathedral stood out. And it was with some pleasure that I realised that the police station could in fact only be made out because of the tall ragged palm tree that grew on is pavement – its rough spinney leaves sculptured by the winds into the shape of a sangoma's switch. I spent some time looking at that palm. It was, after all, the place where the man buried beneath me had spent his last moments of life. And with this, thoughts of both my son and husband came back to me and I spent the rest of my time up there wondering what I could have done differently in my life.

It was only when I leant on my umbrella to raise myself, the sand being unstable to stand on, that I stumbled backwards to a position behind Thales' headstone. There I noticed that on the back, in smaller lettering, was carved an alternative message. I sank back down to read it. 'Although we did not know the man who is interred beneath, we recognise him as a fellow member of the guild of free traders. Thales, may you rest in peace under the shelter of this stone. This gravestone was donated by: Jacobson and Daughters'

It interested me that Jacobson and Daughters should have taken an interest in Thales' death. It was certainly a remarkable thing to have done for a someone who, if it were not for this stone and a corrupted court record, would have been one of thousands of forgotten 'vanished souls' that were the victims of the previous regime. Of course, Jacobson and Daughters could well have erected this after the fall of the last administration. Touching the stone and inspecting the lettering I realised that they certainly could have done this after the regime fell. But even then, why would they do that? I asked. It would hardly be necessary in a reactionary town like Albertsburg – a place whose population still had distinct sympathies for the processes of the past.

These thoughts occupied me as I made my way down the steep mountain path, using the steel point of my umbrella to stop myself from tumbling off the side of the sheer cliffs. There were certainly times during this descent when I began to feel slightly suspicious of Jacobson and Daughters. Could they have been involved in the crime? Could they have set the police on Thales? This could not be discounted. Their sponsorship of the stone certainly could have been part of a cover-up of the kind so often utilised by those who had once supported the previous government.

# Chapter 3

It was with this in mind that I went to Jacobson and Daughters some days after my pilgrimage up to Thales' grave. I had gone to buy fertilizer for my roses but I knew perfectly well, as I drove down the main street, that I was on a mission to find out something more about the circumstances surrounding Thales' gravestone.

There was an emptiness to the Jacobsons's shop. The tawdry plastic signage that ran along its front wall had not been replaced in many decades. Its long squat Victorian frontage with its irregular Tuscan pillars and small Cape Dutch gable, did not suggest the cavernous warehouse that lay behind the facade. Inside, rough pallets, piled high with bulging sacks of fertilizer, manure, cement and compost, formed a labyrinth of darkened passages. At the door, umbrellas stuck out from three clay pots like black dahlias. But it was the smell of manure and fertilizer that struck me first. It is a very familiar smell to any person who has grown up on the farmlands of this country. And it made me stand there for a while breathing it in and, for a few moments, I simply forgot my reasons for being there.

It was only when a voice came out of the general gloom of the store that I snapped out of my memories. 'Hello Judge, how can I be of assistance?' came a deep voice. For a second I could not locate it. The only people inside I could see were the two beautiful pale young daughters, who were sitting behind a glass partition some distance to my left.

'Who's there? Who are you?' I called out just as a black figure swooped down at me. There was a clatter of leather soled shoes on the concrete floor and I jumped back moving quickly towards the umbrellas so as to find something with which to defend myself. It was only after a few seconds that I realised Daniel Jacobson had obviously been on top of one of the pallets above me.

Daniel was a thin pale young man with a long nose, a pair of black rimmed glasses and a wide fleshy mouth. He was, I thought then, the most unthreatening man in the district and the most unlikely looking person to be working in a builder's merchant. He wore polished black leather shoes, grey hound's-tooth trousers, a white collared shirt and a black patterned woollen tie. Only his green John Deere cap suggested that he had anything to do with the bricks, manure and fertilizer that were about us. 'Sorry for startling you Judge, I was just completing some work up there,' he said with a thin smile. And I got the feeling that he was somehow pleased with himself.

'I am looking for 3-2-1 fertilizer,' I said trying my best not to show that my heart was still beating a little faster than usual.

'What do you need it for?'

'My lawn and roses.'

'Do you have weeds in your lawn?' he said walking down the aisle towards the fertiliser at the back. 'The little ones with the white flowers that attract the bees?'

'Yes, why do you ask?'

'Just that 3-2-3 might be better. Also, Jean, from the coffee shop, swears by 3-2-3 for roses. She is something of an expert.'

'All the same,' I stated, 'I would prefer 3-2-1.'

'I know that the customer knows best, but perhaps in this case…'

'Daniel Jacobson, I have been told that you are a clever young man, but you should know not to question a judge's decision.'

'Oh, of course Judge, but I thought in a democracy that kind of thing was allowed?'

'Not when it comes to gardening.'

'I shall keep that in mind. What size bag do you want?'

'20kg. I think.'

'Are those Albertina Sisulus you're growing?'

'Yes,' I said surprised to discover that he knew the name of the rose, 'but as I have said to you, it is for the lawn as well. In fact perhaps I will take two bags.'

'No problem hey, I'll put it on your account.' He lifted one sack onto his right shoulder and then, with a dexterity and strength that surprised me, he bent at the knees and manipulated another bag onto his left.

With the two bags on his shoulders I walked with him to my car and while doing so I began my enquiry. 'I was up on Deacon's Dune some days ago,' I started.

'Oh ja, there are some beautiful views of the valley from up there, hey.'

'Yes, I did have that chance to take them in. Although I did go up for another reason.'

'Personally, I only go up there for funerals and to remember the elders. I prefer St. Thomas. Do you know the one?'

'The one above the mine? Is that not meant to be cursed?'

'Ja, you know people say that, but I have no fear of dead miners,' he said, his voice straining slightly.

'But your family seems to go up to the dune not only to remember your relations,' I continued. 'They also go up there to lay headstones for people they don't know.' And with this I turned slightly so that I could see his reaction. But his face, which had begun to drip with sweat, was too distorted by the weight of the bags to reveal anything significant.

'Oh ja, I take it you mean like the gravestone of the umbrella salesman?' he asked, his voice cracking with the strain.

'Yes, I did see that. And to be frank I was wondering just what motivated it?'

'I don't know hey, I wasn't born then.'

'But I take it that you have been told something.'

'Ja, Gideon, my father, has told me a few things about those days. My grandfather, like that umbrella guy, spent some time in Kaptein Joll's prison. Joll was the, uh, man who ran this place under the old regime.'

'Yes, I have seen the name,' I confirmed. 'What did he ever do to Joll? I have not come across a court record mentioning your grandfather.'

'Oh, I don't think it reached the courts. Uh, it was that detention without trial period. I, uhm, am not sure if you remember it?'

'Oh, I don't need prompting to recall that legislation! I was held under it too.'

'Of course, sorry hey. Um, like, if you wouldn't mind…'

It was only then that I realised that we were standing at my car and that Daniel was visibly straining with the bags. 'Oh my dear, I am sorry,' I said and I popped the boot open, allowing him to slip the bags from his shoulders into the car.

'So, what exactly happened to your grandfather then?' I asked wanting to get to the bottom of the story of the gravestone.

'I was told,' he began still breathing heavily and wiping his forehead, 'that Joll put my oupa in prison after it was discovered that he owned a copy of the biography of Groucho Marx. You see, Joll confused it with Karl Marx.'

'Really?'

'Ja, well I am not really sure that's true. He liked the Marx Brothers, but I found a copy of *Das Kapital*. He was also in a guild of some kind. There's a medal of association in a kist upstairs. Gideon tells me guilds were banned in those days.'

'But did he know this man Thales?'

'Ja, I think the gravestone says he didn't. Look, when I knew him – he died when I was nine – my oupa was something of a fundamentalist.'

'Oh really!' I said feeling like I might be getting close to the truth.

'Ja hey, he was obsessed with one thing.'

'And what was that?'

'Judgement Day. All I remember of him was that he sat out in the backyard reading religious texts and praying. He even took up some Shembe traditions and he always carried their book with

him. He came quite close to becoming some kind of sangoma by the end. Gideon felt he had gone *bos*.'

'What brought all of this on?'

'Fear of death I guess. But there's a rumour that Joll tortured him. He was just *mal* as far as I could tell. Oh and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with the Shembe church.' Daniel quickly popped in, perhaps realising that I might be annoyed by his association of Shembe and madness. 'Shembe came here with the miners, you know.'

'But why the gravestone?'

'I think it was just a good act. My oupa was full of those at the end. He would often be seen picking up litter in the streets and blessing the homeless dogs. He wanted redemption.'

'Redemption from what?'

'That, hey, I couldn't tell you. That's a *lot* of fertilizer,' Daniel said looking at the two bags lying in my boot.

'I will find a use for it,' I said closing the lid. 'Well, if what you say is true about the gravestone, then God bless your family.'

'And God bless you too Judge,' Daniel replied raising his green cap. 'I know that I speak for my family when I say we are proud to have you and your husband here. Although, juses, I imagine it can't be that great for you. But with your loss, comes our gain.' He smiled and waved his cap at me and stepped back into the coolness of the shop.

# Chapter 4

I know I that have strayed from telling the story of the engineer. But I find his story difficult to tell without beginning with the story of Thales, for if there is a beginning to my story in Ablertsburg it starts with Thales. In fact, Thales and the engineer's stories in Albertsburg have the same beginning. Whether they have a similar ending, I still do not know. And I say this not because I am withholding it, but because I don't know the end – even though I am the one who will determine it.

My father often said to me that stories have no beginning or end. But the Engineer of Albertsburg's story, like that of Thales, will certainly have a termination. And perhaps a starting point for it would be the beginning of the trial. That is to say with Albert, our mayor, on the stand.

Adv Hollow (Question): You say that you foresaw the disaster of Albertsburg. Is that correct?

Albert (Answer): Yes My Lady, that's correct.

Adv Hollow Q: But Mayor, that seems unlikely to me. Just how did you foresee it? I wonder if you could explain that to the court.

Albert A: Ja sure, that's not a problem. My Lady, before that night, 317 seconds is the most I've ever counted. So by the time I counted to 349 I knew that there was a disaster on the cards. I just knew it. It was the longest downpour ever, you see?

Adv Hollow Q: But Mayor, let's go back. I'm confused. What does this counting have to do with your premonition?

Albert A: My Lady, since I was five, I've counted the length of every downpour in Albertsburg

Adv Hollow Q: Every one?

Albert A: Every one, from when they start, to when they finish.

Adv Hollow Q: But Mayor, why? That's what I'm getting at. Why do you do this? Do you understand my question? I don't understand why you count out the length of the downpours? What reason do you have for this?

Albert A: Ja My Lady, I understand. There is no need, James, to treat me like I'm some kind of bloody fool, okay?

Judge: Mayor, you can't call Adv. Hollow, 'James'.

Albert: Sorry My Lady. I forgot.

Adv Hollow: Please continue.

Albert: My Lady, my great great grandfather, the founder of Albertsburg, said: 'Any downpour lasting longer than 727 seconds will bring a plague of mental illness.'

Adv Hollow Q: Oh for God's sake! Has anybody here heard of such nonsense?

*Pause after loud explosive noise from the ventilation machine disrupts court proceedings.*

Adv Hollow (cont): My Lady, I think we must question the admissibility of this witness's testimony.

*Pause as an off the record discussion occurs at the bench between counsels and judge.*

Although I wished to proceed, after this exchange Adv. Hollow insisted that Albert's mental health had to be established if his evidence was to be admissible. And with this, a trial within a trial began – a process made longer by the fact that it was continually interrupted by the malfunctioning of the ventilation system.

It took four days on the stand to get out of Albert all of his pathologies, his fears and peculiar self-imposed belief systems. On the second day Adv. Hollow was questioning Albert, who seemed in an even higher state of anxiety than normal, about a list of curses to the town that he believed in:

Adv Hollow Q:  So how do you feel about opening an umbrella inside?

Albert A: Oh no no no I would never do that. And that is not simply a bad luck, it has practical implications.

Adv Hollow Q:  Like what?

Albert A: You could knock something over like an expensive vase or break a mirror, which would be bad luck.

Adv Hollow Q: And ladders?

Albert A: I have never walked under one and I try not to climb them.

Adv Hollow: Why not?

Albert A: I am afraid of heights. Um, yes, Jean does the changing of the light bulbs.

Adv Hollow Q: Right. Now what about something a little more local, say for example the Curse of St Thomas and the issue to do with the dead asbestos miners that are buried under that mountain?

Albert A: Now that is nonsense. My Lady, the Albertsburg volksraad established many years ago, "that the dead migrant miners were fairly treated in line with the cultural and economic norms of the time", so they would have no reason to curse us, would they? They died but we didn't really treat them that badly, I know that for a fact.'

'Asbestos!' screamed a voice from the gallery. And with this, Albert leapt out of the box and ran for the exit shouting that he had to get home because on reflection he might have left the stove on.

At first I thought this to have been a cruel trick played on our mayor. Laughter rose amongst the crowd as our poor mayor, red in the face and under extreme stress, ran for the door. But then somebody pointed out that a fine blue powder was floating out of the vent above the mezzanine level. This observation set off a stampede. Limps waved about, punches were thrown, and

umbrellas were used to beat at the police who were attempting to exit first with the use of their batons. I watched this rather like one does a cat leaping for a branch that seems out of its reach. In fact, the court was cleared in a matter of seconds and only a few people suffered any serious injury. What was left of the 600 people who had been crammed into the court moments before were some discarded and broken umbrellas, a few lunch boxes and the engineer.

'What on earth just happened?' I asked looking at the accused and peering at the fine bits of cloth that were floating up to the clerestory. Sitting back, he shrugged and smiled, but he said nothing. So much burning dust and sand had exited that vent over the last few weeks that this was not a great source of concern to me but it was only when Clarence appeared from the side door that things were explained.

'That bloody machine just ate my boiler suit. I hanged it up by the inflow vent. Look its coming out,' he said pointing to a vent where fine pieces of blue cloth were floating into the court. 'They think it's asbestos,' the engineer said in a flat emotionless tone.

In fact the people of Albertsburg really did seem to believe that. And it took some convincing to get even Sarah, Adv Hollow, the Konstabel, Captain Mandel and Albert, to re-enter the court. In fact only after Clarence could prove beyond a reasonable doubt, that it was his boiler suit and not asbestos were they willing to return.

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Finally, after four days of evidence I was able to decide on the admissibility of Albert's testimony. But this was only made possible after Mr Davidson (who is also the keeper of all the town's records) went on to explain that the origins of Albert's superstitions may have been based on facts.

Adv Maxwell (Question): Why do you say our mayor's belief in the Founder's prophecy is factual? That seems wrongheaded to me.

Davidson (Answer): Well, My Lady, not factual *per se*. But its origins come from an actual event.

Maxwell Q: You mean like Noah and the great flood?

Davidson A: Well, I don't know the specifics of the great flood but yes I guess something like that.

Maxwell A: So, there is a great deal of proof that the flood did actually occur. I was reading a very interesting account…

*Judge O'Higins interrupts asking council to continue with the questioning rather than entering into theological speculation.*

Davidson A: My Lady, if I can explain it like this. In the fifteenth year of the establishment of Albertsburg, Ou Oom Albertson, our Mayor's great great grandfather, recorded in his chronical, and I quote from it, 'Meteorological changes seen. 727 millimetres of water fell. Many filled with the plague of the mental illness. A ravage of death. Kine seen in the district lying dead in the fields, bloated and ruptured stomachs. Beware!' Now, Dr Eloff believes that cattle deaths were due to a waterborne disease. There was no effective drainage in those days. Our sewers were only built about ten years or so later. The water in the area must have become cesspools of decease.

Maxwell Q: But if the cattle were all dead then how did the people survive? I mean it is a well-known fact that the Xhosa cattle killing of a similar period lead to disastrous consequences. In the book…

*Judge O'Higgins interrupts asking counsel to continue with the questioning rather than recounting irrelevant histories.*

Davidson A: I have looked at the tax returns of several of the big farms in the area and they register no significant difference in sales from the years before and after.

Maxwell Q: And what do you conclude from that?

Davidson A: They must have sold the meat of the dead cattle. And people who ate it suffered no lasting consequences – death rates were stable. That can be the only inference.

Maxwell Q: So, in conclusion Mr Davidson.

Davidson A: Well, I think that our mayor simply misheard a story when he was a child and developed his own narrative and ritual around it. That's not a sign of mental illness, simply the origins of a cultural practice.

With this I concluded that although Albert's beliefs were the results of a misheard story there was nothing necessarily mad or irrational about them. What was surprising, was that the prophecy seems to have never caught on in the rest of the town. And perhaps now it is time to begin the story of the engineer proper. The day when the catastrophe began.

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Albert was in the lounge with Jean when he first heard the tapping of the rain. He counted to 349 before he felt a strong and anxious urge to report his feelings to his wife. 'Jean,' he said slightly alarmed, 'something bad is about to happen!' Jean looked up from her computer.

'What's that Albert?' she asked with indifference.

'387.'

Jean forced her mouth down, shrugged her shoulders and went back to loading a picture of a mass of blue Nemesia Vericolors onto her social media with the hashtag #LocalFlowers.

'497! This is getting serious Jean.' Albert exclaimed some moments later while getting up and placing another blue gum log into the old wood burning stove that sat, perpetually smouldering, against the stone wall of the lounge. Then picking up the remote control he turned, from the Western he had been watching, over to the rugby.

Another lengthy downpour fell that night. But this had not disturbed Albert for he had fallen asleep on the couch while watching a film. And if the phone had not rung, he may well have slept there the whole night unaware of the disaster that had befallen Albertsburg. As usual it was Jean who raised herself to answer it. She stumbled blinking in the dully lit room towards the table in the hallway. Then taking out the notepad from the drawer beneath the phone, she lifted the receiver.

Albert lay on the couch, listening to the tone of his wife's voice. Conscious of the fact that she was clearly not speaking to one of her friends. 'That was Mandel,' Jean said putting down the phone. Albert's ears tweaked at the mention of the Captain.

'I bloody knew something bad would happen tonight,' he said pulling a cushion over his face.

Jean, although she did not share any of Albert's superstitions, had to admit that something bad had happened. 'Part of the pass has been washed away,' she said, 'and the driver of the dray has had an accident.'

'Is he hurt?' Albert shouted from beneath the cushion.

'No, he seems fine, but the police want you down there. They say they need you to see the damage.'

'You see, I told you something bad would come of that rain. We should tell Dr Eloff of the chance of plague.'

'Albert! Did you not hear what I said? Mandel wants you at the pass.'

Albert was already up. For although Captain Mandel had been nothing but cordial throughout their working relationship Albert had, since he was a child, always felt uncomfortable in the Captain's presence. He was now sure that he was going to be subjected to something deeply unpleasant in the next hour. He was sitting putting on a pair of gumboots with shaking hands, when Jean came to check on him. He stood up and his wife helped him into his long wax cotton coat and handed him his umbrella. 'Jean, I can't find my wallet.'

'Well, it must be somewhere.'

He groaned at the thought of the delay and its potential consequences. This might only be an unbearable stare from Mandel's glassy blue eyes. But that thought was enough to send Albert's stomach into a spasm. And just when he was going to yell for Jean's assistance again, he slipped his hand into his coat pocket and felt his wallet meet his palm. 'Found it!' he called out in relief. Jean made no reply. 'Where am I going? Jean? Jean for God's sake!' He shouted with a growing sense of desperation.

'Just before the Dassieskraal turn off.'

He checked his watch and let out a long breath of relief. He could be there in a matter of minutes if he took the car.

In the garage, he pulled the tarpaulin from the elongated black Mercedes. It was a shame to take it out on a night such as this. Its black polished bonnet shone brilliantly in the fluorescent light. And Albert stood for a moment admiring not only the work of another man's buffing, but also the car's sleek lines and chrome grill. It was only on entering the vehicle that Albert encountered its single flaw. One of the springs had gone in the driver's seat which made him sit much lower than was appropriate making him look somewhat like a child at the wheel. A simple touch of the key brought the engine roaring into life.

He started off down the main road, towards the pass, telling himself that he was in for trouble. He fixed his eyes on the warm yellow light that dropped from the car's headlamps onto

the road and he winced as he left the tarred main road and heard the tyres hiss on the wet gravel, splattering, he knew, thick blobs of clay-like mud onto the body work.

He could by then see in the distance some lights ahead of him on the pass. There seemed to be two cone-shaped beams pointing down the mountain into the valley. But his view of these was suddenly blurred by a short downpour that lasted thirtysix seconds. As he drew closer a flashing blue light was turned on. It revealed, for brief moments, a group of men in soaking wet trench-coats and hats standing in the middle of the road, R4 automatic rifles hanging on their backs.

A high-powered torch was shone at his car as he approached. He stopped and the policeman with the torch, who was holding a gun to the side of his body, came up beside the car.

'Identification please,' the grey-faced sergeant said shining the torch into the mayor's eyes.

'But sergeant you know who I am,' Albert said in panic.

'I know. But I still need to see some identification. This is a crime scene.'

'I thought the driver was okay.'

'He is, but he was driving under the influence.'

The mayor took out his licence and, reluctantly, handed it over to the policeman standing at his mirror. The sergeant then stepped away into the darkness and Albert got out of his car. With a deep sense of dread, he went over to Captain Mandel who was crouched down and was shining a small plastic torch he had got in a Christmas cracker into the eyes of the driver of the truck. The drayman was sitting slumped against the back wheel of the vehicle, the front of which was pointing down the ravine into the valley. His face was bloody and his black and swollen eyes were cast down to avoid the torch's glare.

'What's, uhm, what's going on Captain?' Albert asked with anxiety.

'This driver has been caught driving under the influence. He has also crashed his vehicle which has resulted in damage to both private and state property.'

Albert looked at Isaacs, the driver of the dray, and realised that not only was his face wet from the rain but, by the looks of it, he had been crying.

'Is that true Isaacs?' Albert asked. Isaacs seemed to nod but refused to look up. 'But Isaacs I thought you were Muslim?'

'I am, Mr Albert.'

'But Isaacs! Oh dear lord. How could you?' Albert asked. But Isaacs did not look up and did not answer, instead tears began rolling from his eyes and bloodied saliva flowed from his swollen mouth.

'Captain Mandel, this is terrible. What happened here?' Albert asked with rising panicked pitch.

'The prisoner, sir, seems to have been driving under the influence. This, sir, resulted in him driving into this part of the pass here, you see?' With this the Captain stood up and pointed his small torch at the part of the pass that had been washed away earlier in the evening.

A large part of the left-hand side of the road, where the drystone walling had once held it up, had collapsed into the valley below. For literally hundreds of years this pass, built by the engineer Thomas Bain, had stood undamaged until that night. Albert whistled in surprise. 'It would be difficult to avoid the hole if you weren't aware of it,' Albert said, more to himself than to the Captain. 'I think I might have done the same.'

'It would have been even more difficult to avoid it if you were drunk,' the Captain barked. 'We could smell it on him.'

Albert looked at the stream of beer and liquor that was still running down the side of the dray into the ditch, frothing and bubbling its way down towards the darkness of the valley.

'We found him soma just slumped drunk as a coot in his cab. He was smelling of the bloody stuff. We got him out and he couldn't even walk right.'

'Perhaps he was concussed?' Albert asked fearing that he could overstep the mark at any moment. But his liking for the drayman was such as to compel him to at least try to suggest some defence.

Captain Mandel ignored the comment and gazed out into the darkness of the valley, refusing to meet the eyes of the mayor. They stood like this for some time before Albert broke the silence. 'Captain,' he said squinting his eyes into the darkness, 'I think I can see a spade and pick down there.' But the captain stood unmoved staring past the mayor, all the while playing restlessly with the leather strap that connected the butt of his service revolver to his belt. 'Captain! I think you should go and get one of your men to fetch those things and bring them up here.'

'What spade? What pick?' the Captain asked in a state of annoyance. 'I'm beginning to get a sense you wish to pervert the course of justice.'

'Oh, no no no. Captain Mandel not me, you have me quite wrong. But if you give me a torch...'

Just then that the wind blew in another bout of rain over the crest and Albert began counting in his head.

'We will investigate that tomorrow,' said the Captain as the rain streaked across the sharp features of his face. The Captain turned, in military style, and marched towards the shelter of his bakkie. Albert moved towards Isaacs wishing to offer him some comfort but just then two policemen emerged out of the darkness. They picked the driver up from under his armpits and dragged him away to their vehicle. Then, with a loud clattering of knees and elbows on steel, the

mayor heard Isaacs landing uncomfortably, as if roughly thrown, into the cage at the back of the yellow bakkie.

With the rain still falling, and getting to 120 in his counting, Albert reached his Mercedes. He was filled with the sense that he should have perhaps done something more for Isaacs, who had always been a decent person in his estimation. But at his car he found the acne-faced Konstabel standing in front of the driver's door, holding his driver's licence out. 'I am afraid, I am going to have to take you in.'

'Excuse me Konstabel?'

'Your driver's licence, he's out of date. You been driving this vehicle illegally.'

With this the policeman turned the mayor against his car, handcuffed him and led him away to the awaiting bakkie where he was placed, with slightly less vigour than they had done with the drayman, into the back. Isaacs, Albert noticed, was lying on the steel flat bed of the floor. But it was only when they began to move that Albert's eyes finally grew accustomed to the darkness and he could see that the drayman was unable to manoeuvre himself upright. He could see that Isaac's swollen cheek and mouth were banging against the cold steel of the floor with every bounce the bakkie made along the gravel road. The drayman's blood was running past his feet down the floor's corrugated grooves.

# Chapter 5

As I have said, it was unusual, before the engineer's trial, to see anybody sitting on the comfortless wooden seats of the amphitheatre that surround my bench – particularly at nine in the morning. But that Monday, after the mayor was arrested, I was made aware of the presence of an audience not by sight but instead by the presence of the smell of coffee. Its aroma caught in my nostrils and, although not unpleasant, it reminded me that I had given it up for Lent. And perhaps because of a certain irritability brought on by the lack of caffeine, I felt an urge to enforce the rules of the court. So not bothering to seek out the perpetrators I called out: 'Clarence, there is coffee in the courtroom.'

'Yes, My Lady.'

'Why?'

'I am not sure I can answer that My Lady,' he replied cautiously.

'Is there not a rule against it? And is it not your job to enforce the rules of the court?'

'No My Lady,' he said.

'No? Clarence, did you have a liquid breakfast at the Red Lion this morning?'

'My Lady the only bar in Albertsburg is the Jackal en Vel. And it's a place I only go to on a Saturday. And My Lady, there is no rule about drinking coffee in the courthouse that I can enforce.'

'But Clarence, unless I have taken to hallucinating since I arrived in this courthouse seven months ago I have seen, I don't know how often, a sign outside prohibiting coffee.'

'Well then My Lady,' Clarence cleared his throat, 'I am…well, I am afraid, My Lady, that you then have been hallucinating.'

I stopped paging through the court file in front of me and looked up. I could see only the outline of Clarence's figure standing some yards away from me, but even this conveyed to me something of the defiant school boy.

'Please explain yourself.'

'I am sorry My Lady but as the Jacobsons pointed out to me this morning, the rules as written on the door state as follows: "By order of the court: no guns, no knives, no pangas, no dirtied or soiled miner's overalls or gumboots, no spurs, no whips, no riding crops, no shamboks, children below the age of 16 are to be seated upstairs". Then there is a list of the kinds of people allowed in and in which sections they must sit, which you had me paint over with black paint when you arrived, and then it states quite clearly: "no food or cool drinks are allowed in this courtroom". But there is no mention of coffee My Lady.'

'But Clarence, the precedent is set with the maxim that "No Drinks are allowed in the courtroom".'

'Objection your honour. May I approach the bench?' The voice came from the gallery, and, although it was a familiar one, I could not at first identify who it belonged to. I switched my glasses over in annoyance and looked up. The voice, I discovered, belonged to Daniel Jacobson. I noticed then that he was sitting with several members of his family and that Jean was sitting amongst them. 'The form of this court, Daniel Jacobson,' I said, 'is My Lady not 'your honour' and no, you may not approach the bench, as this court is not in session, you are not a lawyer, nor are you a witness, and I do not recognise you as an official of the court.'

'Very well,' the young man replied, 'if the court will not recognise me I must appeal to my constitutional right as a citizen...'

'That, Mr Jacobson, will not be necessary.' I felt my voice creaking with agitation. 'All I ask is that the lot of you go and drink your coffee outside. Coffee is prohibited in this court and for certain personal reasons I want you to drink it outside of my ability to smell it. Is that clear?'

'Your hon…My Lady, I must object again for there is no recognisable rule stating that coffee is prohibited from the court. It is a hot drink rather than a cool one. If, however, you wish to appeal to our consciences rather than the letter of the law, perhaps, in fact I know, we will reconsider our position. However, as things stand we are well within our legal mandate to partake in a morning coffee while we come to support our friends, the mayor and Mr Isaacs, in what is quite frankly disgraceful circumstances.' I smiled at Daniel, who had taken on something of the TV lawyer's tone.

When I look back at this time, before the engineer arrived, I realise that I had at least some affection for this place. Certainly, Albertsburg had had an inauspicious and violent past, but as I encountered it then, it had much to commend it. No doubt a town, with those people in the court that day, would have been worth preserving. After what has happened subsequently it is difficult to remember this.

'Now, Mr Jacobson, please sit down,' I said. 'My ruling is as follows. You may drink the rest of your coffee, despite the fact that it remains a source of agitation to me. But I believe that when the precedent was set, with regards to drinks in the court, take-away coffee was a practice not widely observed and so its presence in the court was not foreseen. Then again when I arrived the sign still claimed that court seating should be arranged via race; and that certainly was not legally binding despite its open proclamation. However, I will instruct Clarence to make another intervention on this sign and to add the words 'and Hot Drinks'.'

'Perhaps, My Lady, if I might be allowed to comment on the wording.' Daniel Jacobson was back on his feet. 'Now, My Lady, if I were to prove that my drink was neither hot nor cool, would this not pose another problem for Clarence? I say this only for Clarence's sake, for I foresee my own pedantry. It is, after all, not the temperature that is the issue. Would not it be better simply to cross out the word 'cool' so that the wording simply states 'drinks' thereby including all of the general set of drinks rather than simply a subset?'

'Very well Mr Jacobson, your point is well taken. Clarence please see to it that the word 'cool' is painted out.'

'Sorry My Lady, if the court will allow?'

'What is it Mr Jacobson?' I said beginning to get irritated.

'Only My Lady that Jacobson and Daughters would be most willing to make you up a new sign.'

'At whose expense?'

'At ours of course.'

'Very well. Now can we please be allowed to proceed? Our mayor seems to have, quite inexplicably, spent the entire long weekend in jail. And I am sure Jean is eager to get him home.' I said this nodding in her direction.

It was only then that I turned my gaze towards the two defendants. They had, I knew, been brought still handcuffed from the police station by Clarence. I had myself ordered that Clarence should fetch them. This was after the Konstabel phoned to ask for the case to be postponed because they did not have 'anybody free' to escort the detainees over the road. Clarence, being both the janitor as well as the bailiff of the court, could legally perform the job and so I saw no reason for him not to do it.

Looking at Isaacs I noticed he had a large lump under his right eye which I knew, from many interactions with law enforcement, was consistent with the blow by a left-handed man, possibly using a club or baton. The mayor simply looked like a man who had not seen his bed or a razor for several days. 'Well,' I said turning to the state prosecutor, 'what charges does the State bring against these two men.'

'My Lady,' Mr Hollow looked up, 'we charge the mayor with driving with an invalid licence and recommend a punitive fine. As for Mr Isaacs we are still awaiting the doctor's blood tests which we believe…Ah yes.' With this the door of the court opened and a slightly annoyed looking Dr Eloff entered carrying a piece of paper. 'If I may be allowed to consult with the doctor?'

I nodded and the two men stood at the lawyers table looking over the paper the doctor was holding. Dr Eloff looked at it indifferently, with his hands in his loosely fitting trousers he shrugged and pushed out his lip in an expression of disregard.

It was then I noticed that the young Konstabel, who was heavily affected by acne, was still not in the court. Captain Mandel always sent the young policeman to watch over the court proceedings. It was part of Mandel's policy of having 'a visible police presence'. But I knew that it was as much to check up on me and my decisions as it was anything.

It was only after realising his absence that I began to suspect that the state prosecutor was stalling for time. Hollow was an officious man at the best of times. He loathed delays in the court proceedings. It was, I realised, surprising that he had not objected to what happened with Daniel Jacobson and the argument over the coffee.

'Mr Hollow, I have given you enough time, please let us proceed.'

'My Lady, I would like an adjournment to consult further with the police.'

'What for Mr Hollow?'

'I need instructions.'

'Mr Hollow, I will give you no adjournment and now you must present the evidence against Mr Isaacs and charge him. He has after all spent several days in jail already. He also seems to have suffered an injury that looks deeply suspicious.'

'Well, My Lady,' Hollow paused looking at Dr Eloff who just shrugged at him.

'Out with it Mr Hollow. I will delay justice no further.'

'Well, My Lady, I am lacking any evidence against Mr Isaacs.'

'Mr Hollow, please proceed with the charge.'

'Very well My Lady the State charges Mr Mohamed Isaacs with malicious damage to state property.'

With this Adv Maxwell rose placing his glasses on the end of his nose. 'My Lady, considering he did not cause the road to be washed away – or at least there does not seem to be any conclusive proof of that – and the damage to the truck was done to a privately-owned vehicle, I cannot see how the State can proceed.'

'Indeed, I am in perfect agreement with you Mr Maxwell.'

'My Lady!' Hollow rose again, 'I am sure that Captain Mandel has at least some good reason for having Mr Isaacs before you.'

'Are you acting in the name of justice or at the whim of the Albertsberg police force? You are of course aware of *interdictum de homine libero exhibendo,* that it is unlawful to hold a free man in captivity for no reason?'

'My Lady, it was believed that he was driving under the influence of alcohol but neither the police nor Dr Eloff have managed to bring any evidence to me.'

'Mr Isaacs,' I said turning to the driver of the dray, 'you are free to go.'

'Thank you ma'am,' he said looking up dejectedly. 'Could somebody unlock my handcuffs?' he asked, just as a tear splashed onto his cheek and bloody-looking mucus ran from both nostrils.

With this I quickly changed my glasses to avoid witnessing the rest of Mr Isaacs' emotions. I then turned my attention to the mayor. 'In the case of *The State v The Mayor of Albertsberg* I find the mayor liable for one hour of community service.' And just as I banged my gavel Captain Mandel and his young Konstabel came in through the doors. 'I would urge,' I continued, 'the police and the state prosecutor to be wary of the fact that our country's traffic department is notoriously slow on the delivery of new driver's licences these days, and that we should act with leniency when it comes to the many citizens who now find their licences out of date. I see no need for instances like this to occur again.' With this I banged my gavel again perhaps a little harder than usual.

As for the absence of the Konstabel in the court that day it was not as I suspected, because the police were attempting to conspire against Isaacs, although they were. But rather, as it turned out later, they were taking a statement from the man who has become known as 'the engineer of Albertsburg'. He had arrived at the police station that morning in order to register his presence in the district. In Albertsburg the law of registering one's presence in a district, which is still technically on our country's statutes, is still strictly enforced – unlike the rest of the country where it is simply ignored. And as usual our police were acting, when it was convenient to them, to the letter of the law.

# Chapter 6

The Saturday after the mayor and Mr Isaac's release I worked in my garden, planting a box hedge along the front wall of my property. The ground of Albertsburg is rocky and hard, despite the regular rain, and I spent a large part of the afternoon loosening the earth with a pick. Initially I stood straight-backed and raised the pick above my head. But I realised then that my hands were trembling under its weight. And try as I might, I could no longer control the pick's fall. It was with a sense of my growing infirmity that I recognised that the ringing song of the iron's head falling into rock, that refrain that has played itself out so habitually in this county's earth, would no longer sound for me.

Instead like a stone breaker, on one knee, I learnt to raise the pick to just above my shoulder and then to release it to gravity. It was like this I began my work, hammering and scraping at the earth. Of course, almost immediately I knew that what was missing was the stone breaker's boy. And not for the first time since being sent to Albertsburg, I felt the cold chill of solitude.

Shaking these thoughts off I put my mind to my method and having loosened the ground with numerous blows, I found that I could then sit down and push my fingers into the earth and scrape out a shallow hole. This was really all that was required, for the plants themselves were small, no more than a foot high. Of course, even then, I knew that I would not be around long enough to see them grow to a decent height. But gardening is not only about outcomes and, once I had finished planting the row along the perimeter wall, I stood back to let my mind's eye invent several possible topiaric forms.

This meditation was diverted after a few moments by the flashing light coming from the windows of our whitewashed Georgian house. By then the days were growing longer, but the early dusk created by the sun disappearing behind Towerkop meant that the television sent muted blue and white strobes across the lawn. My husband was, I knew, watching a soccer match inside. I stood there for some time, my mind drifting from the hedge to the realisation that I could not spend another lonely evening in that room with him.

It is not that I dislike soccer, nor my husband, but rather I was taken by a sudden anxiety when I thought of the emptiness of our recent exchanges. Of course we had many things to talk about: we had shared an active political life together, we had many mutual interests and we had had our son. That was surely enough to fill the night with conversation. But when we spoke, the words seemed disconnected. They were the talk of another time and of another country. They were not rooted in the present, they were not of Albertsburg and the implications of our 'exile'

here. We were of course as free as anybody to move around from dorp to capital, the president had exiled us not from entering the country but rather from our society. In the old days, under the old regime, if we had gone into incarceration or exile we had done so with friends and comrades, we were not alone. But now we could hardly go to a restaurant in the city without being greeted by an iron silence.

What was more, seeing my husband sit inside that house, his hand moving between chip bowl and mouth, his dead eyes following some overly-developed man preparing to put a ball into a hoop or net or hole in the ground, was like looking at somebody I could only recognise via an almost unestablishable family resemblance. So it was in an act of defiance that I walked into the living room, still with soiled hands, and informed him that I was going for a drink at the Jakkal en Vel. He looked up and, to my surprise, while wiping the chip oil from his chin, said that he would join me after the game was over.

It was a pleasant twenty-minute walk to the bar. The steel point of my umbrella tapped reassuringly on the road and I could feel the warmth of the sun-baked tar radiating up my legs under my dress. The water, after a short shower, turned into a steam. The dried luminous olive green of the fever trees became muted as they held the mist within their canopy.

As I walked along the final bend in the road that leads to the dorp I could see, as the steam cleared in the breeze, the Jakkal en Vel. Its square double-storey Victorian structure stuck out above the more usual single-storey tin roofed houses. But, what made it especially abnormal was that it was painted as a red and white checkerboard – an indication that the, now disused, airport's runway ran out to the west some 600m behind it.

As I entered its red door I discovered a curved solid oak bar projecting towards me, dividing the room into two spaces. On the left Dr Eloff sat facing away from the entrance, his head bent over his phone. He was in the throes of one of his usual games of chess. I looked around expecting to see Clarence sitting somewhere but I soon realised that only the mayor was there sitting with a person I did not know.

The owner, a large broad-shouldered fellow in a blue check shirt stood in the centre of the bar polishing glasses. A scarlet apron was wrapped around his midriff. He was grinning at me. 'Good evening stranger. Come in, come in.' He waved his right hand at the available spaces. 'Take a seat, take a seat, anywhere for you. They are all the same. Ignore the signs. They are just there as decoration. Testament to the past. Nothing more, thanks to God.'

It was then that I noticed, with a certain discomfort, that Albert was looking straight at me from the right-hand section. Next to him sat a large man, whose huge sunburnt neck and broad muscular shoulders suggested he was a farmer from outside of the dorp. Although my first thought

was to join the doctor, I felt that I should express my unhappiness to Albert with regards to his recent ordeal.

'Good evening mayor,' I said.

'Evening Judge President.'

'I thought I would just reiterate,' I began, 'how deeply I regretted having to convict you the other day, and how I find Captain Mandel's behaviour profoundly concerning.'

'You are just doing your job,' he said, 'and they are just doing theirs. I broke the law.' He smiled in his tense reluctant manner. 'Let me get you a brandy and coke. Double?'

It would not have been my choice of drink. In fact, I can't say that I had ever drunk one before. But wanting to fit in to at least some of the rhythms of Albertsburg I agreed. 'Please sit down Judge,' the mayor continued. 'This is Enoch. He's a farmer from just outside the city. Jean will be here shortly. So don't worry, you won't have to listen to us all night. That's if you are here to stay for some drinks?'

I nodded and sat down with some reservation. I struggled to think of what I might say to this man and I realised a double brandy and coke was, perhaps, just the tonic. I smiled at him and he gave me a brief glance and then stared back down at his drink. 'Is that a brandy and coke too?' I asked.

'Triple,' he replied, holding up three abnormally large fingers in case I misunderstood. A brief silence followed as I settled on the bar stool, but it was he who broke the silence. 'You're a judge, hey? We've never had a judge drinking in here before. That bloody doctor,' he said loudly waving his hand in Eloff's direction and laughing, 'ag man, he never talks to anyone, miserable. The mayor drinks here, but never a judge.'

With this he went back to looking into his drink, turning the glass slowly clockwise on the table with his huge thumb and index finger. The glass seemed as small as a thimble in his hand.

'Judging must be an interesting job, hey?' he started again.

'It has its moments,' I said, and just as I was about to ask him about farming he began.

'Yes, judging, I guess it's a lot of like looking into people's lives. The way they live. I too would like to have done that.'

'Really? It can be pretty horrible.'

He looked at me with his mouth cocked as if I had interrupted his train of thought. And I became aware that Enoch was not making small talk but actually had something on his mind.

'There is a new man next door by me.' He was now moving his eyes rapidly between my face and his drink. 'I have been watching him. Nothing strange or kinky you know. I can see into his study from my stoep when his light is on at night. I always have sat on my stoep in the evening.

I don't see a reason to change my ways now that I have a neighbour who doesn't close his curtains.' Just then Albert came back with the drinks. 'I was just telling the judge, hey, about my new neighbour, the artist painter guy. You know the oke who is renting the place across the road.'

The mayor was smiling. He had more confidence about him here, a kind of Dutch courage I guess. 'You know judge, we gossip a lot about new people who come here,' Albert said.

'Did you talk about me?' I inquired.

'Ja hey, the city doesn't stop,' he laughed.

'I live a pretty ordinary life.'

'As Jean says, the ordinary has its interests too. But she normally says this about plants and in particular about those blue blommetjies of the rooibos.'

I could see that the mayor was rather proud of himself for having made this comment. It was, in truth, above his usual intellectual capabilities – but I could imagine Jean saying it. I realised then that I was actually looking forward to Jean's arrival and felt a certain tension at the thought that I was going to have to sit with these men for an extended period without her.

'I know that it is stupid,' Enoch began again, but this time it was almost as if he was talking to himself, 'but having watched this guy for a week now, I really want to see the painting he's doing in there. I googled and perhaps he works in an 'abstract'. But he might have a bowl of fruit in front of him. I would prefer that. I just can't see, I've walked far to the side but I can't see nothing. Perhaps one day I will ask him to his face.'

'Why don't you ask him now?' Albert said as, just then, a man I had never seen before entered the bar. But they both directed their gaze at the floor when the new man looked over at us. He nodded at me and I nodded back. As I have described, the engineer was a tall cadaverous looking man not without good looks. I remember that I had had the sudden urge to ask him to join us, but then looking at the company I was keeping I decided against it. Instead I watched him order a glass of wine from the barman and take a paper to a table on the other side of the bar.

The three of us sat in silence for some moments until the tall well-built landlord came to clear our glasses. I had met him before across my judicial bench. He had, I knew, been in the merchant navy. Some claimed that he had been a mercenary of some sort, although quite what he had done I did not know at the time. Mr Davidson claimed he had been a Marxist, Sarah suggested that his sympathies had a more reactionary flavour. Everybody in the town called him Boetsman, a corruption some said of bootsman or boatswain. His real name, although very few in the town knew it, was Giambatista Fidanxa – at times he referred to himself as 'St John' in the type of translation that this country is fond of. He was a tall dark man, his grey hair was cropped close

against his scalp and a bright set of dentures protruded from his mouth, the upper half of which was covered by a large handlebar moustache.

He spoke with what I supposed at first was a foreign accent, although there seemed to be the interference of another tongue. He attested during the time I knew him to the fact that he had lived in many African countries but he spoke several of our local languages with remarkable ease. It seemed as if many parts of Africa had contributed to his identity, although he never admitted coming from any place in particular.

'Good evening Judge. It is such a delight to have you here. I am not sure I have ever seen you without your cape. I did not recognize you without it. You are quite a different person, transformed. In fact now you look delightful.' He said this smiling, his teeth looking like they might easily come flying out of his mouth with each word he spoke.

'Good evening Mr. Fidanxa.' I said, pronouncing the end of his surname with a click. He smiled, nodded and laughed. 'Ah yes, ah yes,' he said, acknowledging either that the pronunciation was right or mocking me for having entirely misplaced it. 'What can I get you? And of course it's on the house. You have now found in my favour on *two* separate occasions. For this you deserve a drink.'

'Two occasions? I know of only one,' I said sternly.

'Come now judge, you must know the police are doing their best to send me out of business.'

'Well, if they have the law behind them,' I said, worried that this kind of talk could be dangerous, 'I will be sure to do the same.'

He looked at me smiling. 'Well judge, if the police have anything to do with the law in this town, then that is the first I've heard of it. You know before you arrived Mandel arrested me and searched the bar for a hoard of cash he said I had buried under my kitchen floor. Hah, for the sake of God, that bloody fool.'

'Why would he think that?' I asked.

'Oh, there is a rumour,' Boetsman said loudly, without caring who was there to listen, 'that I was part of a cash in transit robbery before coming here.'

'And were you?' I asked.

With this he laughed out loudly, flashing his ill-fitting teeth. 'I can assure you, you find nothing like that in the places I have worked. In the sea and the bush there are no money trucks. In *those* places you find only solitude and most often death. And to those empty places of the heart, the security companies do not deliver money. No, Mandel is always up to mischief; God be damned.' He smiled and winked at me.

I could see this exchange had made the mayor uncomfortable. He seemed to be purposely disregarding what was being said and was staring out the window at the rain. And it is only now that I am writing this that I realise his lips were moving and that he was no doubt counting to himself. His worried look altered, however, and his face lit up as an oblong set of lights belonging to a Mercedes pulled up to the pavement in front of the bar.

'Jean is here!' he said in an almost juvenile manner, which might have been an attempt to change the topic.

'I will wait for her,' Boetsman said. 'A drink and a chaser on the house for all of you.' And I noticed that Boetsman too seemed enlivened by Jean's arrival, for I saw that he watched her progress from the car to the door with some absorption while vigorously polishing our table.

'Yes, yes come in, come in. The first lady! My saviour,' he said as Jean entered. She smiled at him and to my surprise they embraced and kissed twice on the cheek.

'Hello Boetie,' she said.

'I can't thank you enough for the use of your bakkie, hey, I would have had to have made a million trips up and down to get the bottles from the truck.' Jean smiled and waved his thanks away. 'What can I get you all?' he asked finally.

Taking the order he carried on talking to Jean as he poured the drinks from behind the bar. Then she turned to me and as Boetsman bent to get something from the fridge below, she took my hand and squeezed it with some affection. 'Hello Judge, so lovely to see you here.'

Returning to the table Boetsman placed the drinks down before us and as he placed mine I asked: 'So why do you say I have found in your favour on *two* occasions?'

His smile faded somewhat. 'Of course, of course, renewing my liquor licence that is the one, the most important, and in the case of Mr Isaacs. If you had found against him the truck would have been impounded for months. I would never have seen any of it. And now with the road as it is, well, it will make it difficult to get very much up here. We will only have the full dray again after the engineer has come to repair it.'

'Do you really think Isaac's arrest was another attempt by Captain Mandel to put you out of business?' Jean asked looking at Boetsman.

'Of course. Why not?' But he now was looking exclusively at me. 'You do more good than you know Judge.'

'I simply uphold the law,' I said.

'That's enough. In fact, in a place like this it is a revolutionary act.'

I did not know quite what to say. I had noticed that the mayor had leapt off his seat at the beginning of the conversation and had disappeared to the toilet. Enoch too sat distractedly,

seemingly not wishing to listen. Instead he swirled the brandy and coke around in his glass and then sent a large section of it down his throat.

'The police have had a long history with the drayman,' Jean began. 'The dray, back in the old days, used to bring the internet signal up every week with a mobile router. We all used to be able to take our phones to it and retrieve emails and news. Around here the dray is associated with freedom – the police have never liked that. Of course, that's all changed now, but it is still always a relief to see that the dray has arrived.'

'Please, please, Jean and Boetsman, no more talk of the police,' Albert said on returning to his seat. 'My god, it's bad enough I spent that time in jail. Let's just move on and forget it. Boetsman, when are you going to introduce us to that girl of yours, hey?'

Boetsman smiled and laughed. 'Sadly, there is no girl, mayor. I wish that there was. It would be nice to share with her all that buried money I have. Although we would have to use it slowly to avert Mandel's suspicion, hey?'

'Boetie, has a woman in the town, but for some reason he just won't reveal to us who she is,' Jean said smiling at me.

He wiped the table again, chuckling to himself. 'Do you really think a woman would be that crazy enough to love a face like a relief map of the Swartberg? No, no, no, I have no time for this miracle. This bar is My Lady.'

By then the Jakkal en Vel had begun to fill up with the people from the dorp. I had never seen the town at night and I noticed that the men's dress altered from their day-time clothes which would not have suited the climate's freezing nights. Now they wore coarse woollen polo neck jerseys and jeans, while the women kept their colourful wax-print dresses but covered their tops with dark knitted shawls and their legs revealed knee high boots. Amongst them I could see Clarence's head sticking out from a group of shorter men on the far side of the bar. 'Do the locals not come to this side?' I asked Jean.

'They have always stood on that side. In the old days they were of course forced to by law. Habits die hard in this part of the world,' she said wistfully.

Amongst them too I noticed the Jacobson daughters. Their tall, pale and slender figures sat on high stools in the far corner where, with drinks in front of them, they sat knitting dark wool while occasionally exchanging words.

Like the rest of the town they wore black shawls, but their distinctive, angular and pale features produced a look quite different from the others. 'There's something otherworldly about those two,' I said to Jean pointing with my eyes in their direction.

'Yes, I have always thought of them as something from a painting by Rossetti. They are really quite nice when you get to know them, poor girls.'

'Why do you say, poor girls?' I asked.

'Well there's not much of a life for them here and they won't find husbands.'

'But they are both rather striking, I wouldn't have thought they would lack for suitors.'

'Wrong religion.'

I nodded. 'And from the other towns?'

'They don't mix.'

Jean and I were just discovering each other's interests in art and a little gossip when my husband, to my great surprise, entered the bar. For some reason, possibly because of the effects of the brandy, I felt a real pleasure in seeing him. A pleasure I knew I had not felt for some time.

Many of the people of Albertsburg had not seen him before as he had rarely ventured outside of the house at that point. So when he entered I noticed that people were staring at him and there seemed to be a sudden hush. He appeared to take no notice of this and walked up to me and shook the hands of the mayor, Jean and Enoch. Boetsman came over and shook his hand. 'Ah, so nice to have you here at last, you have always been a great hero of mine, a great hero of this country. And I've never listened to the rubbish about you,' he said. My husband tried his best to smile and brush this compliment aside. But I could see him suffering under the strain of these words and my heart at that moment wanted to break.

I was not sure if it was rudeness or shyness but the mayor and Enoch began to speak to eachother after this, in slightly hushed voices while Jean got up and went over to speak to Daniel Jacobson, who was standing at the bar seemingly by himself. Having really no other choice my husband and I turned to one another and we chatted for the first time in a long while of ordinary things: the soccer, gardening, the possibility of going to the capital to see an exhibition. Of course, I wasn't sure at the time whether he was doing this for its own sake or whether he just wanted the people to see our relationship as functional. But whatever the reason, it was a relief.

We talked until the mayor, no doubt influenced by the alcohol, finally turned and began talking to us. There was nothing unsavoury about it *per se*, it was just, I guess, what men would call 'banter'. But I could tell Jean, for one, was not enjoying her husbands behaviour. However, the whole incident might never have come to a head if Albert hadn't punctuated every sentence with the word 'chief' while Enoch kept using the word 'moffies' when speaking to my husband.

My husband, for his part, smiled in the mayor's direction each time 'chief' was uttered. But as everybody could tell, except seemingly the mayor and perhaps Enoch, it was causing my husband some offence. I even noticed the man we would come to call the engineer, who was now

standing on our side of the bar, was listening in, his hawk-like eyes resting with interest on my husband. 'So,' the mayor continued emboldened no doubt by the drink, 'this bloody soccer is a mess, not so chief? I can't bloody watch it, chief, I just can't.'

'That game is one for bloody moffies,' Enoch intervened.

'God gave you hands, use them, that's what I say. Don't you think so, chief?'

'Only moffies refuse to use their hands,' Enoch grumbled.

'But our lot don't seem to know their arse from a minehole,' Albert roared with laughter with this. 'So what is next for them chief? Relegation?'

My husband continued to smile at him and raised his glass of scotch in measured and mock agreement each time he was called to agree with whatever nonsense the mayor and Enoch were offering. But he looked miserable.

There was once a time in the old days when I could have comforted him on such occasions with a smile or even a squeeze of the hand, but my interventions had long since failed to offer help. Then the mayor's conversation moved almost seamlessly on to the general state of the country. 'Well,' he continued now utterly soaked and slurring in brandy and coke, 'you know better than most what a mess this place is in, not so chief? Captain Mandel will tell you just how things have changed for the worse.' It was a narrative that most people would parrot out after a certain amount of drink. And it was only then that my husband, getting up off his seat and raising himself to his full height, suddenly broke out: 'I would prefer it if you did not call me 'chief'. Nor, seeing we are on the topic of words, that you use the word moffie in my presence, nor associate it with me or my preference for soccer. Do you understand?'

'Sorry, chief.'

'Albert!' Jean shouted looking at him with rage. His eyes seemed to lose their drunken mistiness when he realised his wife's anger. 'And you, Enoch, sit down immediately!' Because just for a moment it seemed as if Enoch had got up in order to physically assault my husband. Thankfully he too appeared cowed by Jean's authority.

'I'm sorry, hey. I didn't mean that,' Albert said to his wife.

'It's not me you need to apologise to!'

'I am sorry. Have I offended you? I didn't mean to, I promise, honestly.' Albert stuck out his hand and my husband shook it with some reluctance.

'I was only going to go to the toilet,' Enoch said meekly.

'Okay, well off you go,' Jean said shaking her head at him.

It was the first time in many months that I had seen my husband stand up for himself. He had, over the last while, lost the will to do it.

We sat there awkwardly not quite knowing what to do or say next. Albert sat stock still until Jean leant over and touched his hand with her index finger which seemed to free him from his anxiety.

'Judge, I hope you don't mind me asking,' the mayor started slurring. 'I mean I hope I am not breaking any law or anything by asking this, but I want to know what happened to the pick and spade.'

At first I thought perhaps he had seen me gardening earlier that day. But then a penny seemed to drop and I looked at him incredulously. 'Do you mean hammer and sickle?' For I suddenly thought that this may be some attempted reference to our old communist affiliations.

'I didn't see them. Did the police find those too? I wonder what they would have been used for?'

'The police?' I looked at Jean but she showed no signs of being able to clarify what her husband was talking about.

'I am afraid you are going to have to explain yourself. I think I may have misunderstood.'

His eyes widened as they tried to focus on my face. 'There was a pick and spade down in the gully the night I was arrested.'

I paused for a moment not knowing what the implication of this was. I scanned the bar to see who was amongst us. 'Are we talking potential sabotage?' I lowered my voice. Albert leant in towards me. His eyes were unfocused from the drink and his speech was slurred.

'The town is plagued...'

'Oh, Albert please.' Jean stretched out an arm and pulled him back upright on his stool. 'The judge is not interested in your silly superstitions, for god's sake, just stick to the facts,' Jean whispered. I could see that she too was worried that there might be people listening. 'This is probably not the place to be talking about it.'

'But mayor,' I began, 'just what's this about? I mean the spade and the pick, what is their significance?'

'There was a spade and pick, that's all I know. I mean, I shouldn't … I mean, is it *sub judice*?'

'There is no case, so no, it can't be *sub judice.* And all I can say Mayor is that this is the first I've heard of it. Should I ask Mandel?'

'Oh no please, for the love of god!' His face went pale with shock and Jean quickly went to hold his hand.

'Please …' she said turning to me. 'Albert could not take another shock like the last.' I could see his eyes were reddening and tears seemed to be emerging.

'Okay, I won't, if it causes you distress.'

'Thank you. Please, we shouldn't have brought it up.' Jean was stroking her husband's hand.

'What is happening about the repair of the road?' I asked trying to divert the conversation and give Albert something to talk about.

'Jean contacted the Ministry of Interior and Infrastructure,' he said in a distant kind voice, his eyes were glazed and he was clearly thinking about his time in jail. 'I could hardly have done it…I was in jail…No, I am not going back. That screaming, I have never heard anything like it.'

'What screaming?' I asked, and with this our mayor seemed to clear his head again.

'Nothing, oh, nothing, I had nightmares in there. It was all very nice. Mandel was fine, actually lovely,' he said in a quickened and perhaps slightly practiced way. 'He didn't do anything. We're lucky to have him now that I think about it.' Jean was now rubbing his back.

Of course, I wanted to know more but I knew he was now too frightened to talk. 'So, when are they sending us an engineer?' I asked again.

'They say as soon as possible. That was the last word,' Jean said.

'And when will that be?'

'Soon,' Albert said in a dissociated tone. And then he said very slowly and very softly, 'I think it will be soon. All will be well. No need to worry Judge. Please forget what I've told you. What a lovely night.'

With this I went to the bar to buy another round. 'Good evening Judge O'Higgins,' the thin man said with a pleasant smile.

'Good evening,' I replied and after a pause, 'I suppose you better introduce yourself, as you seem to have an advantage over me.'

The man smiled again and lifting his glass to his mouth he said, 'Joseph Bain.'

'And why have you come to join us in this part of the world Mr. Bain?' I asked, raising my voice so I could be heard over the din of the bar.

'Escape.' He too had to elevate his tone.

'From the law?'

'In a sense. From our capital.'

'You will, no doubt, wish to escape from here soon enough,' I said.

'Oh, I doubt that. I've work to do here.'

'Oh yes, and what is that?'

'I've retired. I plan to write a book about some of my experiences.'

'Experiences as what?'

'I was a civil servant. You see a lot in the service these days.'

'You always have in this country.'

'True,' he said, his thin smile stretching laterally across his face.

'But why here of all places?' I said watching Boetsman finishing up with a customer and motioning that I wanted a round.

'My mother was from here. Not Albertsburg, but the general area.'

'How *are* things in the capital these days? It is so difficult to tell from the internet.'

'Not good.' He smiled in a way as if to suggest that we were secret sharers of some attitude.

'In what sense?'

'Protests … violence … There have been some disturbing arrests, as you may know.'

He was looking at me as if he was trying to assess something in my face.

'Depressing. We'll no doubt speak again,' I said picking my drinks off the bar and moving back to my husband.

This conversation was a barometer of the times. Bain certainly knew my politics. But fear, I knew, would keep us at a distance. Fear that the Civil Co-operation Bureau, that part of the security cluster known as the 'Devil's Coop', had its ears out.

Of course, it was ridiculous to believe that they could hear us in a noisy bar in Albertsburg but that is the extent of how fearful those who were politically active had become by then. It was not that the Coop were listening then and there, but more that words could be repeated until they reached the ears that were listening.

By the time I got back to my husband the conversation at the table had drifted onto fishing. We finished our drinks but my husband, Albert and Enoch demanded to stay for one last round. Jean and I, however, had had enough. I noticed then that Bain too had left the bar. I got up with Jean. She offered me a lift, but I felt a walk would clear my head a little before going to bed. Bain was standing outside in the light of the stoep smoking a cigar. 'Off home?' he asked. I nodded as I said goodbye to Jean. 'East or west?'

'West.'

'I am off in that direction too. Shall we walk together?' I saw no reason to refuse and we stepped out onto the street. 'So, is the show over in there?'

'You mean between the mayor and my husband?'

He nodded and I saw in the light of the street lamp, not for the first time, that straight-lipped sardonic smile of his.

'Yes, they seemed to have now become inseparable.'

'Romances often begin with a fight.'

'Why do you think that is?' I asked.

'I suppose one sees the worst the person has to offer and realise that things then can only improve,' he said releasing a cloud of grey smoke into the gloom.

'That is a very mundane analysis. Personally I think, as they say, love is close to hate.'

'And that is very unanalytical.'

'Is this a fight?' I asked.

The night was cloudy and, as we walked past the police station, a slanting rain began to fall. Both of our umbrellas unfurled and clicked into place almost simultaneously. The thin unpleasant looking Konstabel was standing smoking outside, under the shelter of the afdak, a plume of e-cigarette vapour drifted into the eaves. He seemed to nod in our direction, and I remember thinking at the time that it was almost as if he had nodded at Bain rather than at me. It was a sign that I took to be yet another personal slight.

'The police,' I said, 'play an interesting role in this dorp.'

'As they do in the rest of the country,' Bain replied.

This provoked another silence between us. 'So,' I began again, 'what is this book you are writing going to be about?'

'Oh, it is just a piece of detective fiction, mixed with a courthouse drama. As I said it's based on some experiences I had in the civil service. Frivolous stuff really. I thought of writing something a little more literary: a bildungsroman, a man's fall from grace, a political exposition, a disguised philosophical work concerning the nature of fiction. But I am told these things don't sell.'

'I believe so,' I said. 'You haven't thought of taking up painting?' I asked, expecting an admission.

'Oh lord no, they threw me out of finger painting classes at the age of four,' he laughed. 'I hear you enjoy gardening. I am a bit of an amateur botanist myself. My mother was one.'

'And who told you that I gardened?'

'Boetsman. He might seem like he would prefer to be standing on a quarter deck with a cutlass held between his gums but he talks, and he's not frightened like the rest of us. He is an unusual character. I wonder just how he found his way here.'

'I have wondered that myself,' I said.

We spent the rest of the walk shining our torch apps to light the way and talking about gardening and the varieties of flora that exist in Albertsburg's valley. He pointed out the two varieties of fever tree along the road. 'My mother, as I have said, grew up in these parts. This one,' he said stabbing the trunk with the point of his umbrella, 'is not local. It is an alien from up north. The bark actually photosynthesises. It's still used by the sangomas.'

'Yes,' I said, 'my mother-in-law used to use it to enter dreams she called the "white paths".'

'Ja, I know them. They call it around here "die blinkende wit waarheid paaie".'

'The shining white paths of truth. Yes, it is the same in our language.'

'It's potion we could all do with,' he laughed and tearing off a piece of bark he bit a piece off and he began to chew, offering me the rest.

'No thanks, I think the brandy and cokes have already set me onto those byways.'

'And what truths can you reveal?' he asked, looking at me quizzically.

'That all dreamers lie.'

'And who might those dreamers be?' he enquired after a slight pause. And I got the vaguely unpleasant feeling then that I was being tested in some way. Perhaps he was simply looking for a sign from me. A sign that I would take him into my confidence so that he could do likewise. But only the utterly foolhardy would do something significant on the first night. There had been, after all, reports that the death squads of the Devil's Coop were active again in certain parts of the country. *That* was the truth, no matter how distant it was to us in our disconnected valley.

We walked the rest of the way to my house in silence. Although I noticed that Bain, at one point, began to hum very gently to himself *Qonggothwane* – the song of the dung beetle's journey.

# Chapter 7

The Monday morning that followed, Enoch, as he testified in the court, was satisfied. He had watched Bain on the Sunday evening and had, he thought, confirmed that the certain movements of Bain's left hand suggested that his neighbour must be painting from real life. 'He seemed,' Enoch stated in his testimony, 'to be taking, uhm, like … what you call those things?' He was holding up his bulbous hand and squinting into the distance. 'You know, what-you-ma-call-it. That thing that artists do with their hands, you know?'

'I take it you mean he was getting the perspective right?' Advocate Hollow asked quizzically looking over the rims of his glasses.

'Ja, that's it! Perspectives. Ja, he also, like, kept on talking to himself. You know? That night I thought he might have somebody in there with him, like a what you call them? Ag, I used to know these words. Y'know a person to paint.'

'A sitter?'

'Or they could have been standing. But, ja no, like a person might have been there in the house with him.' He paused for a second, and then, suddenly looking at me, he shouted. 'I even saw you there! It might have even been you!' he said pointing at me with his huge index finger, while at the same time slapping his other hand down on the stand with such force that several members of the gallery woke up in confusion. Some even raised themselves up from their benches on which they had been sleeping to see if it was once again a breakdown of the ventilation machine. But on seeing Enoch still on the stand they slumped back down again.

It took some time to clear this matter up. But the claim that I was in the house with Bain that night was finally struck from the record when Enoch admitted that he had seen no one in the house, other than the engineer. With this, however, the point was raised again by Adv. Hollow that, considering my friendship with the engineer, it would be proper for me to recuse myself from the case.

This (again) I dismissed, stating that, considering the size of Albertsburg, it would be impossible not to have at least some kind of personal relationship with any accused in my court. During this discussion, I was pleased to note that the citizens, as well as the policemen, had resumed their afternoon naps. Some lay across the benches, others, took to the floor, using their bags and umbrellas as bolsters. Such was the bodily disarray of these scenes during the afternoons of the trial, that my court could, I often thought, be mistaken for the aftermath of a massacre.

The only man who was upright was De Lambert, the journalist, who sat with his tablet, punching at his keys, capturing what could well have gone completely unnoticed. Jean too was

present. But I noticed even her head was lolling back in the heat of the day. I could only confirm that she was partially conscious by the fact that her hand occasionally raised itself to swat away a fly.

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With the activities of his next-door neighbour seemingly clarified, Enoch had woken with a sense that the man living over the road, considering he was a figurative and not an abstract artist, did not pose a threat to the community. With this matter cleared up in his mind he stepped out onto his farm as the sun reflected off the mountains of the Twelve Apostles that receded beyond the engineer's house. The smell of wet earth and the sound of newly woken ostriches fluttering and stretching out their limbs were the only immediate sensations he took notice of.

He spent much of that morning herding his birds to the north of the farm by raising a broomstick above his head and chasing them like a sheep dog. Having finally penned them in a kraal on the slopes of Towerkop he then proceeded to make sure that the fences near to the gravel road, that separated his property from the engineer's, were in good repair.

It was then that a flash of light caught his eye. He had thought nothing of this to begin with, supposing that it must simply be the sun reflecting momentarily off a piece of broken glass lying in the veld. But on straightening out his back he noticed that this flashing was coming from a second chimney protruding out of the house next door's roof. This was something he had never noticed before. But it was only when another flash of light caught his eye, that he bothered to inspect the roof. 'No,' he said to himself, 'no, that house has not grown a second chimney. That is a man sitting on top of the roof, like a bird. Like a bird? With set of binoculars?'

He thought of calling out to the man on the roof. But then it struck him, there was something strange about this scene. Although not blessed with the best eyesight, Enoch claims to have kept note, furtively, of the bird-like figure on the roof while he hammered down the last loose fencing stake. All the while he wiped his forehead in the manner of someone who would soon need a drink. 'I was not tired or thirsty you understand. I just wanted whoever it was on the roof to think that I was,' he said.

Enoch had of course been in the army and was, at the very least, aware of certain bush craft. When he finally moved towards the house he hoped that the man's gaze would be tracking his movements and that he would fail to take in that a jug of water with lemon and cucumber was sitting outside on his stoep. Of course Enoch knew that if this man had been in the army too he would be tracking both subject as well as the subject's immediate environment. But Enoch told

himself he would have to gamble on this. He gave the jug a nervous glance as he got to the stoep but continued directly into the cool interior of the old Victorian farmhouse. Its Oregon pine floor shook as, once inside the door, he bounded towards the cupboard which housed his binoculars and rifle. He swung the door open, banging it against the wall, and, grabbing the eyeglasses, he took the hunting rifle and flung it onto an armchair near the window.

Then he got on the floor and leopard crawled his way to the couch. Climbing onto it he pulled one of the cushions over his head for cover and slipped the end of one of the eyepieces of the binoculars over the parapet. Placing his right eye to it, he took his preliminary reconnaissance of the roof across the road. But there was nothing there – save two chimneys protruding like a set of rabbit's ears from opposite sides, their duck-shaped metal cowls swinging listlessly in the breeze.

With this he withdrew his eye and then lay back on the couch, returning, every few minutes, to scanning the roof. But the subject had abandoned his position. Determined to discover just where this person may have relocated to, Enoch then crawled on his stomach to the dining room and, slipping under the curtain, he propped his chin on the windowsill. From there he had, through the trunks of the blue gum trees that lined the road, a full view of the subject's house and garden and could see that Bain had moved from the roof to the kitchen. However, at this distance he couldn't ascertain just what he was up to. At one point he seemed to be sharpening a knife, at another he appeared to be stabbing at something that lay on the table.

Enoch surveyed the land in front of him and realised that he could pretend to fix the fence at his gate. This was the most forward position to which he could advance without eliciting suspicion. From there he would have a clear visual command of the east flank of the engineer's house: his kitchen, study, bathroom and the eastern pitch of the roof. With this he returned to the cupboard and retrieved his grandmother's opera glasses. These he slipped into the side pocket of his cargo shorts and made his way out to the fence nearest to the gate. Of course, he did not forget to exit the house with a large glass of Schweppes water – in which, according to Bain, was a heavy-handed pouring of *witblitz* and tonic.

Enoch walked out from his stoep, trying, as best he could, to keep his eyes off his neighbour's house. After getting to the gate he began to shake the fencing. There was absolutely nothing wrong with it. But he dropped down to his knees and took out a set of pliers he had with him and began untwist and the retwist the bottom cross wire. All the while he had his other hand on the opera glasses. These he now began to pull slowly from his pocket.

'Do you need any help?' A voice suddenly broke out right next to him. Enoch tumbled backwards, dropping the pliers and then, while attempting to regain his balance, he flung the opera glasses into the air. Finally, in the last act of trying to steady himself, before he crashed to the

ground, he knocked the glass he had placed on the ground onto the leather hiking boot of the man standing over him. In a state of complete funk, with the dust from his fall swirling about him and obscuring his vision, he grappled in vain for anything, a stone, a stick, a fist full of sand, anything that could be used as a defensive weapon.

'Oh my living God!' he screamed. 'Don't do it! Please! My family were never part of any political movement. I have always been good to my workers – in fact, I have none, they all left after the wage dispute. There is no need to torture me. I have only a few possessions. You can bloody have the lot.'

The man standing above him remained silent for a few moments. Allowing Enoch time to recover his wits.

'I'm very sorry, I thought you heard me coming. I have not come for your possessions, at least not for now,' Bain chuckled and, having retrieved the beautifully inlayed opera glasses for Enoch, he now was standing above him holding out his hand.

Enoch had by this time recovered from his shock but he was still lying on the ground. Slightly begrudgingly he looked up and took the hand that was extended to him.

'I was just coming over to say that I am going for a walk and that if the police come looking for me, if you wouldn't mind telling them that I was here but that I have gone out.'

Enoch, still confused and a little bit irritated, was not listening to the man, instead he was slapping the sand out from his clothes. And then once he was satisfied that he had got most of it out of his shorts and shirt he turned to the engineer. 'Why do the police want you? I will tell no lies to the police. If they want to arrest you that is between them and you. I am not here to what-you-ma-call-it for you. You know like as an ali-thingy-ma-gig.'

'An alibi?'

'Ja, that's it. If the police want you, they must have good reasons. I will not stand in their way.'

'No, I don't think the police want me for any criminal reason. Or at least I hope not. They are simply coming to check up on the fact that I am living out here. I informed them last week of my presence in the district and they said they would be sending somebody out to verify some of the facts that I have given them. I have been waiting for them for some time now, but it would be just my luck that the minute I leave, they will arrive.'

'Do you often wait for the police while watching me from your roof?'

'Excuse me? My roof? I…'

'Very well, I will tell the police that you are staying by this place but that is it, hey.'

'I believe that's all that is required. Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.'

Enoch nodded, shook the man's hand that was extended towards him and then watched the lanky figure of the engineer, in his long dark waterproof poncho, broad brimmed veld hat and a tall wooden walking stick, disappear down the road towards the old deserted mining hostels to the south east of the dorp.

The police did not arrive while Bain was away. Instead they came while Enoch was sitting in darkness on his stoep that evening. His binoculars were resting down the side of his seat. A pre-prepared jug of brandy and coke sat on the table next to him. He had seen the police bakkie's blue light reflecting in the tops of the fever trees as it ascended the hill towards his farm. Then came the noise of the engine, straining its way up towards his house. Then the light of the headlamps came into view, bouncing up and down along the trunks of the trees until the vehicle swung into his neighbour's driveway, its back wheels skidding sideways, ploughing dust and gravel into the air.

But after skidding to a halt just metres from the house across the road, it sat for a while, its engine turned off, the blue light still flashing on its roof. Initially the two policemen remained in the vehicle. The silhouettes of their heads were made visible by the spotlight they triggered in the driveway. Enoch could see one of the policemen was smoking while the other sat impassively. Then a light came on in the kitchen and he saw the engineer looking out of the window and beckoning to the police to come in.

When they got out Enoch was surprised to see that it was Captain Mandel who had come himself, bringing with him the young Konstabel. Their movement again triggered the motion sensor of the spotlight and they shielded their eyes against its bright beam. Blinded temporarily, they stopped. And it was only when the engineer's looming silhouette appeared at the kitchen door that they began to move towards his tall dark figure.

Enoch took a sip of his drink and slumped down in his chair propping his elbows on the arm rests in order to steady the binoculars at his eyes. As far as he could make out, the police and the engineer sat talking for some time at the kitchen table. A coffee pot was steaming on the stove and a plate of what looked like koeksisters was taken from the fridge and was placed on the table. Papers were then produced either by the police or the engineer, Enoch could not tell, for the table itself was obscured by the level of the windowsill. Then both the police and the engineer began writing things down and both seemed to be checking just what the other had been doing. After this the engineer got up and went into his study. The light went on and Enoch leapt from his seat and slunk towards his gate in order to get a better view of what Bain might be doing. When he trained his binoculars on the study's window he found Bain searching through his papers.

Just what these papers were, Enoch could not tell. And, for the first time, he crept beyond the boundary of his fence. Advancing, with the binoculars fixed to his eyes, he saw Bain finally pulling out a large sheet of paper from his desk, which rolled itself up the minute he had pulled it loose. Then Bain went back to the kitchen with this large scroll. It took some time for Enoch to admit to the court that he had by then breached the boundaries of the engineer's property. However, after Adv Hollow assured him that, as a state witness, he would not be charged with trespassing, Enoch became bolder in his admissions as to his exact movements.

Enoch then confirmed that he had taken up a position behind the police bakkie. From there he could see that the scroll had been placed on the kitchen table. A pewter ashtray and some mugs were placed on it to hold down the four corners of what looked, to Enoch, like a plan of some kind. The three men stood for some time poring over this, pointing at it and gesticulating with their arms and motioning to the east, down towards the city, as well as towards the south east, towards the pass and the ruin of the mine at the foot of St. Thomas.

After this discussion ended the rolled paper remained on the table but Mandel had by then taken to leaning with his back against the kitchen sink, drinking a mug of coffee and eating a koeksister. Enoch's eyes had badly wanted to see just what the engineer and the police had been looking at. With this he stretched his neck out from the side of the bakkie and in so doing set off the motion sensor of the spotlight. Mandel turned suddenly and Enoch took off down the driveway running for his life. His heart rate surged and his thinking was in a state of pure instinct as he pitched himself into a set of thorn bushes at the end of Bain's property. He felt nothing of the thorns and from underneath the bushes he rolled across the road, his arms tucked to his chest until his body fell into the storm water ditch that ran down the front of his farm.

There he lay, terrified, pushing himself into the sodden ground, hoping that it would swallow him up. He could hear that the police and Bain had exited the kitchen and were searching the front of Bain's property. 'God se aarde,' he could hear Mandel shouting, as he once again blinded himself by triggering the spotlight. And when Enoch finally had the courage to peek above the parapet of his trench he discovered Mandel and the Konstabel, stage lit in the driveway, staggering around like blind men, their service revolvers pointing in all directions. Enoch quickly slunk back down when he realised that Bain was in fact standing, with what looked like a hunting rifle, just metres away, inspecting the thorn bushes that he had dived into moments before.

He was so close in fact that he could hear Bain sniffing like a dog and muttering to himself: 'That bloody drunkard from next door. All I can fucking smell is that drink he dropped on my foot.'

'It could have been an ostrich or a wild boar on the loose,' Bain called out to the police. Enoch held his breath and he could hear Bain's boots moving around on the gravel of the road above him. 'It was certainly a sizeable brute, whatever it was. And if the two of you hadn't have run around the spot like drunken orangutans we might have been able to make out some tracks.'

The three of them stood outside the house for some time after that but Enoch was too frightened to raise his head again and could only hear the muffled tones of a conversation. Then, finally, he heard the kitchen door closing as Bain and the police retired to the house. After about half an hour Mandel and the Konstabel got into the bakkie and sped off back to Albertsburg, their blue light flashing all the way. Meanwhile Enoch lay in the trench not daring to move until Bain had gone to bed. In fact he may very well have spent the whole night there.

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In the trial, of course, the testimonies surrounding the incident of Mandel's visit to the engineer's house were contradictory. Mandel claimed that it was a meeting set up with the engineer to discuss the repairing of the pass. Of course, one must admit that this did seem to fit at least with some of Enoch's testimony. However, when Bain finally took the stand, he declared in a progressively derisive and hostile manner that the police had come simply to confirm his residency status. The conversation, he claimed, had then turned to hiking in the area and he had gone to fetch a map from his study. When asked why the paper would have rolled up like an architect's drawing, Bain snapped: 'It didn't, it was folded! And I thought I was meant to be an engineer not an architect.' He also denied having searched for the animal that had triggered the spotlight. He claimed that it must have been Mandel rather than himself that Enoch had seen inspecting the bush with the rifle.

# Chapter 8

By now we were at the beginning of the crisis and, although we hardly knew it at the time, Albertsburg was at the brink. Captain Mandel had even by then begun to take control of not only the pass but the dorp itself. It was the second week after the pass had washed away and we had heard nothing with regards to an engineer's arrival. The reconstruction of the dry-stone walling that had collapsed was a distant hope.

In the first few weeks very little changed in the mentality of the people. Although supplies dwindled, most of Albertsburg believed that the god in the machine of government would act and all the troubles would simply blow away like clouds. As my next-door neighbours, the Williamsons, said to me, while I was watering my hedge one evening, as they set out for their usual night at the cinema: 'It won't be long before your friends in government send us the engineer, I am sure. Do you not think?'

'With *this* government?' I replied. 'As my husband said to me the other day "I would be less surprised if the Easter Rabbit arrived to fix it over Christmas".' They laughed at this, but then seeing that I was not laughing with them Mr Williamson, looking slightly concerned, asked: 'But your husband and yourself must have old friends in government who could help? Surely all it would take is a few phone calls? We could pay them. I mean even under the counter, if that's what it takes with your lot.'

I ignored the final comment and instead I chose simply to answer him as truthfully as I could. 'I am not sure that is how political redeployment works. I am afraid as the saying goes: when days are dark, friends are few. I very much doubt there's anybody amongst our 'old friends', as you put it, that would so much as forward an email to help either me or my husband – not in the current climate. We are here because we are considered, by the president, to be infectious.' At this they both laughed and Mr Williamson patted me on the arm as if he took me for a shameless prevaricator.

Like the Williamsons the population simply assumed that some solution would and could be found to the problem of the pass. And so both luxury and basic goods had begun to run out after a week. Indeed, by the end of week two Albertsburg's corner *café* was empty of all but washing powder and a few pieces of stationery. A large basket of sun-bleached and half-deflated plastic soccer balls sat feebly in a basket at its door, next to empty wooden pallets that had, only a week before, been filled with fruit and vegetables. A chalk board outside the butcher's informed everybody that nothing but ostrich remained and that the price of this had risen four times.

Boetsman too had run out of almost everything. Beer was not available and brandy was only served as a single shot. What was more, he had started advertising a new special cocktail of rum, honey and rooibos. 'We will be onto ship's biscuits soon,' Jean had quipped when sampling the new concoction.

'Ag, I thought I had seen the last of those,' Boetsman stated as he sat at the bar sharpening his knife on a well-worn whetstone. Out of everybody in Alberstburg it was he who had felt the sense of depression first. A sense that would soon consume much of the population. His smooth jocular manner had changed to one of doleful irony and he seemed to walk about the bar as if he were a prisoner. 'It's not Mandel,' he said to me on one such occasion, his voice drawling out the words. 'It's not that one man dominates over us. For that is, you know, the way of men. I should know. I have been part of that myself, I can *tell* you. Huh, we must sometimes take that freedom power allows us,' he said flinging back his head in disdain. 'Power, this is a natural thing, power can have its goodness too. But, here it is this thievery that is bred-in-the-bone of this place.' He motioned with his hand in the direction of the door. Then he fell silent for a while. But I knew he would begin again if I said nothing. 'For the most part I don't care about what others do,' he broke out in an angry tone, 'but power here is simply the hippo's ears, as they say in my part of the world. What lies beneath those ears is the slavish worship of money, the ripping out of everything that is to be got without a care for anyone. Thievery!' With this he spat onto the dusty wooden floor of the bar. 'I too have been a slave to this devil. I too…' He trailed off. And then after another protracted silence. 'You know the story of the money I have buried under the bar? Huh? The fools. But they are not so wrong about that. They are more right than they know … You, Judge, sitting here, you would not have to look very far to discover what I have done in the name of the devil of this country.'

'I can't imagine what you mean,' I said.

'As you know judge, you don't need to rob a bank in this country to steal money. Get into the business with the right kind of person in government … you can steal just as well.'

'Boetsman, please don't tell me you were involved in this corruption?' I said feeling a breaking sense of helplessness grip me by the throat.

'Me? No, God save me, no. But if you know how to use a gun, then those who are will find you sure enough. Me, I did not know to begin with. The dogs! But what is the use of claiming innocence. Yes, I stole. Not me personally, but it might as well have been me. I protected them. I served them. Much like you and your husband did.' He paused once more. 'Judge, I was on your side. I still am on your side. I worked for people who I thought were like you, honest. I worked for …'

But just then there was a foot fall on the stoep. Boetsman turned his head, slowly sliding his knife along the whetstone. 'Fuck you Enoch, for a big man you have a light step. What do you want? You know Judge, this man is a Peeping Tom. I would close your curtains if you don't want him seeing your private business.'

Enoch's face had turned bright red. 'Ag come on Boetie, I only ever looked at that Bain oke. And that is only to protect us.'

With this Boetsman began to laugh. 'Ja, ja Enoch my friend you can say that til your ostriches come home to roost. But we all know that you're a bloody pervert. Now what do you want my brother?' Enoch was standing at the door carrying two supermarket packets of tinned vegetables bought from the black-market traders – the so called *Kwerekwere* – who had infiltrated the town, bringing with them food and drink. 'Have you got any bottles of brandy to sell? Those bloody what-you-ma-call-thems have none. Mandel's men have confiscated the lot and his kops are selling them out the back of the police station at five times the price.'

Boetsman shook his head. 'No, I have no bottles to sell you, but you can sit down and have a single with the judge if you want.'

Enoch looked disappointed but came in and pulled up a stool.

As you may have gathered I am not particularly fond of Enoch and even by then I felt a certain uneasiness in his presence. I did my best to down the remnants of the lukewarm greasy rum and rooibos. However, I could not get away quickly enough.

'You know Judge, it is now no secret that I am keeping an eye on things,' Enoch began just as I was getting up. 'And that man Bain, that guy you're making friends with, he has something of the, what-you-ma-call-it, of the spirits about him.' Enoch downed his cocktail and pointed at Boetsman to pour him another.

'I'm not sure I understand you. You mean he is making his own alcohol?' I said trying my best to pay up and leave.

'No Judge. It's more serious. I mean like black magic, devil worship. I mean that kind of thing.'

'Oh, I'm sure that's not true. I thought he was an abstract painter that last time we spoke.'

'No, no, I know now that it's not painting he's doing. You know, he came on me like the bloody devil the other day.' Enoch had now begun to raise his voice. 'I did not hear any movement. And he was suddenly there,' he said in an angry tone and then getting up from his stool and raising his hand he slapped his palm down onto the bar. 'It was like bloody magic!'

'Easy there Enoch. You are scaring the judge,' Boetsman said, calmly watching Enoch's movements.

'I'm scaring her? *He* scared the living befok out of me! I am telling you judge, that man should be watched.'

'Are you not doing that for us?' I asked, laying the money I owed Boetsman on the bar.

'Oh, I do I do, I can tell you that. But a man must rest at some point.' Again another cocktail went down the hatch. And again he pointed to Boetsman for another. 'God knows what he does when I fall asleep. I can't watch him all the time, I have work to do.'

'Well, good day to you Enoch,' I said. But Enoch held my arm for a second, stopping me from leaving.

'He's a Jonah, Judge. Look what's happened to this city since he arrived.'

'But Enoch,' I said as calmly as I could, for he had begun to hurt my arm in his grip, 'Jonah was favoured by God. No harm will come to us from him. There are others in this place we should be watching. But Bain, I am sure, is not one of them.'

'He will destroy us all. I tell you this Judge. To survive we must cast him into the waters.'

'Enoch!' Boetsman shouted. 'Bloody hell, let the Judge's arm go.'

He paused and let my arm go as if he suddenly realised his own absurdity, 'Sorry, sorry. But Bain needs to go back to where he came from. We don't want him here.'

I looked at Boetsman, and for one moment his more usual jocularity took hold of him, and winking at me he said: 'There are no whales here Enoch. Unless that fat Sergeant of Mandel's outfit, that Van Rooyen, can fit him in to that beerboeb of his. I'd give you a bottle of brandy to see that.'

'You laugh Boetie, but I tell you man, that oke is the devil. He must go back, he doesn't belong here. It's him who's is bringing the trouble. And he's always planning and watching from his rooftop. I am telling you he is engineering something. There are papers in that study that role themselves up.'

By this time, having had just about as much of this nonsense as I could take, I was at the door. I waved to Boetsman and he, in return, flashed a tooth filled smile at me, winking as he did.

# Chapter 9

Walking back to my house that afternoon I thought very little of Enoch and his pathologies. Instead I was more conscious of just how the town was changing. Its roads seemed somehow dustier and the rain less frequent. The small baptistery of the Church of Zion that lies on the way out to my house seemed more forlorn and deserted than ever. And one could not walk two paces without seeing a yellow cellphone top-up card, of the type that were being sold on the black market, lying in the street.

There were also those dark and solitary figures of the *Kwerekwere* carrying ruck sacks and Ghana-must-go bags of food. They lurked down the alleyways and one, on my walk home that day, clicked his tongue sharply at me as I walked past. 'Canned tomatoes, canned fruitsalad, bully beef, canned spaghetti, bobotie mix for you madam.' I shook my head and moved on.

Were these the new Thales? I wondered to myself. What sympathy did I or any of the population have towards these nameless identitiless apparitions and their tartan bags? It had truly begun again. I felt like spitting as Boetsman had done in the bar but the fear that somebody might see this stopped me. Instead I swung my umbrella at one of the heads of a Pincushion Proteas that lined the road, sending a shower of stamens into the air.

'I never took you for a plant basher,' a voice came from behind me.

'And I never took you for a stalker,' I said as I turned to find Bain a few paces way. 'It seems like Enoch was right about you.'

'In what way?'

'He says you are a shape shifter, that you emerge out of nowhere.' He looked at me with amusement.

'Yes, I gave him a real scare the other day. God knows what he was doing. He seems unhinged. He was carrying a very delicate set of opera glasses, I wonder what that was about.'

'Yes, he said something of the sort. I just had a rather disturbing session with him at Boetsman's.'

'I think he's brewing his own *witblitz*. He spilled some of it on my boot. I almost had to throw the damn thing away. That stuff can send you over the edge if you don't brew it right.'

'We'll all have to start brewing it soon enough.'

'Have you seen what Mandel is up to today?'

'No,' I said, fearing that my court was about to suffer another blow.

'He's started digging trenches at the entrances to all the 4x4 tracks out of the valley.'

'On whose authority?' I asked knowing full well he was fast becoming his own.

'He claims it is to keep out the *Kwerekwere*. But considering they come in by foot it is really about stopping us from getting out.'

'When did this start?'

'This morning, you can see them there, past the fever trees.'

Sure enough a yellow police bakkie was parked in the distance just where the road began to climb towards Towerkop. There I could make out several men in orange jumpsuits swinging picks and shovelling sand while a man in a large brimmed hat watched over them, smoke rising from his e-cigarette.

'What on earth does he think he is doing?' I asked.

'What he is doing,' Bain replied, 'is taking control of this town. He tells me they are getting delivery of landmines from the government in the next few days.'

'How will we get any supplies?'

'He says he will bring them in. It seems he has a supplier.'

'This won't wash with the town, surely? There must be an outcry now. He has overstepped his mark and he'll have to back down.'

Bain shrugged. 'I guess we'll see. But one thing is certain, for the next while this town is effectively under his control, if it ever wasn't.'

'I'll get Albert to call a meeting of the City Council. God, when is this engineer going to come?'

'I can't imagine it's a particular priority for those in the capital. They've got their own problems.'

'Perhaps we should hire our own?' I suggested.

'You must have deep pockets.'

'How much do you think it would cost?'

'More than the likes of you and I have lying around.'

'And the rest of the town?'

He shrugged. 'I doubt it. But we could investigate. But one thing is certain, Mandel wouldn't wear it. He would take us to court. And there is no way he would allow you to preside over it. God knows what he might do to stop that.'

We continued up the last stretch of the road to my house in silence. Both of us, I suspected, were calculating just what this all might mean. In what direction could we turn? Who could we ask for help from? Before, under the old regime, we had each other. We had friends and allies. Of course some of those allies were, as the saying goes, only the enemies of our enemies. But they were nevertheless people to turn to. But out here, in Albertsburg, we were alone. I looked out

towards the Twelve Apostles in the south, silent and immense they seemed to be gazing over us into the distance as if we lay unseen in the folds of the dead land. 'Do not forsake us,' I whispered under my breath.

When we got to my gate, I noticed my husband digging in the garden in an outfit which included my best straw hat and an apron that I only used in the kitchen.

'What *are* you doing?' I called out, more from perplexity than annoyance.

He looked at me wiping the sweat off his forehead with his handkerchief. 'Planting.' He nodded at Bain and came over to shake his hand.

'Please, my hat, my apron. Take them off. You're ruining them.'

'Are these not for the garden?' he asked, taking off my hat and looking at it quizzically.

'No, for God's sake.' But I could not help laughing. And with this he went into the house looking at the hat still seemingly with a sense of amazement that it was not something that would be used in the task he had applied to it.

'Will you not come in Mr Bain? Are you not well?' I suddenly noticed he looked very pale and was leaning against his umbrella.

'No, no, no, all is well. I have these moments every now and again. Something to do with my blood sugar. I will recover shortly. I keep meaning to say,' he said shaking his head as if clearing a fog, 'you must come to my house. You've an interest in art. I would like to show you some things.'

'Yes, I would like that. But first let's see what can be done about Mandel,' I said. 'Are you sure you are okay?'

He shrugged, raised his large brimmed hat off his head and began his walk home still looking as if he was in the grips of some episode. I watched him until he disappeared into the grove of fever trees and then I went inside.

When I got into my study I discovered an email from Mandel confirming that he was digging trenches at the beginnings of all the known 4x4 tracks 'to root out the *kwerwekwere* black-marketers'. Furthermore, he claimed that he would soon be receiving landmines from the arms parastatal to prevent 'any further illegal economic incursions into Albertsburg's district perimeter. Anybody caught using the National Parks Board's service lanes shall thus be arrested and thus charged with wanton destruction of the national environmental.'

I called my husband and read the email to him. We looked at each other in amazement. 'The town will surely not put up with it,' I said.

He shrugged. 'The *Kwerekwere* might be our only suppliers but they are not well liked by the town's people,' he answered.

'But this is not about the *Kwerekwere,* this is about restricting our access to the outside.'

'And just who is 'our' in this case? Those with 4x4s?'

'Look, Mandel's taking over Albertsburg isn't going to be good for anybody.'

'Sure, I don't disagree, but that's not how some see it.'

'What if we got the pass fixed or even fix it ourselves?'

'It's really a matter for the government. We should not interfere, it will only give Mandel more of a reason to act against those with 4x4s if we encourage people to break the law. And if we did fix it, I doubt the old suppliers would have faith in our construction.'

'Alright alright! I see your point!' I said and I turned my back on him.

I could feel him standing behind me, his eyes on the back of my head. I knew I shouldn't have been so short with him. It was not entirely his fault that we were here. And he had been through the worst of the redeployment. I, after all, still had a job. He was given nothing. Not even a pension.

'I have been thinking,' he said, breaking the silence, 'I am going to hike to Prince Albert, I will get a few essentials. I might stay there for a while. I'll leave first thing tomorrow.'

'Fine,' I answered, and I heard the door close behind me. Once he was gone I closed my laptop and took to staring out of the window. I wondered if he would return from his hike. Perhaps, I thought, he had had enough. Enough of the politics of this country, enough of having to fight for everything, enough of redeployment, and perhaps, more to the point, enough of me. Tears fell from my eyes and I knew I should go and speak to him. But I didn't. After a while I opened my computer again and emailed the mayor, asking him to call a town-council meeting.

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In the days that followed Mandel and his men set up a police blockade at the hole on the pass, a blockade that acted like a trade barrier. And by the end of the week he had taken full control of all the supplies to the town. He stopped the wealthy and the farmers from driving out in their 4x4s and more curiously he had also successfully discouraged the *Kwerekwere* from entering the valley. Just how he did this is still somewhat of a mystery. One that, despite my best efforts to uncover his method, I have no clear evidence or theory about. The rumour that came to me through several people was that they had been rounded up and that they were being held in the old asbestos mine under the peak of St. Thomas. In the Jakkal and Vel Daniel Jacobson told me that he had heard that some of them might have been killed there by agents of the government's Civil Co-operation

Bureau. This I thought unlikely, but there were enough rumours of their detention at the mine for it to be investigated.

I have no doubt that my husband would have joined me in my search, but he ended up spending several days in Prince Albert – in fact I was still uncertain as to whether he would return. And so I asked Boetsman and Daniel to accompany me to the mine to find out if there was any truth to the rumours about the *Kwerekwere's* whereabouts. They, in those days, more so than Bain, had become my closest companions. I had asked Jean too, but Albert had kicked up such a stink about her going near the mine and, for the sake of peace in her household, she had declined to come.

Few people ever went up to St. Thomas after the mine was closed. This was not only due to the danger of the asbestos – although according to the Department of Health it was not a significant risk to the community – but because of the curse that was associated with it. On our way there that day Daniel argued that the story of the curse was really just a warning to the community of the dangers of the asbestos. 'It's simply a parable,' he kept repeating.

'Yes, yes Danny,' Boetsman said. 'You have no need to convince us. But it sounds more like you are trying to convince yourself. You need not be afraid, there are no ghosts. No dead souls haunt this place. If they were such things to haunt us for our acts, my bar would be full of them, by God. They would never cease knocking at my door, I can assure you.'

'I am not afraid. I am just trying to explain to the judge that there are rational reasons for a lot of the superstitions we have in this part of the world.'

'I don't doubt that Daniel. You forget I was born in a place not unlike Albertsburg,' I replied.

We stopped at the cemetery, about a kilometre from the entrance to the mine, where the hundreds of miners who had died there are buried. A low rough drystone wall surrounds it and the sand that covers the graves is a chalky white. This added to the haunted and empty feeling that had surrounded us. Wooden crosses in various stages of decay stuck out in disorganised arrangements. I noticed that both Boetsman and Daniel had brought small polished tiger's eye stones which they placed on the wall, whose top was covered with similar types of semi-precious pebbles and crystals.

'Is that to keep the spirits happy?' I asked.

'It's a tradition,' Daniel replied shrugging his shoulders.

'And what purpose does *it* serve?'

'For me? It reminds me of what happened here.'

'And for the rest of Albertsburg?'

'They do it because they are afraid of ghosts,' Boetsman said with a smile.

The miners had not been buried in Deacons Dune. This was not because of their migrant foreign status but as Daniel told me, due to the fact that they were thought to have been infectious. The white quicklime that had been poured into the bottom of the graves to stop the spread of a possible plague and had, over the years, risen to the surface, marking out the extent of the 'plague pit'. Of course, some in the town believed that the rising of the lime was due to the fact that the miners too had risen.

We stood there for some time, thinking and praying. And Daniel took to chanting softly to himself. 'They are not at the mine,' Boetsman said finally breaking our thoughts.

'How do you know?' I asked.

'There isn't any disturbance here. But let's go up there to make sure.' The mine shortly came into view and Boetsman, like a tracker, began looking for any signs of Mandel's men and the missing. The mine itself seemed not to have been disturbed very much over the years, the curse having done its work. The remainders of rusted mining equipment, long since deserted, lay everywhere. A truly monumental hole in the side of the mountain remained as testament to the industry that had once occurred here. Although now it was overgrown with a sea of thorny creepers. Boetsman stopped, got down on his haunches and circled a marking in the sand. 'What is that?' I asked.

'Well, one thing, there's been somebody here recently. But it looks like there has only been one person. I saw the prints of hiking boots further up the path. Enoch told me that Bain walks around this part of the valley. No doubt this footprint is his.'

'So, no signs of the *Kwerekwere* or the police?'

'No. Unless they've learnt to hover above the earth.'

'Could they not have covered their tracks?' Daniel asked.

'Mandel's men?' He shook his head. 'Not a chance,' he scoffed. 'The fact that they know how to cover up their own private parts, still, to this very day, surprises me. And besides like everybody in Albertsburg they are petrified of this place. No, there is no Mandel run concentration camp. He must have persuaded them in some other way.'

'And the Devil's Coop's death squads? Could they have done it and covered their tracks.'

'Perhaps. But, covering their tracks is not their way. They leave tracks. They leave calling cards. They put skulls up on poles or leave bodies hanging off meat hooks. They give men the estrapade and leave them up there as a message to the rest. Their *modus operandi* is to put fear into the heart. No, unless they have changed the way they operate, they have not been here.'

The *Kwerekwere*, it seemed, had simply disappeared. Of course, being illegal within the country, they would never have laid charges against police. And perhaps a small amount of

pressure was all that was required for them to move to another part of the country, where the likes of our captain were not present.

'But wait!' Boetsman grabbed my arm. 'Look there.' He was looking up at the peak of St Thomas. 'Do you see him?'

'No. Who?'

'It's a *Kwerekwere*. Look there, he is looking at us. Just to the left of the Saint's head.'

Finally, after some searching along the ridge I managed to make out the small dark silhouette of a man high up above us. Boetsman began to wave at him. 'Are you okay?' he shouted. But the figure did not reply. 'Hello! Are you okay?' We shouted in unison, our voices echoing through the valley. Still the man stood there in silence looking over us. Finally, he raised both his hands above his head and then slipped out of view. Then as our own echoes faded, a voice, that was not ours, came rebounding off the cliff faces to our left, bringing to us what seemed like a single word.

'What did it say?' I asked.

'It made no sense to me,' Boetsman shrugged.

'It sounded like "casteridge". Does that mean anything?' Daniel asked.

Boetsman looked at me shaking his head. 'Daniel, you take the judge home, huh. I am going to follow that man.'

But when Boetsman came back that night and we met in the Jakkal and Vel he reported that he had found nothing, not even tracks. 'For the sake of God, we all saw that man, did we not? Okay, it was dark when I got up there, but there was nothing. Not that I could find. It is like the man was floating or something. I would say that I dreamt it. But you saw it too. You heard the voice. It's a mystery, huh? Perhaps there is something out there, watching us up to our monkey tricks.' He smiled wistfully.

The disappearance of the *Kwerekwere* has remained a mystery to us. For other than that sighting, we have seen nothing of them. As for Captain Mandel, his claim is that they were simply persuaded to move on. And without any other evidence one has to accept Mandel's version, until something more comes to light.

As for our Captain, in that week, he went on to cut down the telephone poles at various points, leaving connected only the police station and a few houses east of the mayor's residence. The official line was that the poles had been damaged by falling trees in severe winds – although of course nobody could pin point just when these winds had occurred. Furthermore, the cellphone top-up cards, which were such a feature of Albertsburg's litter during the time of the *Kwerekwere*, were not being brought through the police's cordon because, according to Mandel, the 'supplier' did not have a 'valid licence' to sell them. Of course, this did not affect the likes of me, the

Jacobsons, Boetsman and the wealthier members of society who had all had monthly cellphone contracts, but it was enough to render a large proportion of the town almost entirely disconnected.

As the court records show I went on to find against Mandel's interventions on four separate occasions. But this made little difference as we required Mandel himself to enforce these court orders. So, by the time my husband returned, at the end of that week, Albertsburg had become completely physically, politically and technologically cut off from the rest of the country.

At first some journalists arrived. And despite Mandel's best efforts to, quite literarily, cut them off at the pass, some did manage to slip through the cordon. This had little to do with my court order – that stated that journalists were to be let in to the dorp – and far more to do with the propensity for the police guards at the hole to be persuaded with bribes.

That week Albertsburg and its police force made headlines in some of the national papers. *Ukulwa Daily* ran the headline 'Albertsburg's Police Create New "Pass Laws"'. But as things in the capital began to get worse for the president, as the national protests became a daily occurrence, Albertsburg's plight faded from the news. As such we were cut adrift and were left to live effectively under the rule of Mandel and his men.

However, what worried the town most was alcohol. The farms to the west including Enoch's, having lost their markets in the rest of the country, supplied the town with ostriches and mealies. But the disappearance of the *Kwerekwere* had left the town almost dry. Mandel had so successfully sealed off the town with his customs barrier, his trenches and the rumours of landmines, that the only alcohol purchasable was via the police's 'co-op'. And their prices well exceeded most inhabitants' budgets.

Both Boetsman and the Jacobsons had tried to bring a court action against Mandel for racketeering but the case was postponed when the Jacobson family and Boetsman were arrested for the brewing of unlicensed *Umqombothi, mampoer* and *witblitz*. In fact many people in Albertsburg had been working on various methods of making alcohol, from the use of corn, to potatoes, to rose hips. At that point, however, these had been the only arrests. A still was discovered in the Jacobsons warehouse and it was believed, but never proved, that Boetsman was involved in this process.

By the time my birthday came around I had had Boetsman released, due to lack of evidence, but the Jacobsons were still being held in the police cells. I initially had organised with Jean and Boetsman for my celebration to be held at the Jakkal en Vel and for it to be open and free to the whole town. However, it became clear in the days leading up to it that Mandel was preparing to close the party down by force, saying it would be a disturbance to the peace. And so, we ended up having it by the pool at my house with the few friends and colleagues drinking the alcohol that my

husband had brought over the mountains from Prince Albert – it turned out that he had gone there to buy me a birthday present of my favourite gin.

The party itself was one of those moments where our predicament was forgotten. We acknowledged the plight of the Jacobsons when my husband mentioned them in his toast but on the whole we avoided any talk of Mandel and the pass. I spoke to Bain and Jean about art for some time. And then, when Boetsman came to sit with us on the pool loungers, Jean set to teasing him about his secret love in the town.

'Come now Boetie why don't you just come out with it. Why do you keep it secret? You're a nice man, I am sure the woman would be proud to be your wife,' Jean said smiling.

He laughed flashing his dentures. 'An old bastard like me? What would anybody see in me besides my buried money?' I had watched Jean's reaction closely, suspecting, as I did at the time, that Boetsman's love interest was in fact Jean herself. And I thought I glimpsed just for a second the slightest recognition between them. But it was, in truth, impossible to tell quite what was meant by this discussion. Were they flirting? I was not sure. Perhaps the only person who would really have known was Albert. And he was engaged with Clarence in a discussion about cars.

It was with these thoughts in my head that I looked at my husband, while lying back and taking a long fragrant sip of my gin and tonic. Something in him had changed for the better since his hike to Prince Albert. I noticed this most starkly while he was talking to, perhaps even flirting with, Sarah, the clerk of the court. Something had given him purpose again, whether Sarah had anything to do with this I did not know at the time. It had been so long since I had last seen him talking to another woman, I could not have told you what his flirting looked like anymore. But lying there I suddenly had a memory of him in exile in the old days. I could see him lecturing to a group of men and women in a small prefabricated room in the bush camp on the methods of insurgency. I lay back and thought for a while of those days. I think I was happier then than I had ever really imagined. I was young, politically convinced and had a child on the way. And I was in love.

Later that night as the party went on I sat with Jean and Bain. The talk was of transforming our gardens into vegetable allotments. I noticed all the while Clarence sat near to us attentively listening in to our conversation without venturing to participate. Later, after Sarah and Mr Davidson left, the mayor, Boetsman, Clarence and my husband played something like waterpolo in the pool together. There was a lot of shouting and screaming and throwing a soccer ball at one another. Jean, Bain and I never quite understood the game's method of scoring, however, as it mainly seemed to involve attempting to drown the person with the ball. I watched this for a while, finally recusing myself from Jean and Bain's talk about local flora.

I woke up the next morning still on the lounger at the pool, with the sun reflecting off the cleft of Towerkop. I found that I was still clutching a warm flat gin and tonic. My husband, I discovered, when I got up, was asleep on the couch. The 24-hour sports channel was running in a loop and he lay there half naked, his large belly sticking out with his wet swimming trunks still soaking into the tan leather of the couch.

# Chapter 10

A meeting of the City Council had been called for the Tuesday after the party. It was surprisingly quiet on the streets that night and I walked to the City Hall still dressed in my judicial robes. Even the police, who had taken to loitering on the main road, often hidden by huge plumes of sickly cherry smelling vapours from their e-cigarettes with only their swinging batons and a pair of boots visible, were absent. A single light was on at the front desk of the police station and a defective streetlamp next to the palm tree outside flashed erratically over the place where Thales was laid out to die giving the station a chillingly preternatural appearance. I wrapped my robe around me and shuffled quickly past the place which even at ordinary moments gave me the shivers. But as I hurried past, shaking off the thoughts of the fate of Thales, I heard a voice call my name from the dark shadows of the prison windows. 'Who is there?' I called out, my voice cracking with anxiety.

'Judge O'Higgins, could you approach the window?' it continued.

'Is that you, Daniel Jacobson?' I asked, hushing my voice and drawing closer.

'It's all of us,' a polyphony of whispers returned.

'You know I can't talk to you about the case,' I said, looking around to see if there was any sign of a policeman. 'Are you all okay in there?' I asked moving into the shadows of the eaves.

'We take comfort in the fact that other members of our family have been here before and survived,' Daniel said. This was followed by murmurs of agreement.

'Do you need me to settle my account? If it is bail money you need, I could settle it before the thirty days. I do, after all, owe you a sizeable sum,' I continued.

'Never mind that, we can all make bail,' Daniel stated with urgency. 'But we hear the civil engineer has arrived.'

'That's news to me,' I said in surprise, for I had certainly heard nothing of the sort.

'No, he's here. We heard it from Captain Mandel.'

'Captain Mandel told you?'

'No, no, no. Gideon heard the guards talking to Mandel about it. He's here, thank God.'

'Well then, you know more than I do. I've heard nothing.'

'Also we think that you should mention the spade and pick at the meeting tonight.'

'The what?' I asked, genuinely confused because I had not given the mayor's words at the Jakkal en Vel that night another thought.

'The pick and spade that were in the gully. The mayor will not mention it because he is afraid. We heard from Isaacs he saw them too. It was sabotage. A journalist will be there tonight, a man called Raymond de Lambert from *Ukulwa Daily*.'

'Have you spoken to Isaacs?' I asked hushing my voice to the merest of whispers as I felt a sense of dread come over me.

'Yes. But let's speak when we are out of here.'

I had caught the smell of cigar smoke some moments before but it was only when I heard footfalls on the road and the scuffing of leather soled shoes on gravel that I moved swiftly to the palm tree and leant against it pretending to inspect my shoe.

'Good evening Judge.'

'Good evening Mr. Bain,' I said, trying not to sound alarmed.

'And what are you doing here dressed like the Dark Knight?'

'How I wish I was. But I don't think even he could save Albertsburg at this moment. In answer to you, though, I felt that the heel of my one shoe was about to break, it seems fine though.'

'And why the robe?'

'The mayor asked me to formally chair this evening's meeting.'

Bain was looking at me, his wry smile revealing itself in the flashings of the streetlamp. 'I thought it might be so you could hide yourself under the eaves,' he said quite smoothly.

'I was just checking up on the Jacobsons, we were actually talking about my garden, as absurd as that may sound.'

'Yes,' he said, 'it does sound absurd.'

I suddenly felt a hot flush on my face and, making the error of all bad liars, I tried to produce a convincing argument for an already defective premise. 'I was wondering if I should change fertilizers, if I am to grow vegetables.'

'Oh,' he replied and I again could just make out in the darkness that he had seen straight through me.

We walked in silence for a few seconds. Then raising his cigar to his mouth he turned to look at me. I could see, even in the little light that was available from the street lamps, that his eyes were searching out something in my face.

'Are you planning on staying for the whole meeting?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said unplugging the cigar from his mouth, 'perhaps we can bring a little sense and order to this town.'

'Well, I hope so Mr Bain. But we will need two things to do that: an engineer and an army. Have you heard anything about the engineer?' I inquired.

'Only from the Jacobsons just now, at the same time as you.'

'How long were you standing there?' I asked, as a chill rippled down my arms.

'Oh, not long, in fact I only heard that. I missed the discussion about how to grow vegetables.' With this he let out a breath of laughter and I too could not stop myself from chuckling. He gave another pull on his cigar and the sudden incandescence of red light around his face revealed an amused glimmer in those dark eyes of his.

The absence of the police in the centre of the town was explained when we turned up towards the City Hall. For as we approached it we could see their ominous silhouettes standing out against the lighted backdrop of the building. They had formed a crescent shaped cordon at the front of the edifice and with batons in hand they were checking the identities of all those entering the meeting.

We joined the queue of about twenty people and as we moved forward towards the Konstabel I searched in my bag for my identity document. For the second time that evening, however, somebody called out to me from the dark. 'Judge O'Higgins!' The voice was stern and assured. I turned around to find a short square-shouldered and determined looking man. He was not somebody I recognised. 'My name is Raymond de Lambert,' he said holding out his hand, 'I'm from *Ukulwa Daily*.' I took my hand out of my bag and shook his with a certain indifference. 'These cops of yours won't let me in.'

'They are not my cops Mr de Lambert, that you can be assured of. Why won't they let you through?'

'They say I am not a resident and that I have no right to be here.'

I had recognised his name from his by-line. He had reported on the cases in which I had found against the government before being sent to Albertsburg and had, at times, been unflattering towards me, writing on several occasions that I might well find in the government's favour due to my party allegiances. But he had, I should add, outside of these personal comments, been as fair as any journalist I have encountered. 'This is Mr. Bain,' I said, still scratching in my bag. I was surprised to find that they had not encountered one another before. 'Don't worry Mr de Lambert,' I said, finally discovering my little green ID booklet, 'I'll get you in, and if I don't I will give you an interview and the minutes of the meeting.'

'And the interview will be unqualified?' he asked.

'Of course. And you will represent me fairly this time?'

'Have I not in the past?'

'No, you haven't,' I said.

To this he did not make a defence, perhaps because he was ashamed, perhaps because he did not care. Or perhaps because, by now, we had two policemen next to us demanding our papers.

'I am very afraid this man is not allowed in,' the young Konstabel said standing before us and placing his baton across De Lambert's chest.

'Why not?' I asked curtly.

'Orders of Captain Mandel, he doesn't have the proper papers.'

'Do you have your ID?' I asked, turning to De Lambert. And with this he held up his own small green booklet. 'Konstabel there is nothing in the law that can keep this man out of this meeting. Let him pass.'

The young policeman looked at me nervously and, as I moved to usher both the journalist and Mr Bain through, he, for a second, pushed his baton against me. 'Konstabel! This is quite enough. If you dare let that baton so much as touch me once more I will…' and for a second I realised my complete impotence before him. 'I will make sure you answer for it through the police's national structures,' I finished. He withdrew the baton and looked around at Captain Mandel who stood on the raised stoep above us. He was wearing his full-dress uniform and, despite the night, his dark aviator sunglasses covered his eyes.

He nodded to the Konstabel in a sign to let us through and he swivelled militaristically on his right heel and strode into the hall. De Lambert thanked me and then pushed his way into the crowd. I hung back, not wanting to force my way through the melee of people finding their seats. 'I will wait here for a moment, but if you want to find yourself a convenient seat, don't let me stop you,' I said to Bain.

'I'll finish my cigar.'

We stood together on the stoep of the town hall looking up the main road. He leant against one of the large Doric columns, his eyes resting on the lighted tower of the courthouse in the distance. 'It's actually rather a beautiful building,' he said after some thought.

'I am glad that you say that Mr Bain. It is certainly not something I hear very often – it has grown on me in the last few months.'

'Of course, it is designed with the notion of an observation tower in mind,' he said, still with his eyes fixed on it.

'What makes you say that?'

'Just look at the lines.' He took his cigar out of his mouth and started drawing diagonals and verticals in the air. 'That imposing flat roof, the angled windows, the cantilevered balcony at the top.'

'I thought it was just a bad copy of Frank Lloyd Wright.'

'Yes, but with a purpose.'

'And what is that?'

'Really?'

'Yes, what is its purpose?' I asked with genuine interest.

'To impose the idea of the bureaucratic will.'

I thought about it, and of course realised that he was right. It was not like I did not know this but its anachronism was so acute as to make this conceit almost entirely irrelevant in the dorp. The idea of me and my building being an instrument of power seemed absurd. I had none. It was at best a magistrate's office with as much real power as the current King of Sweden.

'It is an interesting thought,' I said.

And as if echoing my thoughts, the engineer said: 'I wonder what it would take on your part to restore it.' He was smiling and his eyes again were searching my face. He was teasing me of course but not without seriousness.

'What? Restore the rule of law to Albertsburg? Did it ever have such a thing?'

'What Captain Mandel doesn't understand,' he started, 'was that in the old days his baton and boot had a purpose. They did uphold the law, they were not good laws but they were still the law. Now what he is doing is merely a squeeze and nothing more. It won't last.'

'It was always a squeeze, the laws then just supported it. Now the laws are an impediment to the squeeze and so, puff, there go your laws. It is the logic of this world that the squeeze must happen with or without them.' I turned around to see where Captain Mandel was. 'But how,' I continued, 'would one bring the rule of a good set of laws to a place like this?' I asked lowering my voice.

'Politicking, education, conviction, pressure, force, violence. One of those. Perhaps all of them.'

I looked at him. 'Where would I get the support?' I asked softly.

'You could find it,' he whispered looking over his shoulder.

'And if I can't?'

'Then you will have to act alone and hope the people will follow you.'

'Mr Bain,' I broke off, 'you frighten me sometimes. There are moments I think you are quite serious.' I laughed out loudly for I was worried that we may have gone too far.

'Indeed,' he said beginning a pleasant hearty kind of laughter of his own. And with this he flicked, with surprising accuracy, his cigar butt into the drain of the gutter that ran below us on the street. And I noticed its red glow flare up and then extinguish itself in the subterranean world of the sewer.

We were still standing there, looking at the courthouse, when Albert came out. 'Good evening mayor,' I said.

'Let's pray that it will be a good evening Judge,' he replied, his demeanour exuding anxiety.

'Have you heard any news with regards to the engineer?' I asked expecting that I might get a positive response.

'None I am afraid, and I have been phoning the department all day. We are ready for the meeting to begin. Please come in, Captain Mandel is eager to start.' I looked at Bain but he simply stepped aside so that I might go before him.

As I entered and walked towards the stage I noticed that a few people were booing me. The majority of the town's people, however, were sitting in the auditorium in silence, their dull emotionless eyes simply tracked my progress. On climbing the small set of steps up to the stage, I walked to the chair that had been placed for me to the left and, on sitting down, I called the meeting to order. With this, the mayor got up and moved cautiously to the lectern.

'Citizens of Albertsburg,' he began. I could see his hands were trembling, the paper he held shook visibly. 'I am, uhm, like glad to see such a good, uhm, turn out.' He stumbled, then stopped and stared out at the crowd, his eyes opaque with confusion. Then suddenly raising his voice to a higher pitch, he forced himself to proceed. 'And that, like, the active citizenry that both Mandel, I mean Captain Mandel, and myself have, uhm, called for is, ja, like, awesome. We are, uhm of course, all aware of the situation with the pass.' He then reverted to the prepared speech he was holding in his unsteady hands – a speech that I suspect had passed through the censorship of Mandel some hours before. He began rattling off: 'Let me first begin by saying that we should first be grateful to the, uhm, emergency services – so adequately led by Captain Mandel – and for the manner in which they have acted.' There was some moaning and a voice came out of the crowd: 'Get on with it!'

'Ja, ja, not to worry, hey, I am getting to the point,' the mayor's face then flushed a further violet. His lips were trembling and his eyes were now darting back and forth from the crowd to Captain Mandel and occasionally to me. 'Ja, I don't want to keep you longer than is necessary. We all have families to get back to.' He began again. 'The situation is, uhm, as follows:

1. The Ministry of the Interior and Infrastructure have written to inform me that they have expedited my request to have the pass repaired. More than that I cannot inform you of as they have not answered any further correspondence to me directly.

2. I have been informed that the Albertsburg Constabulary, as commanded by Captain Mandel, will now take charge of all correspondence in this matter.

3. That, citizens, is all I can communicate to you at this current time.'

With this he folded the paper and slunk back to his seat next to the Captain.

Some talking broke out as people seemed to be trying to confirm with each other just what had been communicated. But the noise fell as Captain Mandel rose, his aviator sunglasses concealing his cold blue eyes. A pot belly, which stuck out of his perfectly ironed polyester dress uniform, hung over a polished Sam Browne belt. But despite his large torso a set of almost balletic legs bore him to the podium in a pair of black patent leather ballroom shoes. The few blond hairs that were left on the top of his head had been greased down and, if I was not mistaken, some rouge seemed to have been applied to his cheeks.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, citizens, compatriots, comrades,' he began, 'we are in times of trying. The falling of the pass has affected all the freedoms that we hold dear in this land and in this great city. But in times of trying we must all put our shoulder to the wheels. When our people face challenges, compatriots and comrades, we can't simply resort to cowardly acts. Acts like running like yellowbellies to the nearest towns so that we can buy luxury products for our own satisfaction. Luxury products, so that we can hold parties in exclusive properties. Fellow citizens, we must tighten our belt. We must endure sacrifices for our freedoms. Remember comrades, that our transformed government of the people, that seeks for the benefit of all, has not deserted us. Instead those who await upon this shall have strength renewed, we shall have a new pass and we, comrades of Albertsburg, shall soar once again. Citizens, our freedom loving government has faced uprisings in the capital. It has been confronting treachery both in parliament and in the judiciary. Compatriots, I have even today had the assurances of my brother officers, in other parts of the country, that our plight is everywhere. It is a sickness that is sweeping the country. A sickness started in the propaganda schools of the liberals that we have all been subjected to since the beginning days of our subjugation. Citizens, we call for patience, we call for understanding. A new set of civic rules have been made and will be sent via email and will appear on signs throughout the town by 08:00 hours tomorrow morning. I thank you Albertsburg for your patience, understanding and loyalty to the nation and to the great city.'

Whatever I had thought was about to come from the Captain it was certainly not this. I never expected for him to get into bed with the government. It came as a shock to see how he had now thrown in his lot with them. They were strange bedfellows but as I then realised, it made sense for both of them. I was still reeling from his statement while doing my best to call the meeting back to order. 'Please, comrades!' I called out, but that word now felt empty in my mouth. 'Order! Order! Please, people of Albertsburg! Discipline!' I yelled, but the people had lost all sense of restraint. 'We must open the floor to questions!' But you might as well have asked a palm not to sway in the wind. In one corner the singing of *Daar kom die Alibama* had begun. And people had

started to wave their umbrellas in the air as the room began to reverberate with song. 'They're drunk,' I thought to myself and I noticed that Mandel sat on his seat impassively, his hand tapping ever so slightly on his knee, a thin smile creasing his cheeks.

Slowly, however, the hall quieted down and I recognised Boetsman whose hand was raised amidst this sea of disturbance. As he rose to his feet the booing began. But he went ahead shouting above it.

'Mayor, Captain, Judge,' he started and the booing quieted slightly. 'The only problem is the damaged pass. When the pass is fixed we can return to our lives, is this not the case? There is no need for new laws or these things. Why, nobody has mentioned the engineer here? We need an engineer not Mandel's new laws. Now it seems clear, he is not coming. Now if he is not coming, then we should fix the pass ourselves.' I could not then discern what response the crowd gave this proposal. It was not one of complete disapproval.

With this, however, the mayor stood up nervously. I could see his eyes could not resist searching out Captain Mandel rather than me, which would have been the proper form. The Captain nodded and the mayor, emboldened, began. 'In response to this proposal, like, I am, uhm, sure that we would all want to do that. The problem is that the trucks will only drive on the road if it is structurally sound. They will not trust us.'

'Here here,' came some voices.

'Ah for god's sake!' Boetsman was back on his feet. 'This was built in Victorian times by one slave driving engineer and 200 criminals, by God? And they trust that! No that's bullshit! Of course, we can rebuild it.'

'No Boetsman. I must insist. This is not right.' Albert looked as if he was going to faint with terror. 'It is a matter of health and safety. We must wait for the engineer.'

'He is amongst us!' suddenly came a voice from the middle of the congregation.

'Order! Order! Discipline! Citizens! Comrades!' I again called out, as the hall began to descend into divisive shouting. 'Who said that the engineer was here?' I shouted once the jeers began to quiet. 'I would like to recognise the person who said that.' And with this Enoch stood up. His face breaking out into immediate perspiration, his eyes blinking nervously.

'He is here! The Engineer is here! I have seen him!'

'Oh Christ,' I muttered to myself and I saw the despondency on both Boetsman and my husband's faces.

The shouting continued for a while, but when it calmed down I said: 'I would like to recognise Enoch. What do you mean by saying that the engineer is here?' I asked.

'It's Bain!' he yelled pointing in Bain's direction. 'I have seen him working on the plans! Mandel knows! He knows! We're saved.'

'Sit down Enoch! For God's sake!' It was Jean. 'You're embarrassing yourself!'

'Order, order!' I called and with this Enoch slumped back onto his seat, putting his head in his hands. Many were now laughing at him waving their hands derisively in his direction, whilst others pointed to the door with their umbrellas, suggesting that he should be removed from the meeting.

'I would like to raise several points! I wish several things to be reflected in the minutes!' I called out while raising myself up and spread-eagling my arms to show the full extent of my robes of authority. It was with a certain satisfaction that I noticed that many in the hall now fell silent. 'I do not doubt that we must wait for the engineer. To fix the pass ourselves may prolong our isolation. If I know anything, it is that it is not unusual to wait this long for the current bureaucracy to comply with requests of this nature. However, to Captain Mandel, I would like to know under what authority you are effectively placing Albertsburg under a state of emergency? Secondly, I wish to know what happened to the spade and pick that were seen the night that the pass was washed away? And what investigation has been launched into possible sabotage. Also is there any truth to the idea that the engineer has arrived? This is not the first time I have heard this said.'

Mandel stood up. 'Judge President. I advise you, do not to act as an enemy against the will of the people. You will receive, like the rest of Albertsburg, an email from the Presidency in the next few hours. You deserve no preferential treatment. The email will state that as of 08:00 hours tomorrow the city of Albertsburg, and its immediate environments, are henceforth under a state of emergency under Section 602 of the Constitution of the Republic. There was no spade and pick. That is not fact. It is the opinion of some people, that is all. The pass was washed away by cause of flooding. And no, the engineer is not here. Unless you have further information that you are keeping from the people? No? We thank you all for coming tonight. This meeting is now closed.'

With this the people of Albertsburg got up to leave but De Lambert, the journalist, was standing up calling to the chief of police and myself. Although it was only when Bain, standing in the isle to stop the outflow, called out at the top of his voice: 'Excuse me! Captain Mandel! Judge O'Higgins! This journalist has some questions for you,' that the people began, once again, to settle down.

'If the chair could recognise me please?' De Lambert was saying, 'I would like to ask Captain Mandel three questions.' The people now fell deathly silent and stood to listen scowling at the new presence in the dorp. 'Firstly, I would like to know if indeed any investigation into the sabotage of the pass was pursued and why the police missed the evidence of the spade and pick as seen by

Isaacs and others? Secondly, under what authority have the police placed landmines and other defensive ordnances in the surrounding mountains? Thirdly, I would like the Captain to respond to the claim that they are involved in racketeering and black market activity.'

The hall retained an unsettling hush as Mandel rose to his feet. In doing so he removed his sunglasses to allow his crystal-blue eyes to settle on his interlocutor.

'Mr de Lambert,' he said, 'you come to our city unannounced. You force your way into our meeting with the help of your foreign friends. Then you have the simple disrespect to suggest that not only is our police force corrupt, but also that it does not have competence. I am sure that if I barged into your house, insulted your wife's fidelity and told you that you can't write for toffee, you would not like me very much. However, I will answer your questions. Once again, I must state, much like a broken record, that there is no evidence of sabotaging. Secondly, and this is important (and you must reflect this fairly in that propaganda rag you write in), the mines were laid in order to protect the community from the blacks market of the *Kwerekwere*. Protecting our public, and not the criminal elements, is simply the role that we, the police of this great city, perform. And if this involves radical steps then, by God, I, personally, am not afraid to take them. And I will not be intimidated by the likes of you and that devilish liberal media of yours. Thirdly, normal suppliers are refusing to utilise the pass. Hence, we have set up necessary quality controls, controls that are the demand of any democracy. That is all I am prepared to say at this time. This meeting is now adjourned!'

Mandel's eyes glared at De Lambert and with a look of utter loathing still apparent they flashed over me. Then, all of a sudden, singing broke out amidst the crowd. It was then that I noticed that the interior of the hall was surrounded by policemen who had their phones out and were filming, not the stage, but the people. With this, picking up their umbrellas, and pointing them to the ceiling they began to sing a new song.

*We hold hands with Mandel,*
*Against the liberal,*
*Under his umbrella,*
*Mandel is our protector,*
*We hold hands with Mandel*

To these strains, I found myself searching out my husband in the crowd. His broad round face was staring up at me from the third row with a look of complete defeat. The crowd swayed and shuffled around him. And even Mandel got up and rocked his head and moved his stomach

arhythmically to the chorus. I sat unmoved, conscious of the scene's familiarity with the political meetings of old but confused by its new content.

I had wanted to talk to Bain, Boetsman and De Lambert after the meeting but the police were out on the streets, swinging their batons and filming each person as they walked past. Under these conditions it somehow did not seem wise to seek out company. We all walked ten metres or so apart and dared not catch each other's eyes. I walked with my husband without so much as breathing a word. Only the occasional jeer in our direction from some of the town folk could be heard.

The meeting had fatigued us both and although my husband's face was hidden in the darkness, he walked as if unusually affected by a gravitational pull. His shoulders were down and his feet seemed to drag along the gravel road up to our house. By the time I had got out of my shower that night he was already in bed. His reading light was off and his body was turned to face the curtain. Under the covers my hand moved across his body and searched for his, but he pushed mine away gently and without a word we lay there awake for most of the night.

# Chapter 11

The next day I sat exhausted and disturbed in court. I was listening to Daniel Jacobson representing his family in that matter of their supposed production of illicit alcohol. It was perhaps the first day, sitting in my lofty seat of impotence, that I really saw Albertsburg proper. It was a place that was not dissimilar to the one I had grown up in. The police now sat in multiples in the front row of the gallery watching both me and the defendants with an attitude that was beginning to feel like open intimidation. Happily, it was they who had corrupted their own case against the Jacobsons by breaking the glass retort. In doing so they had destroyed the evidence proving that the Jacobsons had produced alcohol. It did, I must admit, give me great pleasure in being able to find the Jacobsons innocent of the production of alcohol. Of course, I did have to find them guilty of the intention of doing so. To this I attached a small fine the size of which I knew would annoy Captain Mandel.

But that morning the case was in the periphery of my thinking. Because it was the day that the Mandel's so called 'Edict of Albertsburg' had been declared. On my walk to the court that day I had seen posted on lampposts, on every telephone post still standing and on the park's gate next to the courthouse:

**All citizens must remain indoors between the hours:**

**Mon – Fri: 18:30 – 07:00**

**Sat – Sun: 17:30 – 08:30**

**Any persons considered to be in contravention of this**
**curfew or in contravention of the Alcohol Licensing Act**
**or participating in blacks (sic) market activities**
**will be detained without trail (sic).**
**By order of The Presidency and the Albertsburg Constabulary.**

It was at about nine thirty that night that I found myself, while wearing an old court robe over a dark tracksuit, vaulting over the small hedge at the back of my property. We had closed the curtains later than usual that night and allowed more lights on in the house than necessary. We had made dinner, eaten it in the dining room in full view of the police, whose bakkie had not moved from our gate since that morning. Seemingly as an afterthought I had closed the curtains.

I then looked at my husband, who nodded with a sullen expression on his face, and moving into the kitchen I collected my robe. Then slipping it over me as I opened the back door I made my way quickly through the herb garden. With the perfume of basil and bloublom Salie still caught in the robe's folds, I hurried along, as stealthily as I could, down the old servitude behind the house until I came to the beginnings of the koppie. The moon had just risen over Towerkop, affording me light enough to find the path over the hill that would lead me in the direction of the disused airport. I ran, as swiftly as my legs would carry me, over the stony path towards the old disused radar tower at the far end of the runway. To my dismay, as I approached, the building seemed empty. Its silent ruined edifice seemed at once to prophesy our failure. 'Don't move!' I froze and raised my hands in a movement that came quite naturally. 'There's a berg adder in the tower. Don't open the door. I've woken it already. It will not be as accommodating with you if you disturb it again.'

Boetsman's figure stood alone in the light of the moon. 'Where are the others?' I whispered.

'Daniel is down at the baggage claim. Jean, well, she could not get away from Albert. She says he is in too much of a *toestand*. She says that he doesn't want to go to jail.' Boetsman said in an intonation of resentful disgust. 'She has him on *motlepelo* tea for his nerves, for the sake of God,' he spat out. 'Come Judge, we will go this way,' he said pointing to the ruin of the terminal building in the distance.

We moved along the far end of the runway furthest from the dorp. We ran stooping slightly to avoid detection. The landing strip was now a shattered mosaic of broken pieces of concrete of varying shapes. The giant alien blue gum that had rooted itself almost perfectly in the middle of the runway loomed over as we moved towards the *iQukwane* shaped concrete terminal. The building's large windows had all but fallen out and now surrounded it like a necklace of sparkling shards. A rusting staircase on wheels with the old national airway's insignia stood before the entrance. Boetsman pushed this aside and together we slipped between a metal framed door that was permanently jammed open. The moon shone through the gaping empty windows and we passed the eerily empty ticket booths, following the arrows on the floor to the baggage claim. Two figures were just visible in the light at the far end. I stopped. 'Who is the other man?' I whispered.

'De Lambert.'

'Has he not gone back?'

'Mandel won't let him. They took away his computer this morning. There was a dawn raid on my place.'

'Did he get his story off?'

'Oh yes, long before the cops came.'

The two were sitting on the conveyer belt but they stood up as we came to them. We shook hands and I was surprised to feel theirs twisted in the old revolutionary manner we used to use. Quite where Daniel could have learnt that from, I did not know.

We stood there and began to talk of the Edict, the dawn raid and the new police surveillance. I cautioned that because of this we had little time and that we should be back in our houses as soon as we could.

'But what can be done?' Daniel Jacobson asked. 'Do we lead a protest to the station?'

I shook my head. 'We don't have the support for that at the moment. You were not there last night. It is almost as if Mandel has them under a spell. We will have to wait for the momentum to swing.'

'But that could take years. And what about this idea of Enoch's that Bain is the engineer?'

'Daniel, you surprise me. That man is not right in the head,' I said.

'We did overhear the police talking about the civil engineer being in Albertsburg. There may be something in it.'

I looked at Boetsman. He shook his head. 'What reason would Bain have to delay? And why would he lie to us. No, it makes no sense.'

Just then Boetsman held up his hand, asking for silence. We stood there frozen, our ears twitching at the slightest breath of air.

'What is it, Boetie?' I whispered.

'A sound. A murmur. I am not sure. I feel like we are not alone. Wait,' his voice was hushed. 'Are you all sure that nobody followed you?' We nodded our heads. 'Carry on talking normally,' Boetsman whispered and with this he slipped off behind the conveyer belt.

'We must wait for the engineer,' I said in a normal tone. To which, following my lead, Daniel and de Lambert offered some agreement. Then, just at that moment, came a yell and flurry of blows. A high-pitched scream sounded and Boetsman appeared holding a man in a headlock, his arms and legs flailing behind him.

'Boetie. Let me go. I'm with you, you bloody fool.' The man was almost screaming. De Lambert and Daniel rushed to Boetman's aid and finding a luggage strap they tied the man's arms behind him and restrained his legs. Boetsman then withdrew. He was spiting blood and inspecting a set of dentures in his hand. 'Raise so much as a whisper and by God I will slit your throat,' Boetsman quietly seethed looking with suspicion at the man who was now lying restrained on the floor. 'That,' Boetsman said, still spitting out lengths of blood and spittle, 'is no ordinary civilian. This man has learnt a thing or two from somewhere, that I can tell you.'

'Of course, I am trained. I was in the army. Like all of us. And the same could be said of you,' Bain spat out.

'Everybody here knows that I was a mercenary, that is no secret. But you? I have met the likes of you before. He worries me judge,' Boetsman said turning to me holding his injured mouth.

'What are you doing here? How did you find us?' I asked.

'I was coming to your house to speak to you when I saw you slipping over the hedge. I followed you here. I want to help you against Mandel. You know that.'

'Why?'

'Why? Good God I have worked in the government long enough to know the crisis that we are in.'

'Why did you not reveal yourself sooner? Why did you not call out to me when I was making my way here?'

'I didn't know what you were doing. You could have been off on some other affair. Then I lost you at the tower. I thought you could be meeting a lover. I only came on you now. And even then I was not sure whether I was interrupting something intimate. I was not hiding from you.'

Boetsman looked at me and shrugged.

'Look,' Bain continued, 'you know that I am disturbed about what is happening. We have spoken of this. Good god Judge, we have even been to each other's houses – surely there must be some trust between us. If it is Enoch's rantings about me, then you can absolutely discount that. An engineer? I can't even put a Meccano set together.'

'And yet you fight in the manner of somebody well trained.'

'That doesn't make me an engineer.'

'Untie him. I feel like we can trust him,' I said.

Boetsman looked at me for a second, his face displaying a look of gloomy thoughtfulness. But he untied the restraints all the same. 'Jesus Christ, I think you have broken one of my ribs,' Bain said getting up.

'You realise Judge,' Boetsman said ignoring Bain, 'that if you are wrong, we'll all pay with our lives. Mandel will shoot us if he catches us, of that now I am sure.'

'I guess that is the risk we will have to take,' I said, seeing really no other way to deal with the situation. I looked at my watch and knew that I must get back to the house soon to avert suspicion. 'Right let us make some decisions here. I propose we wait another week for the engineer, who might come, one never knows. And what will you do?' I asked turning to De Lambert. 'Will you stay here reporting from Albertsburg?'

'I plan to get out of here tomorrow via the route over Towerkop. I have a wife to return to.'

'Well, I wish you well Mr de Lambert. Please do return, you will always be welcome. Now,' I said looking at the others, 'let's meet here in a week's time. But I think we could start with some signs of our own around the town.'

'Signs!' Boetsman spat in disgust. 'It's bullets we need, not words.' To which I heard Bain murmur some agreement.

'Boetsman, thus far all we have had used against us are words and we must reply with words. I will not consider violence. For the logic that follows violence is harder to stop than to begin. Perhaps, one day we will find ourselves back in that position, but for now we can still use words, thank God. We must show, with signs, that there is an alternative voice to Mandel and the government. The resistance must be peaceful.'

'Mandel will fight back with violence,' Bain said wistfully. 'He will not go easily.'

'Well, in doing this he will only strengthen us.'

'And what does your husband think?' De Lambert asked.

'He believes that we must begin to drive a wedge between Mandel and the government. The best way of doing this, he feels, is by trying to get the government to send the engineer. Mandel certainly doesn't want the pass fixed. So we must try and get the government to fix it.' With this there was a murmur of agreement.

Then we all shook hands and left in five minute intervals so as not to be caught as a group. I touched Boetsman on the back of the hand in the signal we used to use in the old days, hoping that he would understand. 'Go on,' he said to de Lambert, 'I will leave after the judge, to make sure that she at least gets safely over the koppie.'

'Well,' he asked when we were standing alone, 'do you trust Bain?'

'I think so. Although I haven't quite figured him out. My feeling is that Mandel does not enjoy his presence and I think that is a good sign. What do you think?'

'Hmm, I don't know Judge. I don't know. Perhaps he is good. Perhaps. I cannot say. But I tell you, it is like the old days, the bigger this inner circle gets the more chance there is that Mandel will catch us. Okay, let us trust him, but not with everything. For the sake of God, we will know soon enough if there is an *impimpi* amongst us. We will know this when Mandel comes knocking on our doors late at night to arrest and torture us. Yes, of course you remember how it was. Then we will know who is the dog. But, Judge,' he paused staring out of the window towards that large towering blue gum, 'we will need your husband.'

'I know,' I said. 'He's still finding himself.'

'Well let us hope he is not hiding too far away. I remember, he was giant…'

'I remember too,' I said. 'I don't think he is far away now. There are signs of a return.'

I shook hands with Boetsman and then moved as quickly as I could across the shards of concrete on the runway. I turned around at the old radar tower but of Boetsman I could see nothing.

# Chapter 12

By the Friday after the Jacobsons' acquittal and our furtive meeting at the derelict airport, four painted messages had appeared in various parts of the town. One on the town hall stated: AN ENGINEER NOT AN ENGINEERED DICTATORSHIP. On the side of the police station had been quickly scrawled: THE POLICE SHALL NOT GOVERN! On the old disused fire station: CUT MANDEL OFF AT THE PASS. And one across the front of my court house said: FUck the libel LAvv!

Just what the last sign was meant to convey became a matter of some debate in the dorp. I, personally, assumed it was meant to say 'liberal' and that it had some reference to me and my gender. Although some others claimed that it was to do with the civil case brought by Mandel against Boetsman for calling him, during one court hearing, 'a *poepol* in policeman's clothing'. Those who believed that, claimed that the other signs had been produced by Boetsman as well. This, of course, I knew to be false.

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According to his testimony, Enoch was at the same time flouting the curfew as well, in his own manner. That Friday evening, at 19:30, he was in the storm-water ditch that runs along the front of his property with his binoculars. By then Enoch had made the ditch into a trench four feet in depth and had set the backseat of an old Land Rover at the bottom of it. This kept his body above the stream of water that frequently ran along it. It did not, however, stop his feet from lolling over the edge while he slept there, dangling amongst the water and the rats. This would lead to the case of trench foot which Dr Eloff is still in a process of treating.

But despite this disagreeable element of the trench he had in fact made it into what he referred to as his *voorkammer*. He had cut a shelf into the rocky side for a bottle of his corn *mampour*, next to which he had hung, on a railway bolt that he had driven into the earth wall, a picture of his mother. Enoch was also able to surf the net on his tablet and, as he admitted, he did this under a tarpaulin to conceal the illumination of the screen. He would spend anywhere up to half an hour under the plastic sheeting until the humidity and lack of oxygen forced him to throw it off. He would then return to his vigil of surveying the engineer at work in his study. That evening, however, Enoch had fallen asleep in his trench slightly earlier than usual.

He woke the next morning, not to the sounds of his ostriches, but rather to that of a person walking near the ditch. A pair of hiking boots were moving on the gravel of the road just above

his head. He froze, his eyes refusing to open in fear. Then, as if to exacerbate his sense of misery, drops of rain began to tap on the tarpaulin which lay over him. Rivulets ran along its creases down his back and trickled onto his neck. But he dared not move to wipe the water away.

He could sense that the tall man's shadow was hovering over him. Too embarrassed and frightened to look up he simply pulled the tarpaulin over his head and began to sob very quietly to himself. Then, after a few minutes, the shadow disappeared, and the sound of boots could be heard moving into the distance. With this he began to sob more openly, the black boot polish on his face began running in streaks. He counted slowly to twenty and then raised his head slowly out of the trench. The back of the engineer, in his long grey waterproof poncho and his long yellow-wood walking stick, was walking away in the direction of the mountains to the east.

Enoch set his teeth like a vice, tightening them with such ferocity that tears again pooled in his eyes. He punched the side of the trench in frustration, cutting his knuckles on the small stones of its wall. 'Enoch! Ma always told you that you are bloody good-for-nothing,' he whispered between his teeth while looking at her image in despair. Tears began to roll from his eyes and he sank back onto the seat. 'This man has seen you lying in a ditch, with your face covered in boot polish, your bloody arse hanging out of your pants, sleeping here like a stupid drunken pig! And for all your surveillance, what have you achieved? You have been ditched by everybody in Albertsburg. Not one person in the town believes you. God damn them to this Hell!' he shouted. 'Now ja, I will prove that I am no good-for-nothing! Fuck this fucking fuck fuck!' he screamed with such a deep tolling of despair that the world, he claimed, seemed to respond. For just then the sun broke through the clouds and a shaft of light fell directly on the engineer's house. It was then, so he claimed, his destiny was revealed to him.

He tried to pull himself out of the trench by using some of the roots that grew out of the wall. But they snapped under his massive weight sending him back down onto his seat. Then, standing up again, he grabbed the largest stone to hand and threw it in fury in the direction of the engineer, who had by then long since disappeared.

'Right,' he said, 'I am going to find out just what this fucker is up to, fuck this sitting in holes and watching him like bloody Tom. Let's find out just what this fucker is up to.'

With this he clambered out of the trench and leopard crawled hastily over to the engineer's house. Tearing his legs and arms on the gravel of the road and driveway, he reached the relative comfort of the lush buffalo grass of the engineer's lawn. He lay there for some seconds, deciding on a strategy and inspecting his abrasions. Continuing on his stomach, he headed towards the study and standing up he pressed his slightly bloody hands against the window.

The room was dark and it took some time before he could begin to make out any of the objects in its interior. A tripod sat in the far corner, there was a desk with papers on it and to the side was the infamous drawing board or easel. However, he did not record the two marble busts on the desk, the imposing grandfather clock and the three large paintings of the triptych of the story of the Ring of Gyges. Then, peering around to see that nobody was watching him, Enoch made for the kitchen and wrapping his hand in the bottom of his t-shirt, so as not to leave finger prints, he turned the door handle. It was unlocked and opened without a noise. The kitchen's cool terracotta tiles and the smell of coffee made him want to sit down at the kitchen table. He looked around. The room was not quite as he had imagined it. For one thing he had never seen the painting hanging over the fireplace. 'My God! What the heck?' he said, moving closer to it.

'Perverted! Naked little boys in a field. And one little bastard was, well like, whipping his china, My Lady. The Devil was in that work.' This was the way Enoch would describe it in court. If anything, this did prove to me that Enoch had been in the house. For I too had seen the painting in the engineer's kitchen. The painting I knew was called *Boyhood of Cyrus*.

Not necessarily strange in relation to the engineer's other possessions and interests, it had deeply troubled Enoch and he had clearly stood before it for some time inspecting it. Certainly his description was surprisingly accurate. The young boys' nakedness, the seeming enjoyment of those enacting the ritual, the peaceful bucolic setting and the old grey beard seated in the distance had all greatly affected this simple-minded man. The same obsessive description, however, was not present when testifying to the contents of engineer's study. 'My Lady there was an engineer's what's-it on a tripod thing. Ja, there was lots of maps, drawings of mountains and engineer's drawings. And pages of drawings with words written in circles. And also My Lady there was an identity card saying he was a civil engineer. I think it was a company. The company was like a French name.'

Of course all of these discoveries except for the ID card were explained by the engineer's defence.

Adv Maxwell (Question): And so Mr Bain how would you describe the articles that have been described as engineering equipment?

Mr Bain (Answer): Quite simply a telescope, hiking maps of the area, drawings of the pass by the artist Anton Kannermeyer and a set of mind maps plotting out the timing and sequencing of the events for a novel loosely based on my experiences.

Adv Maxwell: And its name?

Mr Bain: Its working title is 'The Solution'.

Adv Maxwell: That is not a very good name Mr Bain. Perhaps we could think of another...

Judge: If we could please proceed. The name of the book is not important. Please move on.

Adv Maxwell: Sorry My Lady. Now where were we?

Judge: The ID.

Adv Maxwell: Precisely. Now what about the ID? According to Enoch it stated that you worked for a French civil engineering company.

Mr Bain: A complete fiction. I am sorry I have absolutely no idea how he could have come up with this.

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According to Enoch he went home after these discoveries with a sense of relief. After all, the engineer had arrived. The city would soon return to what it had once been, which was, he stated, the only thing he really cared about. And so, with a deep sense of calm he sat on his porch and opened his last bottle of *mampoure*. He was, in fact, in a state of slight euphoria. The road would be repaired and those who brought the alcohol would return and he would not have to rely on his own, less than perfect, brew.

He had slept for a good part of the day on the stoep occasionally waking and reaching for his bottle, all the while keeping his eye on the time. Seemingly forgetting the fact that curfew hours would restrict him from watching the rugby match in Albertsburg he rose at three in the afternoon and had a shower. Then placing the last of the alcohol in a coffee flask with two bags of rooibos he made his way to Albertsburg, swigging from the flask as he went.

For reasons he was unable to explain he was surprised, when he arrived, to find a sign outside the Jakkal en Vel that stated that it was closed until further notice. He banged on the door. 'It's

the bloody rugby final today you can't be closed, it's a Saturday,' he shouted. He continued to bang on the door until, eventually, it opened and he found a man he did not recognise standing in front of him. 'Can I help you?' De Lambert, the journalist, asked.

'Who the fuck are you?'

'My name is Raymond. I am a lodger here.'

'I want to watch the rugby, hey. Where the fuck's Boetie?'

'Boetsman is occupied at the moment. The bar is closed. I would start to head home if I were you, the curfew begins in just over half an hour,' De Lambert said calmly.

'Fuck you, and fuck your curfew. Let me in.'

It is here that I should confess that this was not simply reported to me, but in fact I, along with Boetsman, was sitting a few metres away in the cellar of the bar.

Then we heard De Lambert shout: 'No you don't!' And then there was a dull thud and the sound of somebody falling. This was followed by a series of moans and a bout of pitiful swearing. The door closed and the lock was turned. Boetsman motioned to me to hide in the back of the cellar, behind some of the empty kegs.

'Raymond,' Boetsman called, 'is everything alright there?'

'Yes, he is moving off.'

De Lambert, not a small man himself, had hit Enoch on the bridge of his nose splitting the top left of his eyebrow. Blood flowed from it quite freely leaving a jagged and rambling trail from the Jakkal en Vel all the way to the mayor's house, which was several hundred metres down the main road. A few minutes later, still with his flask of *mampoer* in his hand, he was knocking on Jean's kitchen door and shouting for the mayor. 'Come out and watch some fucking rugby with me.'

'Enoch you are drunk,' Jean shouted at him. 'Go back home and sleep it off. It is almost the beginning of the curfew. If you start back home any later you will miss it and spend the night in the *tjoekie*.'

'I want to speak to Albert.'

'He's on a work phone call to the capital.'

'On a Saturday? What kak! Tell that drunkard to come out like a man and watch some God damn rugby.'

'Enoch go home and sleep it off.'

'Bitch!' he shouted. He walked around the house and slumped down on the front steps, his head lolling forward, his eye bleeding onto his jeans. He had not stopped swigging from his flask

and when it was finished he hurled the empty flask across the road. 'That fucker at the … Jakkal en … Cunt!' he slurred and then passed out.

It was in this state that my husband unintentionally woke him. He was on his way back from the Jacobsons and had accidently dropped the bag he was carrying on his shoulder just as he passed the mayor's house. He swore and then bending down at the knees he hurriedly tried to pick it up again. The time was about five o'clock now.

'Hey you! Judge's husband!' Enoch shouted, suddenly gaining consciousness. 'Hey, weren't you like the vice-president of the country or some shit?' Enoch shouted. 'Let's go watch some rugby.'

'I have no time for that I'm afraid,' my husband answered lumbering forward, with the bag now back on his shoulder. But Enoch persisted. He got up and stumbled towards my husband. 'Now where're we going to watch it, hey? Look, I know that we didn't, like, exactly hit it off. But you foreigners have never really like cracked the nod around here, hey. But I mean we are kind of like friends now, hey?' He said this while putting one of his huge hands on my husband's open shoulder.

'Enoch, as a friend, I think you better get going – you'll miss the curfew.'

'What the fuck ever.'

'Mandel will arrest you,' my husband warned.

'I mean it's not only you who's foreign … that fucking Bain oke is too… and that fucking uptight judge. You're all foreigners in my eyes. I mean no offence.'

'None taken.' My husband was simply trying to get back home.

'And, like what the fuck's her problem? I mean you are married to her. I couldn't take it. Not from a foreign woman like her … Jean likes her though. To be honest … Hey! you come back here, stop walking away. Jesus Christ I just want to chat.' Enoch took several loping strides to catch up again. 'To be honest … I have never really liked Jean either, hey. But that's between you and me. Pinky swear you won't say anything.' Enoch was stumbling backwards while holding out a huge crooked finger.

My husband tolerated this for a few more steps but then, realising that Enoch really did intend to carry on walking with him, he stopped. 'Now look here Enoch, Mandel will have you in the jail for god knows how long if you miss the curfew. Get going!'

'Oh well, fuck you, you fucking moffie. And fuck Mandel,' he shouted. 'Go on, run away. Go and fuck yourself, you fucking cockroach. I am going to watch the rugby and then I am going to go to your house and take your wife's virginity!'

It was then that Mandel and the Konstabel arrived in their bakkie. 'You better get going or you will miss the curfew,' Mandel said calmly to my husband from the recesses of the cab.

'I know Captain. I'm on my way.'

'Very good. I would not cut it so fine next time, you hear?'

My husband nodded and made an effort to show that he was in a hurry to obey. In doing this, however, he did not see the beginning of the incident with Enoch. At first it sounded like Mandel simply wanted to know how Enoch had received the cut above his eye. But Enoch could not remember and seemed to find the blood on his face a complete mystery. But then the rugby became the bone of contention.

'Why can't you just let us watch the rugby, *jou ma se poes*?' Enoch was heard shouting. With this my husband stopped and turned to watch the scene. Enoch's hands were on the door of the vehicle and his head was almost in the window of the driver's side. 'I don't mind you doing what you do. What's it to do with me? In fact I've made more money out of this than I ever have. But you should just, like, let us watch the fucking rugby, hey? And stop being a poes your whole life. You remember, hey, how I used to fuck you up at school when you were lighty. Don't think I can't do it to you again, hey.'

It was for this that Mandel ordered his arrest. But Enoch's sheer size proved a significant problem for the young skinny Konstabel. Mandel, my husband reported with a laugh, refused to exit the bakkie during the arrest. And Enoch simply prevented his detention by holding his hands above his head while the Konstabel hung off his arms with his feet in the air. Then another bakkie arrived and four policemen jumped out and tackled Enoch to the ground, jabbing him in his ribs with their batons and kicking him until he was finally subdued. It was only once they got him into the back of the van, that his shouting changed tack.

'Why does it have to be like this? The engineer is here!' Enoch screamed from inside the van, 'I've seen him! I have seen you with him. I know the plan.'

He began to kick and ram his body against the cage of the bakkie. Shouting all the while as it drove down to the station: 'I've seen him. He's here! He is with us!' Then, when he had exhausted himself with this, he slumped down onto the floor of the bakkie and started crying. But with one last yell he offered: 'Why won't he? It's that devil. Albert!' And then raising his voice again he shouted, 'You fucking devil. Jean!'

Boetsman, De Lambert and I had heard the police sirens but had no idea as to what was going on. I was standing anxiously in the unlit taproom of the Jakkal en Vel and was relieved to see my husband making his way down the main road. I hoped he would have the sense just to

walk on and not attempt to come around the back to meet me as we had arranged. This, thankfully, he did without even the slightest peak in my direction.

I had to wait some hours for darkness to fall before I slipped out the back door of the pub and, saying my final goodbye to Boetsman, I made my way along the hedges and servitudes. 'Thank God,' my husband said as I slipped in via the back door. 'You better give the police out front a bit of a walk by at the bedroom window. The curtains in there are still open, so go and fetch something. I have been pretending that you're asleep on the couch, so make out as if you've just woken up.'

# Chapter 13

I was woken that night by rapping on the front door. I had to wake my husband, who took some time to fully understand why he had been roused. I walked down the passage while he was getting up and called out: 'Who's there?'

'Good evening My Lady.' I heard a heavily accented voice saying.

'What do you want? It's one in the morning.'

'Yes, I am sorry My Lady, but could you just open the door.' I unlocked the door and peeped out to find two uniformed figures standing in the light of the stoep. 'I apologise for the call so late at night My Lady.'

'That is fine Konstabel. What can I do for you?' I asked opening the door and wrapping my dressing gown more tightly around myself.

'Ja My Lady, the captain would like to speak to you about what's happened at the station tonight.'

My immediate thought was of Thales and Enoch. 'Have you called Dr Eloff?' I asked, as I felt the fear moving within me.

'Ja My Lady, he has been called in too. There is a vehicle outside. If you would like to get dressed. We'll wait for you.'

'I see Konstabel. But how can I be of assistance in this matter?'

'My Lady, with regards to this *I* can't be of assistance. Only the captain can speak to you. The Captain has given me an order to escort you to the station.'

'Are you arresting me?' I asked suddenly worried that this was more to do with me than Enoch, although the policeman's manner did not suggest it.

'My Lady, if you will please just get dressed and come.'

'Konstabel, you have to inform us if you are arresting my wife and under what charge.' My husband was standing at the door now and had put his arm around me.

'I am sorry, I cannot inform either of you of this. I have my orders.'

I turned around and touched my husband's arm and we moved to the bedroom.

'What do you think this is about?' he whispered.

'I have no idea. It could be that they have injured Enoch, perhaps even killed him.'

'It could be about us. It could be about the signs,' he whispered.

'What could they arrest me for? Breaking the curfew? They certainly can't prove that I personally painted the signs.'

'No, they can't.' He smiled for a second and then with a sudden look of dejection said: 'Perhaps they have given up on the idea of proof. Perhaps the time has come already. The deaths squads are said to be active again.' We fell silent for a moment. 'Should I get you some food? What clothes do you need? I would wear a shell suit, an extra warm coat and two pairs of socks. Remember? That is how we always dressed.' With this he went to the kitchen.

I finished tying the laces of my running shoes just as he returned with a Tupperware box with some hastily made sandwiches, a packet of biscuits and a thermos of tea. The police had turned on the blue light of the bakkie outside. It flashed through the slit in the curtains, disturbing the few moments that we had to say goodbye. I took the Tupperware, placed it on the bed and slipped my arms around his rounded stomach. 'You know, I've never stopped …' he began.

'I know,' I said interrupting him.

'Let me finish. I have never stopped loving you.'

'I know.'

'These last few years, they have been hard on us both.'

We stood there, holding each other for some time, the flashing blue light adding to the sense of melancholy and fear. Then we broke from our embrace and he placed his hand on my cheek. 'Well, it is not like this hasn't happened before,' he said. 'Should I come with you?'

I shook my head. 'The last thing we need is both of us in jail. And besides it doesn't seem like an arrest, does it?' I then picked up the food and went to the front door. The Konstabel was still there waiting for me. We walked up the path together towards the gate. To my relief when I got to the bakkie he opened the passenger door and I squeezed into the three seater at the front and sat next to a grey looking policeman. He stared directly ahead without acknowledging my presence. He started the vehicle with a roar. But we drove slowly along the tree-lined route to the station, with the blue light whirling above our heads.

'I see something has killed one of the trees here,' the Konstabel said as we drove through the dale.

'Yes.' I answered looking out at the fever-trees hanging over us.

We did not speak again for the rest of the way. All the while images of what might await me raced through my mind: Enoch's dead body lying on a slab; Captain Mandel strong arming me into accepting Enoch's death was a suicide; a night, perhaps several, spent in a cold cell; an unpleasant interrogation concerning the emergence of the graffiti. I wondered what kind of harassment it would take for a woman hitting old age to renounce her belief in freedom and the law. Then I wondered how quickly I might betray my friends under pressure. But all the while I had the feeling that we had already been betrayed.

The vehicle stopped outside the ugly tawny iron-roofed frontage of the station. Dr Eloff was standing out front in his slightly dirty white linen jacket, smoking a cigarette. It looked as if he was somehow guarding the darkened hollow of the station's open door, warning of the perils that lay inside. My heart tightened at the sight and my palms began to sweat. But just as I exited the vehicle the radio went off in the bakkie. It was answered by the Konstabel. And then in an outbreak of noise a siren sounded and the bakkie's engine leapt back into life. The doctor watched me as I made my way towards him. 'Is Enoch okay?' I shouted over the noise.

'He's fine. I gave him a sedative. He's sleeping it off.'

'Doctor!' the Konstabel was shouting from the bakkie, 'come with us! Please! Now! It's urgent! Yes, come now. Please!' Eloff shrugged at me, threw his cigarette down and ran to the police bakkie.

I walked in to the station to find the building seemingly deserted, the harsh neon lights were blinding at first. They seemed to have burnt the life out of the air inside which was dry and hard to breathe. There was also a static electricity about that made my clothes cling to my skin and every hair on my body stand bolt upright. My running shoes screeched on the polished linoleum floor as I took my first few steps inside.

I called out. But there was no response. 'Hello?' I called standing in the charge office. But there was only silence. I then rang the bell for attention, the sound seemed to screech in my ears and echo shrilly throughout the station. But still nobody came. I stood there for a while and then began to feel very tired. I went and sat down on the blue plastic bucket seats at the window and pulled my coat around me. After a few minutes my head nodded forward and my chin rested on my chest.

Somewhere, I could hear what sounded to me like somebody speaking very loudly in a distant room. Then leather soled shoes clicked on the floor.

'Good evening Judge President.' Captain Mandel was standing right next to me, his glassy blue lizard eyes inspecting me.

'Good evening Captain,' I said, shaking myself from sleep.

'Please, if you don't mind coming to my office.' He pointed to the far end of the charge office with a small cane he was carrying, to the door which displayed his name in gold vinyl. I got up slowly. I noticed his shiny shoes and the fact that the bottom of his trousers had an elasticised hoop that looped under them. As usual his clothes were immaculately ironed and his Sambrown belt and holster were perfectly polished. But there had been a small edition added to his uniform. At his throat now hung an upside-down fleur-de-lis. My eyes rested on this detail for a moment

and Mandel self-consciously adjusted it. It was then that I realised that the object had quite obviously come from the top of a fence or gate.

'If you don't mind,' he said curtly, again gesturing with his stick in the direction of his office.

Emboldened by the silliness and absurdity of the honour he seemed to have awarded himself, I turned to him. 'I really must ask you Captain Mandel to first explain why have I been summoned here at this hour of the night?'

'All in good time Judge President, all in good time. Now if you don't mind moving to my office.'

'No, Captain Mandel, tell me now.'

'The matter concerns the engineer. Now please.' Again he pointed with the cane.

'And don't wave that stick at me,' I said.

We moved to his office and he took the large bunch of keys that hung from his belt, and after unlocking several locks on the door he ushered me in.

'Please sit down,' he said, as he lifted the tails of his jacket before sitting down behind his desk on his wingbacked leather chesterfield.

'Now what is this about the engineer?' I asked.

'Well,' he said touching the fleur-de-lis again in a manner that suggested it had now become an affectation, 'we have reason to believe that the engineer is in fact here.'

'I see. But what does this have to do with me?'

He smiled baring his long yellow teeth at me. 'Well Judge President, I would like to ask you some questions about Joseph Bain.'

'Captain Mandel! Are you really suggesting that you are taking Enoch's rantings seriously?'

'I cannot only tell you that we are taking them seriously, but that we are close to his arrest.'

'Arrest? For what?' I began to suspect that he was playing a similar game to our own. That is, trying to divide those who he knew to be against him.

'Judge, please sit down. I merely have some questions for you.'

'No, I am leaving.'

'You'll find the door is locked. Now please, return to your seat.'

With this I took my phone from my bag and began to phone my husband.

Unperturbed by this Mandel began. 'I also want to know if you know anything about these signs that have been appearing on our walls. They are the work of anarchists and devil worshipers and I will not stand for it. Please put that away,' he said smoothly.

'Hello? Yes, it's me. Captain Mandel is holding me against my will at the station. Please come now. No, they are not arresting me but clearly they are up to no good. Yes, come now.'

'I do wish you hadn't done that. Nevertheless, I would still prefer you to answer some questions that I have prepared for you.'

With this he pushed over the desk a slightly dirty piece of foolscap paper with six questions printed on it in comic sans.

1. Has the person that is known to you as Joseph Bain ever admitted that he is a civil engineer?

2. Has the person that is known to you as Joseph Bain ever said anything that might suggest that he is the engineer sent to fix the pass? If so please state the contents and circumstances of this confession.

3 .Having visited the person known to you as Joseph Bain at his house, have you seen any equipment or drawings of an engineering nature in or about his premises? If yes please list items.

4. Have you ever suspected the person that is known to you as Joseph Bain is an engineer? If so please state why below.

5. Has the person that is known to you as Joseph Bain ever spoken out against the government or its arm of law enforcement or that division recognised as the Albertsburg Police Constabulary in your presence? If in the affirmative, what was communicated?

6. Has the person that is known to you as Joseph Bain ever made any inappropriate advances towards you of a sexual nature? If so, please give the details below.

I took the paper and glanced over it. Of course, I knew that question five rendered it impossible for me to answer them. For it was quite possible that some comment of this nature had occurred and had been overheard by somebody in the dorp. 'Captain Mandel this is absurd. And the last question proves it. I will not answer anything here, this is a pure and simple waste of my time. If all the evidence that you have are the rantings of a man who is clearly disturbed and drunk on moonshine, then I would urge you to desist from this farcical investigation.'

'Judge President,' he said with a noxious smile, his eyes glinting in the light, 'I would urge you to reconsider and to answer the questions. Let me just say that we have known for quite some time that Bain is the engineer. Here I will break with procedure and show you the file.'

With this Mandel took from his desk a flimsy looking file with a few loose pieces of paper inside of it. He slid it officiously across the desk to me. I opened it slowly and found it contained two affidavits – one from the Konstabel, the other from Enoch. There was also a form with a tear down the middle that had been stuck back together with yellowing scotch tape.

'If you turn to item three,' Mandel stated, referring to the latter document, while again caressing the ridiculous object hanging at his neck. I looked at it and it took me a few moments to realise that 'item three' was a form filled out by Bain stating that he was now a resident of the greater Albertsburg area. 'I'm not sure what I am looking for?' I asked.

'If you look at the occupation of the resident you will see the case is proved.'

My eyes moved over the page, it was filled in with a small spidery handwriting that was at times almost illegible. Next to 'Employment' the word 'Civil' had been written followed by another that I could not read. It was slightly smudged as well as having the tear running directly through it. 'What is this?' I asked.

'There, it quite clearly states that he's a Civil Engineer. Judge President, he is our engineer, he confessed as much to me when he arrived. I plan to charge him in the next few days with dereliction of duty.'

Just then we heard the sirens coming back towards the station and Mandel looked at me quizzically. 'Please,' he said, 'please, I would recommend you answer the questions as set. Then you will be free to leave.'

'So, I am being held against my will.'

'No such thing is true,' he said distractedly. 'Judge President, I will just be back in one moment.'

And with this he got up and went to unlock the door of the office. 'Excuse me a moment.' The sirens stopped and I could hear from outside the screaming and crying of a woman. I followed the Captain out of the office, but he seemed too distracted to notice. He continued walking outside through the doors of the station. I, however, remained in the charge office and stared out of the window. From there I could see the two Jacobson daughters, Orlanda and Jemma, illuminated by the streetlight, standing at the very spot where Thales had spent the last minutes of his life. They were crying and looking into the back of the bakkie. A man in a cap – I could not see who – was being led by the police into the station. I waited at the window until two policemen entered, walking on either side of Daniel Jacobson whose hands were cuffed behind his back. His face was blotchy and grey and his eyes were scarlet with crying. 'Daniel, what has happened?' I asked. But instead of answering, his throat produced a howl of inconsolability. With this I rushed outside.

There the two girls were still standing weeping and looking with horror into the back of the police vehicle. 'Jemma, Orlanda, what's the matter?' I asked. They shook their heads but words could clearly not come. I took three paces forward and caught sight of what they were staring at. There the huge half-naked body of Boetsman was lying on the cold metal floor of the van. I took out my phone and shone the torch on him. His eyes looked vacantly up at the roof, his teeth

protruding from his mouth. Blood was everywhere and as I moved to inspect his corpse I stepped in a small pool of it which was running out onto the dusty road.

Dr Eloff, I realised then, was now standing beside me. His linen jacket was covered in blood and he had the look of a man who had been crying. 'What happened?' I asked still in a state too uncomprehending to be emotional.

'I couldn't save him. He was dead when I arrived.'

'But what happened?' I begged.

'Daniel shot him.'

'What? Why?'

'He thought he was an intruder.'

We stood there for some time in complete silence.

'What on earth was he doing at the Jacobsons'?' I said two or three times.

'He seems to have been having an affair with one of the girls,' the doctor said and I realised Eloff was crying.

'I thought that you didn't care for Boetsman,' I said letting out these words with a trembling voice.

'Boetsman? Besides Jean, he was about the closest thing I have had to a friend in this place.'

My husband arrived just then and Eloff explained to him what he knew. We stood outside in the cold on the stoep looking through the window at the police processing Daniel. We then watched four officers pull Boetsman's body out of the van and carry it inside in a white sheet that was soon soaked in blood. We watched as they took the corpse down the long hall towards the mortuary, leaving a trail of deep maroon behind them on the floor. The girls simply continued to stand on the pavement, under the palm tree, holding each other while they cried.

After that, we watched Daniel being taken to the cells and my husband and I escorted the two girls home. We took them inside to their family who were sitting in what seemed like a surreally lit front room. We sat down there with them. No one spoke. Three bottles of contraband whiskey sat on the table for any who wanted to numb themselves to what had happened. Gideon, the father, was slouched forward on his chair. He was rocking slightly and staring at his shoes. The grandmother sat bolt upright gazing, with her milky cataract covered eyes, up at the naked light bulb that hung from the ceiling. The girls did not release one another, entwined in each other's shawls they continued in gentle, unremitting sobs on the couch to comfort each other. At five in the morning my husband and I got up to leave. Silently we embraced them all and then made our way home. The police did not observe the curfew that night.

# Chapter 14

Boetsman's burial occurred at a time when life in Albertsburg was disturbingly confused. What exacerbated this was a sudden disappearance of the rain. It was as if even the heavens could no longer deliver relief to the town. The effects of its evaporation were startlingly rapid, turning the valley, in a matter of days, into an ochre and alien dead-land. What was more, the heat, without the usual accompanying rain, had conspired to produce a strange static electricity that took an almost preternatural grip over the community. For weeks one could not open a door or touch a filing cabinet or brush against a stainless-steel counter top without producing a painful and startling electric pulse. The results of which could be heard in every shop, house or place of work in the form of a sudden scream or yell, or a series of curses. It also fashioned in those with straight hair the look of something from a zombie film. It would have made one laugh if it were not the visual expression of a deeper emotional disorder.

And it was in this agitated state that the engineer, the doctor, the mayor, my husband, Clarence, Gideon, Orlanda, Jemma, Jean and I, at times carried, at other times pushed, pulled and dragged, Boetsman's body up the white sandy paths of Towerkop to his burial place on Deacon's Dune. The thick embroidered canvas tarpaulin, which he had been sewn into so lovingly by the Jacobson daughters, was almost entirely ruined by the time we were half way up.

All the way this miserable, isolated and halting procession was trailed, at a distance, by some of the town's folk. They were seemingly unwilling to get too near to the funeral party for fear of association, while at the same time wishing to honour the dead. 'They are eager to avoid Mandel's gaze,' Jean said to me, pointing up to the line of cypresses on the edge of the dune. There one could make out the figures of the Konstabel and Captain Mandel, who had a pair of binoculars trained on our progress. Outlined by the sun, which was towering behind them, they stood at the trees, like dark bronze figures shimmering the haziness.

We laboured under the searing sun for several hours, only noticing when we stopped to rest that the air was filled with the piercing screeches of cicadas and that there was a stark metallic smell of the scorched earth that was giving up the very last vestiges of water to the sun. 'It's like even nature is at war with itself,' Gideon said when we stopped. This was one of the few instances on that journey where words were spoken. For the rest of the time we either sat, too exhausted to talk, or grunted and strained under the heavy white robes of our funeral dress, moving the enormous deadweight, at times only a matter of inches, along the seemingly endless hindrances the white path seemed to offer up to us. Sweat poured down our faces from under our headscarves.

This, mingling with the young girls' tears, poured ink black makeup from their eyes down their cheeks.

As I struggled to help, strange and disconnected imagery flashed into my mind: scenes from my childhood; an image of a bombed-out toilet where Margaret Thatcher had been; the *Kwerekwere* lining the mountain tops, their tartan bags balanced on their heads; the bicycle my father had owned before I was born; my son playing as an adult on the island beach; myself lying on a grass mat in a prison cell in my judge's robes with some photographs by Santu Mofokeng strewn on top of me.

With some hundred metres to go we stopped one last time at a cave's overhang along the path. There we placed Boetsman's body on a small rocky ledge, which overlooked the valley roasting in the sun. Dutifully we opened our black umbrellas over the body to provide the covering it required for the ceremony. Orlanda began to cry again and my husband placed a comforting arm around her as Gideon came to us to pin black ribbons on our chests. Then, stepping forward with a copy of the Torah, he chanted Psalm 23, in his tenor voice, over the body of Boetsman as if calling out to the valley below.

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
He has me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside the still waters.
He revives my soul;
He guides me on paths of righteousness for His glory.
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no harm,
For you are with me.
Your rod and your staff do comfort me.
You set a table in sight of my enemies;
You anoint my head with rich oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall abide in the house of the Lord.

Then we took up the body again and moved haltingly along the precipice of the last stretch of path up to the graveyard. The Konstabel and Captain Mandel retreated from their position as we approached and I watched them as they clambered up a small koppie to the left which overlooked both the graves and the path we had just climbed. The trail still had a few of the stragglers from the town on it. And they either hid from the policemen's surveillance in the gorges or simply stood with their black umbrellas open over their heads.

Some ten metres down from Thales' headstone the grave digger, in white canvass trousers and a faded blue and white hooped t-shirt, was standing next to the pit. His broad brimmed grass hat hid his pale features. It was only once we had placed the body on the mound next to the grave that we realised that Bain was not with us. Dr Eloff offered to go back to see what was the matter. We waited there with Boetsman's vast body resting on the beach sand above the grave and not for the first time we could find no words for one another. Instead we simply stood listening to the sound of the sobs of the girls and the piecing shrill of the cicadas.

'He seems to be poorly,' Dr Eloff said as he came to stand with us once more. 'It's like a symptom I have seen amongst the locals. Strange … he says we should continue with the burial and that he will soon recover.' My husband, Clarence, Gideon and Albert then lowered the body into the grave. We stood over it for some time, saying our own payers and remembering him. Then, after each of us had placed a silver coin in the grave digger's hand, we began our silent walk back down towards the town.

By the time we got back to the ledge Bain had recovered himself, although he still looked deathly pale. He was standing looking out over the valley. 'Is everything alright?' I asked.

'Yes, I'm fine. I just never really like the idea of graveyards. Particularly that one.'

'Are some of your family buried there?'

'My family? Oh no.' He paused. 'But my mother used to tell me as a child about how the dark spirits haunted it. Strange how one's childhood fears can grip one in later life.'

No one said a word after that. Only the sounds of grunts and the scraping of the metal points of umbrellas on the rocky path could be heard on our way down. When we got back to our house we all sat on the lawn drinking *mampoer*. And there we started to begin our lives without Boetsman, in the full view of the police who sat in two vehicles at our gate not ten metres away.

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It has been difficult to establish quite what had happened on the night of Boetsman's death. I have never been satisfied with any of the explanations. That Boetsman was having an affair with Orlanda, of that I have no doubt. They were a strange pairing to be sure. He was old enough to be her father. But as Jean had told me, both daughters had largely been excluded from the community by their religion, an exclusion Boetsman himself, a stranger to these parts, had also felt. What was more, Boetsman was the kind of man many women, particularly young ones, can find attractive. He was both powerful and gentle.

But as Orlanda told us, it was a surprise to her that he was there that night. She had explicitly told him not to come as the police had recently taken to deploying two surveillance vehicles at their property. So, whether he had gone to fetch alcohol from a still hidden in the Jacobsons' warehouse and whether Daniel had shot him thinking he was a policeman who was near to discovering their secret brewery, only the Jacobsons know.

Another question was how many bullets killed him. Those in the house thought that there were several shots fired. But Daniel could confirm that he had pulled the trigger only once. Dr. Eloff seemed to think there were two entry wounds. Although as he said he was a simple GP and not familiar with forensic medicine – there could be another explanation for the other wound. I have felt, on more than one occasion, that Mandel's hand was at least in some of this.

However, Daniel confessed that he shot Boetsman and pleaded guilty to culpable homicide on the condition that he served out the beginning of his fifteen-year sentence in the cells of the courthouse, rather than those of the police station's. He would be there until such a time as he could be transported down the pass to the penal colony off the coast. Although Mandel was unhappy with this arrangement, the state advocate, Mr Hollow, deemed it a reasonable request. And until this very moment, this is where Daniel is incarcerated under the care of Clarence.

With the death of Boetsman and the imprisonment of Daniel, any resistance to Mandel within Albertsburg was, for all intents and purposes, at an end. For although they were both outsiders in the community in their own ways, they were our link to it. Certainly, neither my husband, nor the engineer, nor myself could ever have dreamed of connecting and persuading the community to stand up against Mandel. This left only Jean and she had her own problems dealing with Albert, who was now more in a state of terror than ever before. He had in fact gone to Mandel to ask if he could step down as mayor but Mandel had refused. No doubt this was because our captain was worried that the position might be filled by somebody who might be a little more competent.

What made the situation in Albertsburg so completely ruinous was the fact that nobody seemed to hold a consistent political position. In fact everybody seemed affected by a cognitive dissonance so exasperating as to defy belief. It was, after all, Mandel who supported and was supported by the government. And it was the government that was refusing or simply failing to send us an engineer. The truth was, however, that Mandel's power was nearing its zenith and there was no alternative political structure other than his. What was more, he seemed, publicly at least, to be beyond censure. Even those who would have been his natural enemies, the upper-middle class, people like the Williamsons next door and Mr Davidson, seemed somehow happy with his rule.

To be sure, Mandel did not rest on his laurels and he was preoccupied by various of his own perturbations. For, like all tyrants, he was anxious about the future of his power and threats to it both real and imagined. For one he was clearly disturbed by the graffiti that had appeared, particularly the one on his station wall, which had been quickly painted over with road paint. And then there was the fact that some people had attempted to attend Boetsman's funeral.

My husband and I, for a few days, were of the opinion that we must somehow encourage this timid show of defiance. But we were unsure as to how to rally those people to our side. But this hope was brought crashing to earth a few days after the funeral. My husband and I were working in the house when we heard what sounded like chopping and shouting in our garden. I looked up and I could see only my husband's eyebrows raised above his dust mask. Then we heard a yell and what sounded like the screaming of our names. I took the pressure cooker off the stove and went to wash my hands while my husband moved to the front door. Then, on hearing further shouts, we ran out to the front garden to find our next-door neighbours, the Williamsons, standing inside our property. Their hair, as a result of the static, was pointing bolt upright which at first gave me something of a fright. Then I noticed that the wife stood holding an uprooted Albertina Sisulu rosebush in her right hand, while her husband was swinging a long-handled axe at one of the small saplings I had planted when we first arrived.

'I'm getting the pellet gun,' my husband said walking past me back into the house.

'No, don't do that,' I called after him. And then, turning to Mrs Williamson, who was shaking the soil out of the bush's root system, I barked. 'Mrs Williamson! What *do* you think you are doing?'

But instead of an answer the bush came hurtling in the air towards me, and it took a quick sidestep to avoid it. 'What on *earth* is going on?' I asked moving towards her in a state of consternation and growing anger.

'She asks us what the fuck is going on?' Mr Williamson yelled, straightening himself up from his chopping and looking at his wife. 'No, Ms O'Higgins, or whatever the fuck your real name is. Pretending to be Irish, what a fucking joke! You have about as much Irish in you as Chairman Mao. Now, don't ask *us* what is going on. *We* want to know what the fuck is going on with you? Where the fuck is the engineer your government is meant to be sending us? You fucking people! What I want to know is what you are getting out of this? No doubt it will be a tender linked to one of your companies.'

'My companies?'

'Yes, that son of yours is no doubt taking a nice fat cut from it.'

'Mr Williamson, neither my husband nor I have companies, nor are we linked in any capacity to anything our son might have done or be up to.'

'Ja right, whatever! You fucking liar! Your type, just can't stop yourself from putting your chocolate fingers into the till, can you?'

'My what?' I asked choosing once again to ignore the reference to 'type'. 'Mr Williamson, just because my son is under the wing of the president, please do not confuse me and my husband with those people who now control our country. Just as I do not confuse you with those men who murdered Thales.'

Mr Williamson was no doubt confused by my reference. He looked at his wife who shrugged and then lifting his axe he took one final swing at the sapling he had been chopping at. Although he had not made much headway with any of his previous blows this time he sliced deep into the green pulp of its small trunk. I watched the tree teeter and then begin to fall. But it was not the only thing earth bound. For due to the unexpected success of the blow Mr Williamson lost his balance and he too fell with a far more spectacular tumble than his subject.

And by this time my husband had appeared with what was our son's childhood pellet gun. He rushed up to Mr Williamson, who was lying amongst the flimsy green branches of the fallen tree, and stood over him pointing the child's toy roughly at his stomach. 'We have nothing to do with those people in government,' my husband spat out. 'And get this straight, if you appear in my wife's rose garden or molest another one of our plants again I will fucking,' he paused, 'I'll use this child's toy as a fucking ramrod, place it up your arse and fire when it enters that witless void that occupies your skull. Do you understand me?'

'Leave him alone you brute!' Mrs Williamson screamed rushing to her husband's aid and helping him up from out of the tangled branches. I ran to the axe and picked it up, flinging it over the wall into the Williamson's pool. It was only then that I noticed that two fat greyish policemen were standing at our gate. One was speaking into a radio, the other was simply looking on in disbelief.

'Ja, I am not sure, hey,' the man at the radio was saying to his controller. 'As I said the man and lady from next door are like attacking the judge's shrubberies. Then the ex-vice-president arrived with a popgun and threatened to stick it up his neighbour's *poepol*.'

We had quite simply lost. Mandel had won. Although both he and his men would, no doubt, struggle to interpret the defeat that we had just suffered in the garden that day.

When we finally got inside, my husband looked at me. 'How absolutely absurd,' he said, 'everyone's gone mad.'

'Perhaps, we will have to find another solution to this,' I said.

'Well certainly this pellet gun won't be it,' he laughed wistfully.

# Chapter 15

It was several days after the unfortunate incident in the garden that I heard from our stenographer, while we were in the courthouse, that Captain Mandel had arrested Bain on a charge of dereliction of duty. With this news, I cancelled the court hearings and rushed over to the police station. A few children were out on the street in front of my building asking for sweets and refusing to go to school. But for once I brushed past them showing an empty pair of palms. By the time I got to the station a small crowd had begun to gather outside and I had to push my way through to the front. Some of the people began to boo me as I did so and it was with a slight feeling of relief that the Konstabel opened the door for me when I knocked.

Inside the charge office the state prosecutor, Mr. Hollow, was standing at the counter. He was looking at a few sheets of paper in the same file that I had seen in the Captain's office the previous week and I noticed there were a few more pages in it. The Konstabel directed me to one of the blue plastic bucket seats. And I had to sit there for some time before Captain Mandel appeared. He was walking back from the cells to his office. 'Captain Mandel, have you a minute?' I asked.

'I am afraid Judge, I do not. Can you not see that we have a crisis on our hands? The whole city is gathering outside and they require answers.'

'But Captain Mandel, why have you arrested Bain?'

'I have told you, he is the engineer, that is why.'

'But I don't understand. How is prosecuting him going to help? It won't fix the pass for you,' I said trying my best to play him at his game.

'Judge, I have a busy day ahead of me. And you will have one too, soon enough. I would suggest that you get back to work. The next time you see the engineer it will be in your court. There is no need to worry for his safety, my men have him under guard. And in the court we will be producing the evidence. Now if you don't mind, I have an angry crowd to deal with.'

With this Mandel went over to a half-length mirror at the door of the charge office and straightened his jacket and adjusted the fleur-de-lis at his neck. The Konstabel then opened the door and placed a small wooden fruit crate onto the stoep for the captain to step onto.

'Comrades, fellow citizens,' I heard Mandel begin. I walked over to the officer on duty to see if I would be allowed to visit Bain. 'No, that is not regular,' the charge officer said turning his back on me. With this I went back to the window to listen to what the captain was saying.

'… the government has sent him. But it's he and his liberal friends who are refusing us our liberty.'

'Who are the others?' I heard some of the people call out.

'You know them. They sit in judgment of you. You know this I am sure. There is no need to name them. They are the ones that corrupt you with their alcohol and their sugar. They are the ones who are poisoning our people. I have fought them with my sugar and alcohol tax. Remember, citizens and comrades, the liberal is the one that will impose on you their systems of eating and their immoral laws. They are the ones who refuse you meat. Be on your guard citizens, they will not destroy our culture here. Long live the Republic. Long live Albertsburg.' And then to my utter astonishment he shouted out, 'Amandla!' And the crowd replied with slightly baffled and irregular call of the word, 'Awethu.'

With this Mandel got off his box and he came back into the station, the Konstabel following him with the wooden fruit crate in hand. Mandel walked past me to his office with a look of delight in his cold blue eyes. I knew there was no point in remaining there. As I began to leave, however, the Konstabel stopped me. 'My Lady, the captain has instructed me that you must remain here until the crowd has dispersed. It is for your own protection. We would not want an incident.'

'What incident could possibly occur?' I said pushing past him. But as I opened the door and looked out, the dispersing crowd turned and looked at me. Then something came flying from the middle of it in my direction. It smacked against the door to the side of my head with some force and then went rattling onto the cement of the stoep. It was only when it settled against the small parapet wall next to where I was standing that I realised, after resetting my glasses onto the bridge of my nose, that it was the key to a Mercedes-Benz. Then some in the crowd began shouting and jeering. And with this I stepped back into the relative safety of the police station.

It took some time for the crowd to leave and I heard there were some shouts to the police that I should be brought out, but, to my relief, the police showed no sign of submitting. When I left the station about half an hour later the key to the Benz was still lying where it had fallen on the stoep. I thought of picking it up and perhaps finding out who it belonged to. But instead I dribbled it with my foot onto the road and then kicked it into the metal grate of a storm-water drain where it fell into the dry subterranean sewer.

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We had been waiting for the journalist De Lambert's return for some days. He had been in contact with us when Boetsman was killed, wanting to know the circumstances. A few days later a small piece appeared in *Ukulwa Daily* that mentioned the second entry wound. But the article did not attract much attention in the rest of the country due to the news of the protests and arrests that

were occurring in the capital. But after having restored contact with De Lambert, he had expressed a willingness to return to Albertsburg. Just why he wished to, he had not told us. But it was with him that we devised one of our last plans to try and gain some form of popularity amongst the local population.

With Mandel's attention seemingly focussed on Bain, we felt it might be the time to try to reintroduce some access to the internet. One thing we knew was that the Captain had been unwavering in his attempt to keep the web out of most citizens' reach. And it was perhaps the one thing that we had heard people openly grumbling about. We knew that this could easily be done by smuggling top-up cards back into the town. My husband and I had, on a few occasions, gone to the mine on St Thomas to look for any signs of the *Kwerekwere* in the hope that they may be willing get us a supply of these 'contraband'. But there was still no sign of them. We even resorted to calling out the word Boetsman, Daniel and I thought we had heard the one man calling. But the only answer to these shouts, were our own echoes.

So, when De Lambert said he was going to hike over back to Albertsburg, taking the same route he used to escape, we had wired him as large an amount of money as we could, so as to bring us top-up cards to distribute. We all agreed that returning access to the still independent newspapers, who were covering the anti-government sentiment in the cities, might go some way to undermining Mandel. We also thought that it might help improve the people's diet. Mandel's recent ban on sugar, fruit and vegetables, almost stopped people from eating a balanced diet in favour of eating solely ostrich meat. And many people in the town were complaining of exhaustion and fatigue.

It was the Sunday night after the engineer had been arrested that we heard a gentle tapping on the back door and discovered a dirty and tired De Lambert sitting on the step. He had fallen in the dark several times on the way down the slopes of Towerkop and I could see his face and hands were bloodied. 'It is like there is a Hadrian's wall around this place. There are trenches and boulders blocking every path. And I couldn't get the idea out of my head that I might step on a mine.' Were the first words he uttered as I motioned for him to stay where he was until my husband had made sure that the policemen in the bakkie outside were asleep.

'I am so glad to see you.' I said. I was genuinely happy to see a friendly face even if it did have blood on it.

He grunted, ignoring me. 'There is something else up there,' he said looking up towards the snow-capped head of Towerkop which was now illuminated by the moon.

'What do you mean?'

'There are people up there,' he said, 'up in the mountains. At least I hope they were people. I saw only their shadows.'

I looked at him more closely and saw in his eyes and in his trembling hands that he was suffering from the beginnings of shock. 'How are the police?' I called out to my husband.

'By the looks of it they're asleep. But I would keep the light off.'

'Come in. Sit down. Let's get you warm and get some sugar into you,' I said helping the journalist towards the kitchen table in the dark. I put my old robe that hung at the back door around him and made him some tea and honey. He sat trembling for some time and I called for blankets. 'Are you okay?' I asked, but he did not answer. Instead he sat there staring out the window at the moonlight. His bottom lip seemed to be moving; perhaps out of cold and shock or perhaps in some personal and silent monologue.

'My feet are very cold,' he said finally in a deadened tone. And with this I sat down opposite him and took off his boots. His socks were soaked through and taking them off I began to rub his feet as I had done with my son when, as a little boy, he had made the same complaint.

'Did your mother ever do this to you?' I asked as I worked as hard as I could to restore the blood flow.

'No, I don't think so.' His voice was still empty and emotionless. 'So Boetsman,' he said after another period of silence, 'he's dead.'

'Yes, it was a great shock, but we are glad at the very least to have *you* back. Let me get a basin of warm water for your feet.'

By then my husband felt that it was safe to turn on the light and I placed the small basin of warm water at his feet and got out my first aid kit and began to clean some of his grazes while my husband stoked the fire in the lounge.

'Are you okay?' I asked feeling his forehead and then holding his hands to see if warmth was returning to him.

'Yes, fine,' he answered.

'What people are up in the mountains? Do you think they are Mandel's men? Or perhaps the Civil Co-operation Bureau?'

'Oh no, I don't think so.' His speech was still slow. 'They wouldn't have let me get here if they were. They seemed happy to let me pass. God knows what they are doing up there though. Perhaps they aren't real.'

'Spirits you mean?'

But he did not answer. My husband came into the kitchen and we helped the journalist into the lounge. 'Have you got anything to drink?' he asked.

And my husband produced some of our witblitz. He splashed a good amount of it into the mug and topped it up with some rooibos tea. Then we left him under some blankets on the couch and went to prepare some dinner.

'Something's happened to him,' I whispered.

'What do you mean?'

'Something in his eyes isn't right. He says there are people up in the mountains.'

'*Kwerekwere*?'

'Maybe. He thinks they might be ghosts.'

'He wouldn't be the first,' my husband said looking at me and raising an eyebrow.

When we took him some ostrich soup I was glad to notice that there was something a little more substantial in his manner.

'So, I am told you had a bit of an event coming over the mountains,' my husband began as we sat down with him.

'Yes, I think it was probably the cold that got to me. I might have begun to imagine things. But it did seem for a while like there was a human presence up there. But they could have been stray ostriches for all I know. But it seemed like they were waiting for something up there.'

'Might they have been *Kwerekwere*?'

'They could have been, I guess.'

'If so, it is us that are waiting for them. They would be a solution. And I could do with a decent bottle of scotch. You didn't bring any?'

'No, it was too heavy. I drank the bottle I had.'

'Oh well, never mind. I am sorry that our situation has put you through that. But we are glad to have you here again.' My husband put his hand on De Lambert's shoulder.

'I would rather be here than back home,' he said taking a large swig of a witblitz and rooibos.

'Well, thank you. Not that we fully understand why you are here,' I said.

'Oh, it is not dedication to you,' he paused. 'It's my wife. She just served me with papers. There is nothing for me in the capital. She's taken the children.'

'Shame,' both my husband and I replied in unison. 'Perhaps she just needs some time to think. I have seen many cases where partners return to each other.'

'Oh no, she's made up her mind. Nothing I can say or do will bring her back. Absolutely nothing. There's somebody else.' Once again, I noticed an unsteadiness emerge into his blue unhappy eyes and I thought it best to change the topic.

'Did you bring the top-up cards?'

He nodded. 'I liked Boetsman,' he suddenly broke out. And then as if summoning up his professional persona he asked: 'Is there no proof that Mandel did it?'

'Besides that second entry wound? Nothing. Not that we could do much even if we could prove it,' I replied.

He shook his head. 'It's a bloody shame.'

We then began to talk of what was going on in the capital. A new wave of demonstrations had finally come to an end after a series of arrests and violence. Not only had there been police beatings but several people had been killed with live ammunition. Many believed that the shots had come from the roof of the building next to parliament, the headquarters of the Civil Co-operation Bureau – a building commonly known as the 'Devil's Coop' due to its Neogothic architecture.

'There's also been proof of the re-emergence of organised Co-op operations. You must have heard of Rev Francis Quarta's death. The rumour is that the Co-op poisoned his underwear. You knew him well of course.'

'Yes,' my husband replied, 'he was our chaplain in the old days. It came as a shock.'

'I should tell you that is the reason why I was allowed back here by *Ukulwa.'*

'Why's that?' my husband asked.

'You.'

'What do they want from me?'

'The paper is interested in what you two are doing. You know the demonstrators are calling for your return. The word is out that you are basically under house arrest here. And they are singing 'Stephen Tlali hold my hand' at the demonstrations. And with this De Lambert softly broke into song *'Stephen Tali bamb'isandla sam'*

My husband smiled wistfully and I held his hand.

'And what do they think I can do? Two years ago there were demonstrations calling for me to be removed. They claimed I was a homosexual. That I was corrupt. No, I can't return after all of that. They will have to sing for somebody else.'

'But they know now those were lies,' De Lambert said staring into his drink.

'Still, I can't return after all of that,' my husband said. 'And how would I get out of here to the capital anyway?'

'I am here. There are ways.'

'I would need more than just your help. And who could I rely on, Kosaner?'

'Yes, that's a problem,' De Lambert looked tired and rested his forehead in his hand. He stared blankly down at the carpet. 'It doesn't look like Kosaner will break with the president.'

'He is the only hope we have. If Kosaner won't lead the way no one can.'

Robert Kosaner had once been our great political ally and friend. But he had not stood up for us when the going had got hot and he had made no public utterance for many years.

'It's like everybody's gone bloody mad,' De Lambert said, 'it really is. The capital has changed. You can't even put on your own underwear without wondering if some agent of the Co-op has poisoned them. It's like the old days, like a plague's returned.'

'It never left,' my husband replied.

With this I got to my knees and I asked my husband, for the first time in many years, to pray with me. De Lambert too, even though he was a committed atheist, then got onto his knees and we all knelt holding hands in the middle of the lounge floor. 'Dear Lord,' I began, 'we would like to remember our old friends Boetsman and Rev. Quarta, good men both, in their own ways. We trust they are both safe in your arms. Lord we take succour in the knowledge that your justice cannot sleep forever…'

# Chapter 16

Whatever good De Lambert has brought to Albertsburg it was not immediately apparent in the first few weeks of his return. Shortly after his arrival Dr Eloff registered the first case of scurvy amongst the children. Mandel's taxing and his somewhat bizarre cultural attack on fruit and vegetables had been startlingly effective. His claim was that the use of vegetables and fruit were a simple 'substitution for sugar' which he claimed to be waging a war against. Furthermore he now made more and more reference to the fact that 'liberals' were trying to deny the town their cultural inheritance. The eating of meat was a cultural right and that the veganism of the liberals was a direct attack on this. Of course, just who these vegans were was never made clear. The only vegetarian in the town that was known to anyone was the deaf jeweller and with his disability he rarely made public pronouncements.

However, the sale of fruit and vegetables was said by Mandel to be part of the capitalist agenda which had 'caused suffering and obesity in the world'. And as absurd as it may sound, a strong anti-fruit and vegetable movement began to develop in the dorp. All of this talk of a meat diet, was directly related to the fact that Mandel's cousin ran the largest ostrich farm in the area. So when De Lambert wrote a piece for *Ukulwa Daily* on the growing cases of scurvy and malnutrition in the district he was arrested for sedition.

When Dr Eloff and myself tried to meet with Mandel, he simply refused to see us. Four days after De Lambert's arrest the good doctor and I went to the police station. Mandel's door was closed and two new curly haired police recruits in yellow tracksuits were sitting at the door, pick handles lying on their laps. They seemed asleep but as I moved towards them, without getting up, they crossed their sticks to block the door. 'We need to speak to the Captain.'

'He's engaged,' a dry and empty voice replied. 'The door is closed.'

'How are you feeling gentlemen?' Eloff asked.

'The door is closed,' the other replied.

'Can I just feel your foreheads?'

'The door is closed.'

Eloff then went and touched both men on the forehead raising his eyebrows in surprise as he did so. He then motioned with his head that we should go to the charge office.

The Konstabel was standing there at the counter under a white neon strip light. When we asked him if we could see the captain he simply held up a piece of paper for us to read:

*From The Orfice Of The Capstan,*

*Any further enquiries into the eating of vegetable and fruits will be meat with arrest. The journalist, Raymond de Rambert will be heeld until decanting.*

*Best wish,*

*Kaptain Modle*

'Now please Lady, Doctor uhm this is the order. Please I've no wish to, you know, put you…away.' He paused. He was slurring his words and I took a step closer to him to see if I could smell any booze on his breath.

Dr. Eloff, I noticed, was inspecting him too. Eloff was closely examining his hair that had, seemingly overnight, gone curly. 'Konstabel,' Eloff asked, 'is that a perm?'

'Oh no, I just like woke up like this,' he said running his hand through a thick stack of curly locks that were now collected on the top of his head. 'Quite a few of the other guys have curls now, hey. Captain says it's because rain, uhm, is ja…' He trailed off. Each word he spoke seemed to come out of the thick Scotch mist of a confused mind.

'Yes, well you should tell your captain he'll soon have a police force with no bite.'

'Ja Doctor, I'll, uhm, just write that down. Uhm.' He paused. 'Sorry, like. What was that again?'

'Soon the police will have no bite,' Eloff repeated slowly.

'Soon the…sorry, I've forgotten again. Could you, just write it down for me Doc. My memory is really…not that…my heart feels like a shoe in a washing machine,' he said softly to himself placing his hand on his chest with a look of concern. Eloff took the Konstabel's pen and wrote down a few words on his pad in capital letters.

'Okay right, now, let's just have a look at this.' The Konstabel took up the pad. He seemed to struggle to focus on the words in front of him. 'EAT SOME FRUIT!' he read slowly and deliberately. 'Sorry, I'm afraid I'm going to have to place you under…' He stopped. He looked down at his desk and picked up a stapler as if seeing it for the first time, 'you know the way, down the hall the keys are… you know…there…I just need a little rest.' With this he slumped down onto the chair behind him and, still inspecting the stapler, he began humming *Sarie Marais* as if nobody was in the room with him.

'Well, the news is,' Dr. Eloff said, as we walked out of the station, 'they all have scurvy.'

'You don't think that it has anything to do with alcoholism?'

'No, it's the scurvy that is getting to them. That curly hair is one of the signs.'

Sure enough in the days that followed all the junior members of the constabulary, who Mandel had enforced his high protein diet on, began to fall very ill. In fact, in that week it was not unusual to see human teeth lying on the main road near the police station. There were also quite a few scattered around Dr Eloff's surgery, where many of the policemen had sought help. This was despite Mandel's insistence that none of his officers were to go to Eloff, who he referred to as 'that quack of a neo-liberal sangoma'.

Of course, we knew that now was the perfect time to act against Mandel. The police, after all, were almost entirely incapacitated. And the people were, on the whole, as weak and helpless as newborns. The sight of citizens simply sitting or lying on the pavements taking 'a rest' in the baking sun or in the rain, their umbrellas lying helplessly next to them, was not uncommon. The constant checking for loose teeth had also become standard practice. The dorp was, as both my husband and I acknowledged, ripe for the picking.

The problem was that both De Lambert and Bain were in jail and although we could have easily retrieved them, the keys being on the hook outside the cells, once the town was well again we might have to face charges. The general populace were still very much under Mandel's spell. For even though we had partially brought back the internet we were still waiting for the people to change their minds on him. Even if my husband, Jean, Bain, De Lambert and maybe Clarence had wrested control away from the captain at that stage, we still weren't likely to win any popularity contest. As such our power could then only be maintained by continuing to withhold fruit and vegetables, which would have hardly been proper.

However, a few days after our attempt to speak to him on the subject of fruit Mandel agreed to meet. 'I can see my people are suffering.' Was the first thing that he said when the doctor and I sat down. 'I am coming to you in the name of reconciliation.' Eloff and I looked at one another. 'Teeth can't continue to litter our streets.'

'I agree,' replied the doctor, 'it is an omen of change.'

'What do you mean?' Mandel looked at him with suspicion.

'Have you not heard of the prophecy that where teeth are sown on the ground a race of men will rise up and lay waste to the land.'

'Do not waste my time with these false prophecies,' he shouted. But I noticed in the neon light that a feverish sweat began to reflect on his face. 'Jesus Christ,' he said reaching for the glass of water on his desk. His hands were shaking. 'I am not sure I am feeling particularly well myself at the moment.'

'You should see a doctor,' Eloff said with a wry smile.

'Why the bloody hell do you think I have you here?' he yelled. And then putting his fingers on his forehead he massaged his temples for a moment. 'Now,' he began, 'I want to introduce the African potato into people's diets and I want you to help.'

Eloff looked at me and raised his eyebrows. 'And why would we do that?' I asked.

'Because it's good for these people you claim to care about.'

'Is it?' I asked turning to Eloff.

'Well it certainly won't do them any harm. But Captain I would like to introduce some other fruits and vegetables to their diet.'

'Like what?' Mandel asked.

'I won't go totally against your no sugar agenda, if that makes you happy.'

'Okay, I am listening.'

'Let's say: rose hips, chillies, lychees and broccoli for a start.'

'With the African potato?'

'If that's what you want. But tell me, why this sudden interest in that?'

'Have you not heard of its miraculous curative qualities. I can read you a list.'

'I take it this has nothing to do with the government's interest and economic investment in it as a supplement?'

'Will you help or not?' Mandel asked between clenched teeth.

'Your gums are bleeding Captain.'

'What the bloody hell is that meant to mean?' he shouted, but just as he said this a trickle of blood ran from the corner of his mouth.

'Damn you, you bloody sangoma! Don't bring your witchcraft into my presence,' he yelled raising himself from his chair and pointing at the doctor.

'Mandel, this is no witchcraft, it is a simple lack of vitamin C.'

'I've been eating…' he trailed off.

'Well clearly not enough.'

'Will you help me?'

'Only if you help yourself.'

Mandel smiled and sat down, whipping the blood from the corner of his mouth with a perfectly white handkerchief.

And so with Mandel's consent we drew up a list of 'sugar-free' fruit and vegetables that the town should include in their diet and distributed it. But the African potato was a clear sign that he and the government were developing closer and more mutually beneficial ties. But what else could

we do? And as we said to each other perhaps any normalization of ties between us and the captain might be beneficial.

As if to prove this policy correct, Mandel also, surprisingly, reduced the 'tariffs' at the hole that were 'protecting local industry and culture and fighting obesity'. And so the corner *café* slowly returned to being a shop again and Jean was able to go back to her bakery, a place that had been closed for many months. What was more, the rain had returned and the valley began to sprout a bright haze of Lincoln green.

This was a period when my husband and I had little to do, besides wait for the access to the internet to hopefully take its hold. We spent our time watching the next-door neighbours' hair going from standing bolt upright to what my husband referred to as 'being somewhere between the state of electrified cat and badly maintained Irish Wolfhound'.

The person who was truly affected by all that happened at this time was De Lambert. Despite my best efforts to have him released, he had spent his ten days in solitary confinement. In fact, he had lain on the concrete floor of his cell with no blankets or bolster for at least seven of those days. The police had simply, during their time of scurvy, forgotten to feed him and he had survived by licking water off the wall as it ran from a leak in the roof. Finally, when the police had returned to a normal diet they remembered the arrest and finally brought him to court. I was deeply shocked by his appearance and I had him released immediately. He had lost a considerable amount of weight and his eyes had a now almost permanently unfocused stare to them. He was, in many ways, unrecognisable from the person who had gone into Mandel's jail.

In the next few weeks he gave up on journalism and started working as a waiter at Jean's bakery with the air of a somnambulist. He also took to sleeping in Jean's bakery on a thin mattress which he rolled out between the oven and work bench. He did this despite the fact that I had organised accommodation for him at the Jacobsons'. I had done this partly in the hope that he might begin some kind of romance with one of the daughters. An idea that I thought might be good for all of them. But the solitary confinement had shaken him, as I believe it does to all those who have poor emotional support networks. As he admitted to me later, he had lain there in complete darkness for what felt like several months and it was at some indeterminable point that he was suddenly taken by what he referred to as 'the complete indifference of the world'. This lugubrious bewilderment was brought on, I believe, not by the world but rather as I put to him by a 'sudden lack of faith in others'.

'Perhaps,' he replied, his eyes still glazed by the experience. 'The only way I can describe it, is that it was like the scenery of the stage around me had suddenly collapsed. I couldn't remember where I was for hours each time I woke. In fact I was never quite sure if I was awake or asleep.

The only realisation that I was alive, that I still had a will to live, was when I would run my tongue along the wall in search of water.'

Clearly a deep psychological wound had been opened. It was some days before this admission, however, when I was sitting at Jean's bakery that I asked why he did not simply go home. 'You know, Mandel would be all too happy to see the back of you. If you wanted to go you would receive a guard of honour. It's not like you are trapped here, like the rest of us.'

'But Judge, don't you see?' he said, his eyes at last showing signs of engagement, 'there is nothing for me in the capital. And, after all, I am perfectly happy here.'

'Really?' I asked. 'Surely your children and your career are things you *must* try to return to?'

'My wife has taken the children. They are with her, she won't tell me where that is until I sign the papers and things are finalised. I will not see them for months, maybe for years.'

'Nevertheless, don't give up on them. You will regret it, as will they. You're a good person. I know that.'

'I don't see that your failed relationship with your son has done you much damage. You never mention him. It is as if he doesn't exist to you. I'll simply have to do that with my children.'

I regretted having just put down a sizeable tip on the table and I thought, for a minute, that I might withdraw it. But when I looked at his face, I knew he had meant me no harm. I paused for a moment and stared unfocusedly out at the courthouse thinking of my son's infidelities. I knew that it was no doubt our neglect that had caused it. 'Don't give up on your children,' I said, 'and don't give up your job. You are, I suspect, a good father and I know the importance of your journalism.'

'You know Judge,' he answered sitting down at the table with me, 'those days in the cell set me thinking about wanting to be a waiter. I realised, lying there, a waiter knows themselves, unlike most other people. They have a job with tasks and they perform them for their own sake. Journalism? There're too many motives behind it. Why does one write: For Justice? Money? Fame? Career? Fear? Because one believes in some bullshit ideology? To appease the editor? Or worse, the owner? And besides I am tired of trying to tell the truth. My wife doesn't care for it. She has been lying to me for years. And look at her, she's *happy*. So why, on earth, should I care a damn for it? And what do I know about the truth?'

'The truth?' I broke in, 'we can't really know that. But we can establish what is false, can't we?' And then I whispered. 'We can prove that it is false to say that there were no cases of scurvy and malnutrition in Albertsburg. We have evidence that there are. That has meaning, even Mandel had to admit that. It might not be the whole truth about Albertsburg but it's certainly not false.'

He looked at me pensively. 'I'll think about that on my mattress tonight, but that's a strange thing for a judge to say.'

'But judges, at least on this earth, never work with Truth.' I looked again to see if anybody was around. 'I don't need to know the truth of Bain's life in the upcoming case. I simply need know if Mandel's claim that Bain is 'the engineer of Albertsburg' is false. Even if Bain has lied to us, that does not make him guilty. Say if it turns out he is an engineer and he has not told us, that has no relevance in the case. If it turns out he is not the one sent by the government then he is free to go. The Truth? Who could ever know that about a man like Bain…'

Just then a contingent of new police recruits, dressed in yellow track suits with pick handles resting on their shoulders like rifles, could be seen heading for the bakery.

De Lambert got up and took the money I had put on the table. 'Good, afternoon officers,' I heard him say. 'Table for six? Beautiful day, is it not?'

# Chapter 17

During the time of the scurvy we had begun to freely distribute cell-phone top-up cards to all members of the public. However, our hopes that access to the internet might turn the town against Mandel were sorely mistaken. Instead quite the reverse seemed to occur. In fact, throughout the trial Mandel's appearance at the proceedings was greeted with cheers. These he acknowledged by waving in a manner not unlike the Queen. He had taken to wearing a pair of bleached-white cricket gloves with the padding removed. At a distance he looked, I guess, imperial but if one got too close the effect was less convincing. But the image of him as 'King of Albertsburg' was supported by a Facebook page dedicated to him. And this was the page from which most people of the town began to get their news.

Seemingly there was nothing we could do after the page was set up, other than simply let events unfold. We had heard nothing from the government about either the engineer or Bain's identity in the last month. Despite all attempts to verify who this stranger in our town was, nothing had in fact been uncovered. No amount of googling or phoning or emailing had established whether he was who he said he was and what career he had once pursued. Whether he was a civil servant as he claimed or, as the state claimed, a civil engineer, or simply a novelist, could not be either proved or disproved. After over two months the evidence against him was still only:

1. Enoch's testimony which included the claim that he had seen the engineer's work ID card.
2. Possession of detailed maps of the area.
3. The possession of drawings of the pass by the artist Anton Kanameyer. One which depicted the actual site where the pass had collapsed.
4. Possession of a small telescope on a tripod.
5. The claim that he was from the family of the engineers called Bain – the very people who had built the pass – and that he had been sent here to fix his great grandfather's mistake.
6. And finally, there was the much-scrutinised piece of paper called 'Exhibit C' which was said to have the words 'civil engineer' written on it in Bain's own hand.

This miserable scrap of paper had been inspected so many times and been fingered by so many hands that near the end of the trial even the word 'civil', one of the few legible words on the wretched document, could hardly be read. Almost every witness had had a go at deciphering the word that followed it. Even the reclusive jeweller who had never met the engineer, who rarely left

his shop and whose deafness excluded him from the rest of the community, came onto the stand with his magnifying loupe to have a go at unravelling the mystery of that torn and inky blotch.

There the goldsmith had sat, scrutinising the document, his wizened face contorted in concentration, his loupe protruding from his eye socket. Then finally he took out a pen crossed out the two words under consideration and wrote underneath it in a fine and steady engravers hand: *Civil marriage – hand-writing displays that possible agent of the Devil or perhaps atheist, independence of character and tendencies to over rationalise, not to be trusted. Also possible, civil conviction.*

At this point I excused the venerable, if somewhat confused, man from the witness box and it was agreed that Exhibit C had been irretrievably corrupted.

By the end of the second month I became confused as to what course of action would alleviate the situation. Mandel and the state prosecutor, Adv. Hollow, seemed intent on dragging the case out for as long as they could. Hollow had in fact subpoenaed a huge number of the dorp to testify, and many, if not most, had little or nothing to add to the case. And so we sat waiting, at times for the witnesses to get to the point and others for Clarence to fix the ventilation system. This still, on occasion, belched out dust in loud canon-like eruptions or at times leaked out a thick acrid smoke from the vents on the floor. So customary had the trial become in everyday life that I had almost forgotten what Albertsburg was like before it began. It seemed as if I was powerless to stop the proceedings. We had simply run out of ideas and so I let the farce run its course. I knew at some point that I would have to put an end to this, but an effective mechanism was, for the moment, not available to me.

A ritual began in the second month which I would observe every morning via the small mirrored window in my chambers that overlooked the court. A much-changed De Lambert from the one who had waitered a month ago would arrive to take up the prime position in the front row. He would take out his tablet and have his social media accounts active, typing out a stream of judicial observations – for all the good that they did us. Then about half an hour later a steady flow of the town's people would filter in. Followed by the arrival of Mandel in his white cricket gloves, his fleur-de-lis still hanging at his throat. After this Clarence would gently lead the engineer to his seat, removing his handcuffs with an almost heartbreaking gentleness and care. I would then walk down my small flight of stairs and ready myself at my bench. Then Sarah would call for the proceedings to begin.

Perhaps the only element of this ritual that showed the slightest change was the engineer himself. His ramrod uprightness of the first month had been reduced to a bent and tired aspect. His feet seemed to drag now ever so slightly along the ground as he walked – although to begin with I put this down to the fact that he was encumbered by leg irons. But more surprisingly by the

end of the second month I began to believe that he had started giving his hair a blue rinse. A fashion, my husband had noticed, that seemed to have gripped some others in the dorp. It was true that Clarence had pointed out to me that the engineer's skin and the white of his eyes were looking 'yellowish' but I had thought little of it, believing that the change was an act of vanity on his part – I have seen many people staining their skin in both the cities and the rural areas of this country. But it was only after he was cross examined for the third time that I realised that all was not well.

In truth, outside of the trial the engineer had begun to cut a very strange figure. Due to the terms of his bail he was restricted (what is referred to as 'banned') to the municipal boundary of Albertsburg, which did not include his own house. Accordingly, he spent the hours of the curfew in the court cells with Daniel Jacobson under Clarence's supervision. But during the day, when the court was not in session, he was able to wander the streets. As such he lived, much like the rest of us did, by the order of Mandel.

During the afternoons in the weekends he had taken to roaming the dorp rather aimlessly. His legs were shackled with a long chain which dragged on the ground as he walked. You could hear him coming your way from some distance, which led to his solitude, for nobody wished to get too near to him. Later, at the closing of the day, he could be found at the site of the Jakkal en Vel. It had, since Boetsman's death, been knocked down by a bulldozer. It was usual, after that, to find policemen in yellow tracksuits with picks and spades excavating the area in search of Boetsman's hoard of cash. A treasure which he had supposedly buried beneath the patterned Victorian tiles of his floor. Of this, of course, they found not a trace. But the engineer could be seen there on most days. He would sit in silence on his haunches like a bird of prey on top of the huge mound of rubble that now began to tower over the environment like a mine dump.

'Good evening Mr. Bain,' I would say as I walked past him on weekends, trying my best not to call him 'engineer' which by now everybody did. 'Have they found any of it yet?' I would call out.

'Not yet Judge, not yet, but I think they are getting close,' he would croak out in a voice unaccustomed to speech. To be sure I longed to know just why he had taken up such a vigil over this absurd excavation, but I knew for his safety, and mine, it was better not to be caught talking privately.

But I would not like to give you the impression, that he had turned into something of a *bergie* or vagabound. Because nothing could be further from the truth. He was, as always, immaculately turned out in a broad brimmed hat, wayfarer sunglasses, a pair of light-khaki pants, a grey linen shirt, a newish looking pair of hiking boots and a bottle of water strapped to his belt.

In the second month of his banning I had given him consent to garden in the park next to the courthouse. After this permission was approved by Mandel, he spent his mornings, when we were not in session, in the park growing melons and pumpkins which climbed up the concrete wall of the court. He had convinced the Jacobsons to deliver bags of fertiliser to the park. This seemed to have sent his vines into frenzies of growth and they soon began to cover huge sections of my building. And so by the end of the trial he could be seen either in the park or at the excavation site of the Jakkal en Vel crouching like a silent watcher or digging, watering and tending his creepers. But he was almost completely socially cut off from the people of Albertsburg, who moved about him as if he were a modern-day leper.

But the modicum of happiness that his gardening brought him ended about a week ago. It happened after the men at the site of the Jakkal en Vel had punched a hole into the main artery of the underground sewer that runs directly below the courthouse out towards Enoch's farm. The damage they caused to the keystones of the arch resulted in a collapse of nearly twenty metres of Albertsburg's labyrinthine Victorian substructure. And this incursion into our underworld brought with it an unbelievably unpleasant stench. At times it was so overpowering that when it caught in one's throat and nostrils it brought on nausea. What was more, when the South Easter blew up from the ruins of Boetsman's pub, towards the courthouse, it carried this stench through the vents of the courtroom, rendering the place uninhabitable. As a result all work in the building had to be suspended at these times.

It was on such a day that, having cancelled the morning's proceedings, I was making my way back from church, my Bible and rosary in hand. Then just as I approached the courthouse I saw the engineer bent at the waist, standing among his plants. At first I thought he was simply weeding or aerating the soil. But as I drew closer I realised that he was leaning against the wall of the building and that black bile was coming from his mouth. I hurried towards him calling out loudly so that all around could hear that I was not colluding with him in any manner: 'Mr Bain, are you not well?' I called.

But instead of receiving a reply the engineer collapsed amongst his vegetables, while emitting a strange and disturbing gurgling noise that came from deep within his lungs. When I got to him in the plants, I rolled him onto his side to clear his airways from the vomit. And after making sure that he was still breathing I rushed to Dr. Eloff's house. It was not far from the park and I found the doctor sitting in his *voerkammer* reading a novel I recognised by Damon Galgut. 'Dr Eloff,' I shouted through the burglar bars, 'the engineer has been taken ill. He's vomiting black bile.' Eloff looked startled and walked quickly to collect his Gladstone bag. Then we ran as quickly as we could back to the courthouse.

There we found that the engineer had partly recovered. He was sitting propped up against the concrete wall spitting out the last residue of the black bile from his mouth. Eloff crouched down, took his pulse and shone a torch into his eyes. Then looking at the pool of bile he said: 'Let's take him to the police station. I am not sure it is healthy for him to go back to his cell in the courthouse. That open sewer, I am sure, is the cause of this.' With this we helped him up.

'No, no, please,' he croaked, 'my cell will do. Look, the wind has changed. I'm fine, it was just an episode. I will recover in a minute.' So we took him to his cell, which still retained a unpleasant smell. There Eloff inspected him. 'Is he okay?' I asked.

'Not really. He seems to have contracted a form of hepatitis which I have only ever seen in the locals. That's why his skin is so yellow and his hair has that purple tinge to it. It's an illness that I believed was transmitted from mother to child. I thought it was extremely localised and suspected that it arrived with the cattle plague all that time ago. Of course, whether the engineer has it, it is impossible to say for sure. With Mandel I have no access to a pathology unit. This is the first case I have seen in a foreigner.'

'Your mother was from Prince Albert, wasn't she?' I asked Bain, who was lying on his side on the grey blankets of his bed. He was staring empty-eyed at the wall in front of him.

'Yes,' a dry and breathy whisper came from him.

'It was more localised than that. My guess is that he may have contracted it from the open sewer. We must try and get Mandel to seal it before it spreads to us.' With this Eloff called for Clarence and gave him a list of instructions as to what the engineer could and could not eat and drink. 'Only filtered and boiled water, in fact we should all begin to boil our water. No meat and only fresh fruit and vegetables, where available.'

'Perhaps,' I said, 'you can prepare him some of his own melons and pumpkins.' At this Clarence shook his head. 'What's wrong?' I asked.

'Have you seen them? They can't be eaten. Their pulp is dry. All those plants are bloody doing is swallowing up my courthouse. One of these day I will have to get rid of those things.'

Eloff looked at the two of us with a tired and depressed expression. 'It is like something from the bible,' he said shaking his head.

# Chapter 18

I was not sure if we were being punished because of our demands to have the sewer sealed, but in this the last week of the trial, Captain Mandel again raised the tariffs at the hole. This once more sent up the price of food and almost put Jean out of business. What is more, several cases of hepatitis had now been registered. Again Mandel had turned the situation to his advantage saying that the engineer and the foreigners had brought the disease with them and were spreading it through 'their dirty sexual practices'.

Mandel had been stepping up the rhetoric against the forces of 'liberal corruption'. And there were several posters around the town and on social media stating: Liberals = Lucifer. As absurd to some ears as this may sound, there were many in Albertsburg who openly agreed. Indeed a large proportion of the dorp had taken to writing this message with *koki* pen on plain white t-shirts bought from Jacobson and Daughters. It was a message that the catholic, zionist and protestant churches were eager to deny. But considering that they barely had a constituency here anymore, their message was ignored. The majority of those living here received their religion from a blonde middle-aged YouTube pastor whose plastic church was, as my husband says, only matched by her plastic surgery. We had to admit that our promotion of the internet had almost certainly added to the problems that we were now facing. For this surgically enhanced pastor too was spreading the message that liberals were the root and branch of Satanism.

This message was, however, more recently succeeded by a sign referring to the engineer that has been widely displayed in the dorp and shared on social media.

**WE**
**DEMAND**
**HIS**
**LIFE**

Here I still assume that they mean 'life' imprisonment, for we have no death sentence. Though I have a growing sense that there is a strong possibility that the people could be planning on taking the law into their own hands. Despite De Lambert's best efforts, writing several articles in *Ukulwa Daily*, revealing the gross corruption of Mandel's customs barrier, public sentiment is still fundamentally behind the police and it is really they who will decide the engineer's fate.

The final nail in the coffin of my hopes for change was on the last day of evidence when a demonstration congregated outside the courthouse at the recess. Here a large section of the townspeople, in front of a lacklustre police cordon, burnt an effigy of the engineer with a car tyre around his neck. In fact the police, far from trying to prevent the demonstrators, openly encouraged and facilitated them. One policeman literally took to fanning the flames of the effigy of the engineer with his cap when it threatened to go out.

I watched this performance from the courthouse's tower, hidden both by the darkness of the interior and the engineer's vine that had climbed across part of the window. From there I could see that the Williamsons, Mr Davidson, Enoch and Sarah were all present in the crowd as if they were inspired by an evil spirit. For they danced and moved about in a manner that I could hardly have believed them to be capable of when I first met them. I turned away from this, with an overwhelming sense of helplessness. One thing was certain then, I could not simply release the engineer to this. I would have to consider the repercussions of my judgment very carefully.

When the demonstrators filed back into the court and they were all settled back into the gallery, they carried with them the acrid smell of burning rubber. And although they seemed settled I noticed that not a single one did not have their eyes fixed on the engineer. When the Konstabel was called up for cross examination, a huge cheer rose from them. Some even shouting out the words 'Phanzi the engineer, phanzi. Phanzi the liberal corrupters phanzi. Life for the engineer, life.'

This outburst was followed by shouting and it took me a considerable time to bring the court to order. But finally, Adv Maxwell straightened himself up and moved to the podium. Again the crowd became unsettled and singing broke out. I banged my gavel repeatedly once more. This time, however, so uncontrollable did the people become, that it was impossible to stop and I felt that I may have to call an end to proceedings. However, it was the ventilation system that intervened. For just then it let out one tremendous explosion which sent most people diving onto the ground. In the silence that followed Adv Maxwell took the opportunity to shout out: 'Now Konstabel! I would just like to go through what happened when the engineer … sorry, when Mr Bain (correction), came to the police station to register his presence in the district!' With this the people got back onto their seats and began to listen. The Konstabel smiled to the crowd. He seemed both very pleased with himself, while, at the same time, trembling with anxiety. 'Please tell us what happened, Konstabel.'

'My Lady, the engineer rang the bell of the duty officer.'

'And who was the officer that day?'

'That was me, My Lady.' He laughed nervously, looking around to see if the crowd would laugh with him.

'And then what happened?' Maxwell asked, ignoring the murmurs of support from the gallery.

'He said good afternoon Konstabel, I am the engineer come to fix the road.'

'Was it not the morning when this happened?'

'Yes, My Lady.'

'So, he said "good morning"?'

'Objection My Lady. Leading the witness.' Adv. Hollow was up on his feet.

'Sustained. Mr Maxwell, rephrase.'

'What did the engineer say the morning he came to the police station?'

'He said good morning, My Lady. Although he didn't say, My Lady, My Lady.' There was some tittering from the audience. The witness then twisted his head around to look at the room and then began to laugh with them.

'Mr Maxwell, could we move on please,' I intervened.

'So, he acknowledged that he was the engineer?' Maxwell took up.

'Ja, he did, My Lady.'

'And did he offer you proof that he was the engineer?'

'Ja, My Lady. He showed me his ID. The same ID Enoch saw in the engineer's house, My Lady.'

'How do you know it was the same ID that Enoch saw?'

'Because I saw it, My Lady.'

'But you didn't see what Enoch saw.'

'Ja I did.'

'But Enoch saw it in the house and you saw it in the police station. How do you know it was the same ID?'

'Because.'

'But you didn't see what Enoch saw.'

'Ja I did. I just told you I did,' he said, looking genuinely confused.

'And what did this ID say?'

'It didn't say anything, My Lady.'

'It had no words on it?'

'Oh ja, it had words on it.'

'And what did those words say?' Maxwell drawled out.

"'Civil Engineer" and "Mr Bain".'

'That's it?'

'Yes, Enoch said, My Lady, that it said "Civil Engineer" and "Mr Bain" and that is what it said, just like Enoch said.'

'But Konstabel, I am asking you what you saw, not what Enoch saw.'

'But, we saw the same thing.'

With this I banged my gavel. 'Mr Maxwell, I think the court has understood the point. Can we proceed with the next question?'

Maxwell nodded and looked down at his papers. 'Did Mr Bain ask to see the Captain that morning?'

'Ja he did, My Lady.'

'And did the Captain see him?'

'Ja, he saw him and he said: "Good morning Captain I am the engineer come to fix the road."'

'No Konstabel, I put to you that this did not happen.'

The Konstabel looked confused. 'Uh, like I don't understand.' He looked helplessly at me. Some members of the gallery laughed but were hushed by the majority.

'Is it not true that Captain Mandel was in fact asleep in his office, in full view of everybody in the station including you and Mr Bain?'

'No, My Lady. Captain Mandel does not sleep, he has never slept. I mean has slept at night but never in the day. Or if he has slept in the day it is only because he hasn't slept at night, My Lady.'

'Council,' I said utterly exhausted, 'could you approach the bench?' And then whispering to Maxwell I said. 'Council, we have had over two months of this kind of examination. Is there actually a point to this line of questioning? Should we not just wrap this up? I really doubt you are going to get much more from this witness.'

Maxwell looked at me, shrugged and went back to the podium. 'My Lady, the defence rests.'

I realized then, as I sat there in those final moments of the trial, that I was in fact searching for the engineer's eyes as I had at the beginning of these absurd proceedings. But when I looked at him I found that this was not the same man that had been sitting there those months before. Now he was not Bain the powerful and almost menacing civil servant who was so eager to help us against the machinations of Mandel. Instead he had metamorphosed into what the town had demanded of him, that is to say the first real victim of the new dispensation. There he sat slouched, his eyes moving erratically, looking at the crowd, then to the floor and then up to the ceiling,

searching for … I know not what. Even the broadside of an explosion that then came from the ventilation, which again sent people scattering for cover, hardly seemed to register with him. Instead he sat there unmoved, his shirt hanging off him like a sail flapping in a wind, his eyes hollow, his mouth open.

'This court is adjourned!' I heard Sarah shout. But instead of the court clearing, the people of Albertsburg seemed intent on staying there to jeer at Bain. They began to stand up and move towards the accused. Then some shouting began and for the first time the police had to intervene, forming a rough ring around Bain as he sat helplessly on his seat staring at the floor. Many of the townsmen had taken off one of their shoes and were trying to hit the engineer with them. So rough and uncommitted was the police's protective ring that I noticed they were allowing some of the blows to get through. Shouts of 'liberal scum', 'umlungu', 'moffie', 'Kwerekwere', 'soutpiel', 'rooinek', 'bergie', 'cockroach', 'kafirboetie', 'impimpi' were heard. Others were shouting at him that he was a 'secret Jew' or 'disguised kaffir', a 'curry munching lekula' and a 'gamat', while another section seemed to be calling out that he was a 'fucking Dutchman' and 'a communist'. Finally, however, Mandel stood up and raising his gloved hand into the air shouted to the crowd that they must stop. 'Let justice take its course,' he called out, looking at me over the rims of his aviators. And with this the police began to clear the courtroom.

Clarence, when he came back from helping Mandel's men, placed his hand gently under the engineer's armpit and raised this ruffled and beaten figure from his seat. I watched them cross the floor with the sound of the chain at Bain's ankles dragging on the concrete. 'Mr Bain,' I said as he got to the front of my bench. He looked up at me with piercing eyes that suddenly seemed alive. 'What?' he asked angrily and I knew then that he was not himself. I also knew that there was nothing to say. The couple walked on and I went to my chambers.

# Chapter 19

This chronicle is nearly at an end. But I must offer something more to this surface of things, both as explanation and vindication. Of course, no doubt my future actions will be greeted by any democratic loving person with nothing less than contempt. But there is a story here that is yet to be told. One that, at this moment, remains to me indefinable and yet at the same time seems revealed in images of this place and in the shadowy identity that lies behind them.

But perhaps I should begin by saying, one thing is certain. This case against the engineer is no longer one where I can consider simply what is just or what the law demands. Instead a pragmatic solution is requisite. In my defence – if such a thing can ever be truly defendable – I offer the state of Albertsburg as I have described it above, a place where a malaise has gathered around its people. There is a growing sense of violence lurking, in the streets, the houses, and in the hearts of its people and an ever-greater sense of reckless irrationality growing in the very fabric of its furniture.

What is more, Mandel's administrative and political grip is not the only compounding evil. There has been the government's own continued encroachment into the functionings of the judiciary and its movement towards its own martial state. It is a process that has seen the benches of every court filled with a new breed of papier-mâché magistrates and justices. And, to be sure, there has been the re-emergence of the agents of the state prowling with a pestilential intent under the eaves of our houses. As such neither I nor the statutes of the law of this land can be said to be uninfluenced by the malevolent political forces that are now ravaging our diminished democracy.

Being cognisant of these concerns necessitates that two processes must be considered. Firstly, I must I perform my usual judicial duties of reviewing the evidence against the engineer in relation to the law, but secondly I must acknowledge that there are grievous ramifications for any judgment that follows the letter of that law. In truth my husband and I had made our minds up some time ago as to what should be done. But it has been a plan that required much engineering and as such we have not decided on it lightly.

Here I want to make the next point clear, for I do not wish to implicate only my husband in the decision that *we* have taken. I have taken this decision in my own personal capacity without coercion, but it has been a collective decision and as such I would want it noted for posterity. We are, after all, still the loyal servants of our democracy – although our future actions may not be read as such. But it remains that it is our decision and it is one that history, if Albertsburg ever makes it into history, will judge us by. Justice is, after all, not our only concern. At times there are

competing values that can relegate justice to a subordinate demand. And this, I am sufficiently satisfied, is one such time.

Of course, I must still write the judgment – although its importance is in many ways secondary, as I doubt it will ever be read outside of my court. Nevertheless, in this regard I must review the great pile of discreditable evidence that sits before me. And perhaps here it is worth setting at least some of the record straight. For I feel the need to clarify, if not contest outright, certain evidence that is already in the public sphere. As always with a trial of this nature there are inconsistencies, fabrications and falsehoods. One of the most irksome to me was Enoch's description of the supposed conjugal engagement that the engineer and I enacted on his kitchen table the day I went to his house for tea before the crisis began – a piece of (false) testimony that was circulated widely on social media and was at the centre of the calls for me to recuse myself.

Certainly, I remember spending some time in the kitchen with the engineer, but rather than having sex we spent it inspecting the painting that hangs over the fireplace entitled *Boyhood of Cyrus*. The painting by Deacon of the scene when Cyrus (the future of the King of Persia) proved his hidden kingly identity when as a young boy he ordered the beating of a fellow child while playing a game. It was both by a painter and of a story I had not heard of before and the engineer spent some time on it, even going so far as to find his copy of Herodotus' *The Histories* and reading out the reference.

To be sure, my defence against Enoch's false testimony is one of time constraints. As my husband can confirm, I was at the house for only an hour and a half of which I can recount enough of it to, I believe, corroborate that a sexual liaison could not have taken place. In fact we spent almost all the time discussing the engineer's art collection of bought and inherited works. One of these included a huge and conceptually questionable copy of the twelve-panel work of the Ghent Altarpiece that hangs in his lounge.

'What an extraordinary thing to have had copied and so perfectly too,' I said to Bain as we walked from the kitchen into the sitting room.

'Yes, it was my grandfather's idea, a conceptual joke of sorts. He was fond of that kind of thing. As the story goes he went to Ghent in the thirties and came back with the panels of *The Just Judges* and *John the Baptist* and had the rest of it copied out here.'

I stood there puzzled for a while and then finally asked. 'A joke? Why did you say it was a joke?'

'The centre piece is called *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. My grandfather was a Karoo sheep farmer.'

'That's a little sacrilegious, don't you think?' I said unsure of how I now felt about it.

'Yes,' he laughed sardonically.

'What happened to the farm.'

'My father sold it, he was a doctor. I am not sure why he kept the paintings.'

'He cuts a very different figure to our Giambattista, although there is a certain solidity of build that corresponds,' I remember saying while inspecting the panel of the Baptist.

'Yes, you can't imagine a guy like Boetsman baptising our Lord – more likely to drown him,' he laughed.

'You don't trust Boetsman?'

'Trust him?' he paused. 'There's no man in this town I would go to before him if I needed something done. You could certainly trust him with certain things. But where his actual loyalties lie? I wonder if he even knows. He's a businessman and businessmen are never entirely incorruptible – thank God.'

'Why do you say that?' I asked.

'Oh, no reason,' Bain smiled. 'But let me show you the other paintings by Deacon.' And with this he ushered me, with a strange urgency, out of the lounge and into his study where *The Ring of Gyges* series hung.

Of these paintings, there was no mention in Enoch's testimony. This despite the fact that, like *Boyhood*, their content must have shocked him. What is more, he must have seen them on many occasions both while spying on the engineer at work, as well as when he spent time in the room rummaging through the engineer's papers.

The story itself is retold on three canvasses, each much larger than *Boyhood*. On walking into the room I discovered I was forced to read the sequence backwards from the murder of the Candaules to the finding of the magic ring. But Bain took me straight to the first painting depicting the half-naked Gyges, deep within a subterranean world. His shoulders draped in a shepherd's shawl, he is twisting towards the viewer having found the ring of invisibility in a Trojan-like horse. It depicts the moment just before he discovers the ring's powers of making him invisible with his face exhibiting the first signs of amazement.

I recall the Gyes paintings for several reasons, one is, as I have said, to show how I spent my time at the engineer's house. But I must confess I have other reasons. For I have reflected a great deal over its content during the last few months. The story of Gyges, I have begun to believe, pertains to my own dilemmas and to that of Albertsburg. The most obvious is that it is Socrates' claim, with regards to the story of the ring of invisibility, that justice is absolute and can't be trumped or ignored when it proves inconvenient. This idea, considering the action I have decided

to pursue, sits heavily on me. But the story of Gyges, I have begun to believe, is the story of Albertsburg. For there is something manifestly hidden, some elision, in this dorp and in this trial.

Unlike Enoch, I could recall several other aspects of the room. I remember quite clearly the grandfather clock, the marble busts of Athena and Zeus, the small telescope and papers scattered across the desk. Enoch, however, seems to have remembered very little of the room itself while at the same time remembering other elements in great detail. At times he seems to have been unobservant to the point of disbelief. Of course, it could just be that what we have here are results of a highly disturbed and distracted mind selecting the narrative he wanted to believe in.

However, Enoch was at times a perfectly reliable witness. He was correct in stating that the engineer was in possession of maps of the area and like he said many of these seemed to have been drawn on for a purpose that is not entirely obvious. The engineer's claim that they were hiking maps held water only to an extent that some did mark out trails around the pass. However, there were other markings drawn along the pass itself and near the mine that seemed to make little sense with regards to any hiking trail.

Then there were also the drawings of the pass done by the artist Anton Kannemeyer, which could simply be said to be art, but one of them was of the exact spot where the pass collapsed. It was also true that the telescope found in the engineer's possession did have the markings for horizontal and vertical measurements, much like an engineer's theodolite. Enoch was also right in reporting the presence of the drawing machine on which drawings had been done. Of course, the engineer explained that they were 'mind maps' and timelines for the book that he was in the process of writing. However, this was a book that he could not produce a single chapter of, saying that the work was at too early a stage to be brought into the public domain. Bain stood by this throughout the trial even though it meant that certain suspicions about his activities up there would remain unclear.

Again some of these 'mind-maps' could certainly be identified as plans for a novel, there were clearly character sketches for policemen called Mandel and Joll and there was reference to the *Kwerekwere* (whom he called 'barbarians') whom the town expected to arrive at any day. Others were more obscure and seemed to denote chemical formulas or perhaps computer coding. To this the engineer testified to say that he had taken, like many in the town, more than a simple amateur's interest in the production of alcohol when the town was left dry.

To be sure, there is some *prima facie* evidence to suggest that the man called Joseph Bain has some connection with objects related to engineering and the pass. Although none of the State's claims that he is *the* engineer have been sufficiently corroborated with any definitive evidence. It is here where I remain confused as to the silence of both the National and Provincial Governments

and their seeming refusal to provide any evidence of Bain's previous employment. Of this I can make only two rational conjectures. One, they are incompetent and they have not managed to expedite the request for information. Two, they are colluding with Mandel and have deleted evidence of his employment as a civil servant. Both of these possibilities are, in my experience, entirely consistent with other cases I have overseen.

But there is something more here, something that is not simply explicable in factual terms. I have been progressively convinced that underneath the small-town patina of Albertsburg lies a rotten and visceral underworld. Something is boiling not only here but under the surface of the rest of the country. In fact I believe that we are now skating precariously along the surface tension of a large body of water, a tension that a Leviathan is about to break. Take too close an interest in the surface of things, somebody once wrote, and the truth beneath it becomes hidden.

But in saying this it is the law's role to look at the surface of things, to evaluate action and circumstance. A man's internal moral life is his own, it is no concern of mine as a judge. It is his actions I must evaluate not the inner turmoil that drove him to perform them. That tumult I will never understand completely, as a judge.

And now I must get back to my tasks in this matter. I realise that some of the elements of our lives have to be sacrificed when we are confronted with such things, even if the sacrifice strikes at certain values that I have cherished above all others. At times, brute reality must become our master. Sometimes, as my mentor in jurisprudence once taught me many years ago, we are placed in the position of choosing between evils, and honesty does not permit us to obscure that. In this regard, I pray that history will judge me with understanding. Tomorrow I will deliver an infernal judgement. It will be something from which, no doubt, very little good will be recovered. However, I believe that all other possible solutions have been exhausted. As such these notes will, I hope, at some later date go some way to vindicating my actions. My God and this country forgive me.

# Part II

# The Ruin of the Valley

# Chapter 1

When I was sent to Albertsburg the hole was still not fixed. No doubt even now it lies in the same state as I found it that day; the day I walked the four-kilometres from the police barrier to the town, along the muddy road of the pass. I had been sent to Albertsburg by the government to sort out the mess at the courthouse. But with each step that took me to that dorp I developed a growing sense of resentment. It was the work of a sangoma, I thought to myself. They were asking me to read the bones, bones already laid out for me.

They said I would have judicial independence – for what that was worth back then. I could write my own findings. But they knew there was nothing to find. No forensic officers or auditors had been sent for. They knew that, even as I got on the bus to get out there, the narrative told in the media was the one that I would find. I am not embarrassed to say that – it was simply the way things were back then. There was no need for me and my enquiry. Politically, well that was another matter, they required me for their own uses.

But I should state that it was not as if they were wrong about what had happened up there. In a sense the bones had fallen perfectly for them. There was no need to corrupt the evidence. Judge O'Higgins had given them the rope to hang herself with. I just needed to put it around her neck; they would do the rest. What was objectionable to me was that *I* had to do it. Why couldn't they get one of their own men? Why drag me out of bed in the middle of the night in order to do their meddling? For I knew that if I did not give them the conclusions (or lack thereof) that they required, they would simply find somebody else to do it.

Of course, I had seen on their media some of what had happened. But nobody had actually been up there in person. To be fair, most people, the government in particular, had other concerns at the time. As such I went up there as Abraham, dragging with me the Isaac that was my career. Though just why the president had called *me* out that night, I still, to this day, could not tell you. At that stage I was a very young judge. I was certainly not well-known. Even the minster said to me, when he called on the Sunday at two in the morning, 'Manzini, the president has actually requested you by name, I'm not sure why. Just do your best. This is all I can ask. And remember this is an independent commission of enquiry. That is what we require. Independence.' It was highly irregular for a judge, still sitting, to be in charge of such a thing. But, as the minister kept saying: 'The president has asked for you by name. It's your independence that she values.'

That Monday morning, I received an email from the mayor of Albertsburg. It stated that there was no point in bringing my car up. I would have to park it at the hole and it would not be safe there. There were people in the mountains and rumours of unrest. Instead I was sent detailed

instructions about what bus services to take from the capital. I was also given a number to phone when I got to the hole.

The bus made its way up the mountain pass little faster than a jog. I was its only passenger. I knew by then that the bus driver was annoyed with me for having made him drive up there. I had found him at the bus station in a one car dorp at the foothills of the Swartberg. A hateful little place called Prince Albert, full of sulking locals and not a decent coffee to be found. The bus station itself was a large asbestos hanger, inside of which sat an old red bus. Besides this, the place seemed simply to be a dumping ground for treadless tyres. The entire left-hand-side of the interior was stacked to the roof with them. Just where they came from, God alone knows. No doubt they were stored there for burning at protests or necklacing, I remember thinking. The driver sat at the far end of the hanger on an old rusted wire chair. He was drinking tea and watching a small television that sat on top of a grey metal filing cabinet. A soap opera was on.

I coughed to get his attention. But he pretended not to hear. 'Excuse me,' I said, 'I need to get up to the hole at Albertsburg. Your bus is scheduled to leave in five minutes.' The man ignored me. I stood there, ready to turn around at any moment and simply go back to the capital. But, as the soap ended, he got up without looking at me. He fetched his brown linen overall and hat from a hook on the backdoor and, putting them on, he came over and picked up my bag. He unlocked the baggage compartment at the bottom of the bus and threw it in. 'I am sorry, please don't handle my bag like that. Do you have any idea what might be in it?'

'No,' he said and walked past me.

'I could have a laptop in there.'

He did not respond. Instead he got into the driver's seat and began filling out a form on a brown clipboard. 'I am going to Albertsburg.'

'Ticket.'

'Have you been up there since it happened?' I asked.

'Nope. I go to the hole. That's all. You can't see it from there,' he said slowly taking the ticket from me and slipping it into the clip of his board.

I made my way down the bus. It was one of those old school busses I used to travel on as a child. The smell of its fake leather seats and the feel underfoot of its slatted wooden floor were so familiar. I opened the tops of the sliding windows near a seat roughly in the middle and sat down. That morning I had dressed for work rather than travel. I had assumed that the internet was correct when it stated that the bus trip would be about an hour. This would mean that I would be in Albertsburg just before lunch. After this I had an interview set up with the mayor. However, I had

already begun to feel beads of sweat dripping down my legs. I knew then that I had chosen unwisely.

The driver took some time to begin the journey. At first, when he started the bus it refused to take. Then, with a loud discharge, the engine came to life. Black diesel smoke poured into the hanger. For some reason the driver waited some time before releasing the handbrake. The bus filled with fumes. I could see the driver's eyes watching me in the mirror. I said nothing and tried my best not to cough. Then I saw his eyes look down and we moved out of the hanger onto the main road towards the mountains.

As we made our way down the street I pushed myself up against the window and closed my eyes. At some point I noticed that the driver was playing the radio. It was on louder than was necessary. It played an unsophisticated local jazz; the kind of music one hears only in corner cafes.

I must have fallen asleep at some point because I suddenly became aware that the bus was stationary. I sat up. We were parked high up in the mountains overlooking a green valley and upright veins of rock towered above us. I looked down the bus. The driver was not in his seat. I got up and made my way out. He was sitting on a rock in the sun some metres down the pass, sipping Oros from a plastic juice bottle. A blue Tupperware sat at his feet. He was eating cheese sandwiches made with thickly sliced white bread. They were laid out next to him on the rock on grease proof paper. 'Is there a problem?' I asked.

'Lunch,' the man said pointing with his eyes at the sandwiches.

'Isn't it dangerous to leave the bus in the middle of the road?'

'No.'

'Can you not eat while you drive?' I said looking at my watch.

'No.'

'But we only…I mean we…' I was going to say that we had just started, but he was not listening to me. I stood there for a while looking directly at him. He did not look back. Instead he stared out over the green bushes towards where I imagined Albertsburg to be. There the clouds hung over a tall mountain peak in the distance. I stretched myself and, looking around, I said: 'Beautiful mountains.' He made no response.

I went back into the bus and sat down on the back seats, partly because I could lie down properly there and partly because I could keep an eye on the driver outside. He continued to stare out over the escarpment towards Albertsburg. His jaw moved slowly. But he seemed unaware that a downpour was coming towards us. I noticed with pleasure that he had to scramble to pack up his lunch box. He ran to the bus as the rain swept in. He burst in, brushing the water from his overalls with his hands. 'Nasty downpour,' I called out from the back. He did not respond.

I realised that we were on the move again when I was woken by a sudden blow to my back. The bus had begun to lurch through potholes. For the rest of the trip I lay on the back seats staring up at the ceiling as we bounced uncomfortably towards the infamous hole in the road. After about an hour we came to a halt. 'Teatime!' I shouted from the back. And after a short pause I received the answer. 'Hole.' Then, when he realised that I was not moving, he shouted, 'I go no further than this!'

I stood up and walked to the front. 'So, this is it?' I asked looking out at the empty police sentry box.

'Ja,' he said as he got up out of his seat. I followed him out and I stood looking down the muddy track towards the hole.

'Can't you just drive around this thing?' I asked.

'No,' he stated, unlocking the baggage compartment under the bus. He threw my bag onto the wet gravel.

'Please, I did ask you not to do that. Look, I don't see why you can't drive around it. I'll pay you something extra.'

He gave me no answer. He simply climbed back into the bus and left me there like an unwanted dog.

I took out my phone and called the number the mayor had sent me. Someone seemed to pick up. 'Hello?' I shouted. But the phone cut off. I phoned again. It rang, but nobody answered. I walked towards the bent and rusted boom that blocked half the pass at the police check point. Another downpour began and I went to the empty sentry box. I opened the door and was hit by the smell of humid urine. Polystyrene coffee cups and chip packets lay on the floor. I almost did not enter but the rain intensified and I got in and sat down on the empty paint bucket the police had used as a stool.

I tried calling the number again, but nobody answered. A radio lay on a little shelf on top of a *Scope* magazine. I picked it up and turned it on. The battery was dead. A large breasted woman on the cover of the magazine stared up at me, her hands behind her head. A penis and balls had been scratched in ballpoint pen into the glossy cover over the woman's underwear. A set of crude nipples were drawn over the stars that censored hers. I held my breath for as long as I could, trying not to breathe in the stench. From my bucket seat I could see the collapsed part of the pass. I could have driven my 4x4 around it, I thought to myself, just why the mayor had given me this advice I could not imagine. I tried the number again, but the call would not go through.

The rain rushed down the pass creating a waterfall where the hole was. I watched the water for some time pouring into the valley below. Finally, when the rain stopped, I decided that I would

have to walk. As I began the sun burnt through the remaining clouds and dried the surface of the road. It dried so quickly that it created a white dust on top of it. This powder whirled about blowing into my face and mouth. It was as if nature was warding me off. I tied my handkerchief around my face and moved on.

I walked like this for the rest of the way. My suitcase dragged along the corrugated surface. With about two kilometres to go one of the wheels broke off and I was forced to pull it like a sled. It yanked constantly on my shoulder. I thought of abandoning it and getting somebody to go fetch it once I was there. I stopped and looked up at the mountains. Were there people up there? A feeling took hold of me that I was being watched. I remembered the thieves that the mayor had warned me of. I carried on.

As another short downpour began I cursed almost everybody I could think of: the bus driver, the mayor, Judge O'Higgins, this engineer or whoever the fuck he was, the Judicial Services Commission, the president. But most of all I cursed myself for having taken the Minister of Justice's call that Sunday morning. If I had just ignored him, I thought to myself, maybe they would have got some other dog to do their work.

The rain stopped after about five minutes and I began, with a sense of relief, to see houses emerging amongst some of the fever trees in the distance. These were at the far end of the town to the south west. The town itself still lay, from my vantage point, in the dead ground. It was only as I walked down the last long bend towards the town that I finally caught sight of the rest of Albertsburg stretching across the valley. First, I could see the huge abandoned mining hostels to the south. Then, finally, I caught sight of the remains of the courthouse, collapsed in the middle of the grey Victorian hamlet. Its blackened burnt concrete hulk lay there like a beached whale. Vines covered in grey ash crawled from its ruins like entrails spilling out onto the main road.

The town had the look of an old black and white postcard. An effect created by the grey soot that had mixed with the rain. Everything down there was still. The only thing that moved was a dirty threadbare flag that flapped listlessly on a pole at the police station. A dog came out of a side street as I got to the verge of the town where the gravel stopped and the tar began. It looked at me with empty eyes and moved on, sniffing at the walls and cut off telephone polls. Then I noticed that a figure was watching me from one of the houses. It waved me on. And as if obeying an order, I moved forward despite a fear that was growing in me.

By the time I got to where the person had been standing she had disappeared. But I realised that I was in front of the BnB the mayor had booked me into and I went inside. A woman, who was as silent and grey as the town, booked me in. I noticed nothing about her. 'I tried to phone the number the mayor sent me. There was meant to be a car to pick me up,' I said a with certain

degree of irritation. She took my bag down the passage motioning me to follow her. She opened a door. 'Here you are.'

'Thank you,' I said and I took my bag from her and closed the door.

I flung off my clothes and got into a shower. After getting out I unzipped my suitcase and emptied my possessions out onto the bed. I threw the muddy suitcase into the nearest corner of the room. It rebounded back and caught me painfully on the shin. I gave it a kick in the direction of the bathroom. It flew in and knocked my toiletry bag off the small shelf next to the shower. With this an overpowering smell of aftershave filled the room.

I sat down on the bed breathing deeply, the perfume filling my nostrils. There was silence. No traffic and no sounds of people could be heard. Even the screeching of the cicadas that had, I realised, been everywhere on my walk here, seemed to have deserted this part of the valley. I lay back still breathing deeply and I looked at my phone. Twitter was up. There were pictures of demonstrations in the capital. People were occupying several roads outside parliament. I was glad not to be there. Perhaps this place and this assignment was a blessing in disguise. However, if it was a disguise then it was a very good one, because Albertsburg was then, as it is now, absolutely hateful to me.

# Chapter 2

Ash fell like fine snow over the town for four days after July 28. On that day the courthouse at Albertsburg had been torn apart by a devastating explosion. An explosion which had killed everyone inside. Not one of the gallery of townspeople and children, or lawyers, or court officials, or police had made it out alive. Fuelled by the books and files of the court, the fire burned for three days. It burned until there was nothing left except the blackened giant shards of collapsed concrete and a still-intact tower jutting out from its collapsed heart like a harpoon. Not even the bouts of rain could extinguish the blaze. By the time I got to the site that afternoon ash was still rising from it in gusts of wind.

A woman was there, holding an umbrella. She stood on top of a pile of rubble that lay on the road overlooking the devastation. I noticed her long floral dress was washed with the grey pigment of soot that covered everything here. A pack of dogs surrounded her. They were sniffing and barking at the ruins; but they refused to go any further than the fringe of the fallen debris. She waved to me to come and join her. I hesitated.

'Don't mind the dogs. They won't harm you,' she called.

I stepped towards her up onto the rubble. The dogs barked and sniffed at my leg. I thought of pushing one of the more persistent mangy looking ones away with my shoe, but the woman called it to heel.

I stood there for a while wondering why this woman with her umbrella was so determined to speak to me. She started the conversation. She had been working in a bakery, not far away, when the incident took place. I then asked how she seemed to know what I was there to do. She looked at me strangely and said: 'Because I'm the mayor. I've taken over from my husband.'

'But the mayor's name is Jean,' I said pronouncing it in the male manner.

'It's Jean,' she said, correcting me.

I was just about to say that her perfume was very familiar, when I checked myself. It was, I realised, the scent of my own cologne. I realised then that she was also the manageress of my BnB. She had, I discovered, managed to clean my bathroom before coming out here to meet me.

'So,' I said suddenly understanding her identity, 'what do we know about the explosion?'

'We don't really know anything. All the police were killed. And those that are left of the 600 or so of the town don't have any investigative skills.'

'How many are left?' I asked.

'Six. Three children, two OAPs and myself.'

'And Tlali, the husband? I believe he was not in the court that day?'

'No, he was at home. Don't you know? He hanged himself the day it happened.'

'Did you know them? I mean Tlali and the judge.'

'We are … were a town of 600 people. It would've been difficult not to know them. Did you?'

'No,' I replied, 'O'Higgins served on a different bench. I never met her.'

I almost told her then that in judicial circles O'Higgins was not well liked. She was known to be overly self-righteous and something of a pseudo-intellectual. At the time of her redeployment there were many judges in the appellate division who were all too happy to see the back of her. And of course her husband, Stephen Tlali, had been disgraced as a homosexual and was corrupt. 'I know their son,' I found myself saying, 'we move in similar social circles. Although I do not know him well.' I noticed Jean's expression change.

'Did Tlali leave a note?' I asked.

'I didn't find one. But I left the house as it was. That was, after taking him down and preparing him for the burial.'

'Where did you bury him?'

'Well, I couldn't get him up to our cemetery by myself, so I used the bulldozer and put him with his wife, and the rest of Albertsburg, into the flames.'

'You burnt the body?'

'Should I not have done that?'

'It's probably just as well,' I said. 'I wouldn't mind having a look at the house though.'

'I can take you there now, unless you want tea?'

The dogs followed us as we walked together to the west of the town. But when we entered the Tlali's property Jean closed the gate on her group of followers. The garden was filled with Albertina Sisulu roses. A square grey Edwardian house sat at its far end. Jean took out a large ring of keys as we got onto the stoep and unlocked the front door.

She had broken into most of the houses to begin with, she told me. There were cats and dogs to be fed. She now had keys to most of the properties. The door opened into a dark cold interior. It was filled with a sense of emptiness. When I was young, I had liked Tlali as a political figure. And despite all that had occurred, I felt sad entering the place of his death. He had been, before his fall, a political hero to many people my age.

Jean then took me to the dining room where Tlali had hanged himself. A cut piece of rope still hung from the chandelier. Everything from the neoclassical paintings on the walls to the furniture was covered in a layer of ash. I noticed it was slightly less thick where the body had fallen and there was a long streak where Jean had dragged him so that she could get his body to the

inferno of the courthouse. 'Did you disturb anything else?' I asked turning on the lights to the lounge.

'No.'

'And you haven't seen a note.'

'No, but as I said, I left things as they were.'

'And the study?'

'It's through there,' Jean said pointing down the passage.

I went into the lounge searching for a place where he might have left some kind of explanation. 'Is this where you broke in?' I asked finding a broken window pane. There were dark marks on the carpet and on the curtain at the window. By the looks of it somebody had attempted to clean them. 'Did you cut yourself?'

'I never broke in; the back door was open,' Jean said coming up behind me. 'Do you think those marks are blood?'

'Maybe. Perhaps not. I'm no expert.'

'Strange,' she said.

'I wonder when this took place?' I asked aloud not expecting an answer.

'It must have happened some time before the ash began to fall. But the judge never mentioned it.' Jean picked up the floor-length curtain and began to inspect it.

'Tlali had no cuts on him?'

'No, not that I saw.'

'Why do you say that it happened before the ash fell? And when was that?'

'The ash started falling heavily on the second day. And as I said only six of us survived and none of us would have done this.' I noticed Jean's top lip quivering. She had shown no signs of the trauma she had been through till that point. But clearly she was now in some distress. Perhaps it is an indifference that comes from my profession, from seeing too often people under extreme emotions, but I continued to question her. It is, after all, a time when people can let their guard down.

'Go on,' I said, 'why do you think it happened before the ash fell and not after? You said you had not seen the window broken when you came here to find Tlali.'

'No, I didn't see it, but I wasn't looking for something like this. The ash is sitting on top of the stains. If anybody had tried to wash this off afterwards they would have made things worse by washing ash into everything.'

'Perhaps it was the thieves you told me about in the email.'

'No, the thieves won't come into the town and besides nothing seems to have been taken.'

I looked at the stains again. She was almost certainly right.

'Why won't the thieves come here?' I asked getting up from inspecting the floor.

'They think Albertsburg is cursed.'

'Did you see the judge the day of the explosion?' I asked dismissing the talk of curses, although I had not entirely rid myself the eerie feeling Albertsburg produced.

'Yes, she came in and had a coffee with me in the early morning. She always did that.'

'How did she seem?'

'A little sadder than usual,' Jean said. I noticed her eyes were wet. She wiped one. It left a stripe of either ash or mascara across her temple.

'Was she distressed in any way?'

'No, I wouldn't say that, more like exhausted and drained. I suspected that she was going to find the engineer guilty. You have to understand what was happening in the town at the time…' Jean's voice was trembling slightly. She had not let go the curtain and was unconsciously caressing the stain with her thumb. A distance was developing in her eyes.

'How well did you know the judge?'

'Pretty well,' she said, but her thoughts were miles away from my questions now.

'You were good friends?'

'Yes, I think so. We had a lot in common.'

'Like what?'

'We enjoyed gardening and art.'

'Did she ever make any political confessions to you?'

'Like what? What do you mean?' Jean dropped the curtain and looked at me. She was now fully conscious of the fact that she was being examined.

'Did she ever confess holding terrorist views? Did she condone the use of violence with the aim of removing the government?'

'No, never.'

I looked at this woman, trying to gauge just what kind of person was standing in front of me. She was hard and practical. That much was clear. And she was, I thought, now worried that I was perhaps some kind of threat to her. 'Can you show me to the study?' I asked.

She took me down the corridor and opened the door. It was dark. A small red light of a device was flashing in the interior. Jean walked into the room and opened the curtains, allowing the afternoon sun to come in. The room was neat and ordered. Some bills were in a tray on the desk, which was covered in a thick dusting of ash. But there was no sign of any note. I looked for a moment at two strange dappled paintings that hung on the wall.

'They are Ernest Mancobas,' Jean said moving closer to them, 'they were Tlali's taste rather than hers. Do you know much about art Judge Manzini?'

'A little,' I said, 'but I've never liked abstract paintings.'

There was something horrible about these works. In fact there was something horrible about the room. I remember feeling an anxiety that I could not explain. I noticed Jean's eyes were looking at me. But there seemed as if there was also something else in that room with eyes. It was a ridiculous thought. I took one last look around. 'Was there no computer in here?'

'No, she had a laptop. She must have taken it with her. Are you alright Judge Manzini?' Jean suddenly asked.

'Yes, fine. Please close the curtains.'

I turned to walk out and on seeing the red light flashing on the printer at the door I pressed the off button. As Jean went to the curtains the printer whirled and then stopped and then began to whirl again. For a second we both watched it. Then it sprang into life and began to print something. By the end it produced seventy nine single spaced pages. I picked up the loose sheets and began to read.

*In the courtroom, his dark eyes were watching me. Beneath him lay his black umbrella, which he slid to the side with his foot as his lawyer came to sit down next to him. However, not for one moment did he take his eyes off me. And as mine briefly caught his, his thin lips stretched horizontally into a smile.*

'What's that?' Jean asked peering over my shoulder.

'It looks like somebody was writing a novel,' I said taking it away from her eyes. With that I searched for a folder. There was a pile of empty ones on the bookcase. I took one and slipped the pages in. 'That will do for now,' I said.

'Are you okay?' Jean asked. 'Your hands are trembling.'

'Yes, it's a sugar low. I think I just need to sit down for a while. I'm exhausted. Perhaps we can go back to your place and have tea.' With this Jean closed the house up and we walked together in silence back to her house, the dogs again running at our ankles.

When we got back to Jean's I went and locked the file away in a drawer in my room. I took out the folder sent to me by the Ministry of Justice and went onto the back stoep where Jean had laid out tea and scones. I sat down in the sun and I paged through the dossier. There were some pages that the Captain of the police force in Albertsburg, a man called Mandel, had sent through to the Civil Co-operation Bureau. There was also some background on the Tlalis, on both Judge O'Higgins and her husband, the ex-vice-president.

There was a full dossier on Steven Tlali. It documented his activity in the military wing of the liberation movement. There were pictures of him both from the training camps as well as images of him in jail. There were none of the more famous ones, the ones of him leading the strike action that toppled the previous regime. I searched the file to find any evidence of his homosexuality. But, surprisingly, there was nothing there other than a few notes that mentioned the press had reported it. The file on O'Higgins also contained images of her in the training camps. There was one of her, young and fit looking, standing in a kind of army jumpsuit with a rifle slung on her shoulder. The page attached to it noted that she was a highly effective marksman. It was her husband, however, who was trained in bomb making.

The O'Higgins file was filled with proof of O'Higgins' anti-government sentiment. It had explanations as to why the judge had found against the government in two court cases, before her redeployment. There seemed to be a *prima facie* case that her findings were politically motivated and were part of a judicial conspiracy to remove and replace the president with her husband. Of course this was not news. But here, for the first time, I was reading what seemed like actual proof. Somebody in the CCB had done a lot of work on this.

# Chapter 3

I had not really heard of Albertsburg before I was sent there. At least I had not heard anybody mention it in my adult life. It is one of the places that only existed in the history of the previous regime. What I did know was that Justice O'Higgins and her husband had been sent there under a cloud of political intrigue. But I only recollected this when the explosion at the courthouse was reported. I think it is fair to say that most people, myself included, believed that the Tlalis were involved in a conspiracy to remove the president. Certainly, many did believe the reports concerning Tlali's personal life.

Hindsight may have shown this to be mistaken. But it is easy to say this now. It was certainly a lot more difficult then. There can be no doubt that O'Higgins and her husband wanted to remove the president. They may have even been right to do so. But it was not that clear in those days. What was more, the O'Higgins' memoir, on my reading of it, seemed to confirm, rather than deny, this.

Of course, it was also clear what the government wanted from me. I remember sitting contemplating this in Jean's garden on the third day of my stay there. She was in the kitchen preparing lunch. I was under a weeping willow at the small pond at the bottom of the garden. The CCB dossier lay in front of me on the wooden table. The further I got into it, the more I realised that there was nothing to find here in Albertsburg. The evidence was in this dossier; it was not in the outside world. 'You will find the answers to commissions of enquiry on the surface of things,' one judge had told me. 'Don't scratch that surface. You will only make it more complicated for yourself.' Those were words I have always kept with me. Even despite what happened at Albertsburg.

What I did know was that the president was seeking to discredit O'Higgins and her husband. She wanted to do this because the Tlalis were totemic for the opposition within the Party. Of course, Tlali and his wife were already discredited and out of the way. It was the other members of the Party, sympathetic to the Tlalis, that the president was after. And how it looked from there, sitting under the willow, was that the president might very well have been right to do so. I was perhaps a little naïvely swayed by the government's media. Where there is smoke, there is fire, I had thought to myself. The government's media had already put out that it suspected the Tlalis of having blown up the courthouse. They had already made the link between Tlali's bomb making training and the explosion. I just had to connect the dots.

The president had also made a well-publicised and convincing speech in parliament stating that 'acts of unconscionable terror have been perpetrated by traitors. Perpetrated by forces allied to opposition elements within the Party. There are traitors sitting with us here today. This, I can assure you, will be dealt with with an equal and opposite reaction.'

It was now, or so I suspected, for me and my one-man commission to give the government the same narrative. I see no reason to deny that I knew this. I was not unaware of the situation I found myself in. Honesty simply does not permit me to deny this. But honesty should also not deny that, without forensics, there was little to find in Albertsburg. I knew that I would be allowed to mention in my report these failings of the government to support me. Of course, who would actually get to read it – with the media in tatters and a weakened parliamentary opposition – was another question. A distilled version would, no doubt, reach the people and I would be left with my dignity. What was I to do? All I could do was to find what was available to me and report it. I was being manipulated. But there was nothing I could do about that.

I was thinking something of these thoughts when Jean came to serve me lunch at the table. Holding a tray of lasagne above me she asked: 'Do you mind if I eat with you?'

'Please do,' I said closing the file that I had been reading.

'Is that what you got from Judge O'Higgins' house?' she asked as she sat down.

'No, I haven't looked at that yet. But I don't think it will be of any importance.'

'Why's that?'

'It's a novel by the looks of it.'

'Could I read it?' she asked.

'No… I don't think that would be appropriate. It may have sensitive material in it.'

I could see the disappointment in her face but she dropped the subject. 'Do you have a family, Judge Manzini?'

'Do you mean, am I married with children?'

'Yes.'

'No.' We did not say anything after that for quite a while. But then I asked: 'Did you plan on having children?'

'No, we didn't.' She paused. 'I suppose there is no point in being embarrassed about it. I can't. And I don't think my husband would have been a very good father anyway. He was terrified of all kinds of things. We couldn't even keep a dog.'

'I think you would have been an excellent mother,' I said.

I had not meant to offend her. In fact quite the contrary. But I saw her quickly wipe a tear away. 'I am sorry, I did not say that to upset you.'

'Oh no Judge Manzini, I know you didn't. It's just…oh well, it's just my husband was a kind of child. That is why I think I loved him. He was in many ways a weak person who could not stand up for himself. But I did love him. I know that now.'

'Love can be a strange mistress,' I said.

'I thought you were single Judge Manzini.'

'Being single does not mean that one is not in love,' I replied and she looked at me. I knew she was trying to understand this statement by something in my appearance. 'And please don't call me Judge Manzini.'

'What should I call you then? I can't call you Judge.'

'And why not?'

'Judge is what I called Miriam O'Higgins. To call you that, so soon, would confuse me – emotionally I mean. We were friends. At least I think we were.'

'And I hope we will be too. Please call me Ken,' I said.

We fell into another silence after that.

'And you?' she asked breaking into my thoughts. 'Are you still pursuing this love of yours? Is she "Mrs Right"?'

'Oh no. And besides my job is not conducive to a married life…What are you going to do after I've gone?' I asked.

'I'm not sure. It is not like I have any property I could sell. I will start to run out of money pretty soon. I mean there is Albert's insurance policy but that won't sustain me. I think I will have to go to the capital and find something there. Will there be anybody else coming here to investigate?'

'I shouldn't think so. My instructions are that I am to find out what I can. With the troubles mounting in the country they simply don't have the men to spare.'

'What do you think will happen? Is the government in trouble?'

'Things are not looking good. But the president is still in control of state resources. She has a lot of power behind her. I doubt anybody is strong enough to depose her.'

'And the judiciary? Just how independent are you?'

'Oh no, don't worry about us. We are still independent.'

'Judge O'Higgins said that it has fallen into the pocket of the president.'

'Well she would, wouldn't she? That Judge of yours, I wouldn't take her view on things. She did as much damage to the judiciary as anybody.'

'In what sense?'

'Taking the issue of her husband's loss of power and playing it out in the courts.'

'That's not what De Lambert said. He said that both of them were right in what they did.'

'De Lambert?' I almost screeched, doing my best not to lose my temper. 'That discreditable little hack. I certainly would not believe anything that came out of his poisonous lying mouth. The stories I could tell you.' Jean was looking at me. I think she was slightly shocked by my sudden anger.

'I always liked De Lambert; depressed as he was. He worked for me as a waiter for a while.'

'An absolute snake. I am surprised he didn't drive you out of business with his lying! But let's talk of something else.' I realised that I was beginning not to like Jean's presence, and we could not seem to speak for a while after that.

Jean finished her meal and went back to the kitchen to make coffee. When she came out again and she was the one that spoke first. 'So, what will happen now with the investigation? If I can help you in anyway, you must just ask.'

'Jean,' I said realising I had no reason to create an enemy out of her, 'I am a judge not an investigator. So perhaps you can help me with a few things. I do have one question for you.'

'What's that?'

'Are we really the only ones here in the valley?'

'In the valley? Oh, I don't know. But I'm sure we are the only ones in Albertsburg.'

'Can you be sure?'

'I've seen nobody. Why?'

'I don't know. I keep getting the feeling that somebody is here. Do you ever get that?'

'Of course, but it comes from the feeling of emptiness and fear, I think. This valley has always been like this. It has always created an anxiety. My husband felt it more so than most. There are people up in the mountains though, I'm pretty sure of that.'

'Who?'

'Kwerekwere maybe. Bergies certainly. There were rumours that the CCB were up there at one point. But the man who owned the bar here couldn't find any trace of them.'

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That evening I went to my room straight after dinner. I ended up having an uneasy night's sleep. I was still gripped with a feeling of anxiety and I lay in bed incessantly looking at my phone. The social media sites, that had in the last two days been taken down, were up again for some reason. They showed parliament surrounded by protestors. Its fences seemed to have been breached. Some people were claiming that there had been defections amongst the police. The president was

not available for comment. She was said to be away on an official state tour of the Far East. That night I also received a message from O'Higgins' son, Zané Tlali. It stated: *'4ball arranged for Tuesday next week. Keep on the fairway and come to me to check the course rules ;) ouosvavvx'.*

I was surprised by this. As I've said I did not know him well. Although we did on occasion play golf together. Lying there I began to worry. I didn't like Zane Tlali's message, although we had arranged to play golf. Just what the last letters were I did not know, I assumed they were a typing error.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing circulating on various social media pages that night was that several members of the cabinet and leaders of the opposition could not be accounted for. The arrests of Party members had perhaps begun. That night I remember zooming in on a photograph, taken outside parliament, onto a banner that stretched across the perimeter fence. It read: LONG LIVE THE TLALIS! THEY LIVED AND DIED FOR OUR FREEDOM. I lay there awake for some time, my mind ticking over. My thumb refreshed the internet pages until finally, at 3 AM, everything went offline. After having tried unsuccessfully to sleep, I turned on my light again and went over to the drawer and took out the file with O'Higgins' document.

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*The forthcoming section of the novel, running to its conclusion, is beyond the word count as laid down in the regulations for this PhD programme. It is at examiners' discretion as to whether they wish to continue reading further.*

# Chapter 4

The next morning I woke up late. I had fallen asleep with my contact lenses in and my eyes were swollen and red. I took a long shower, but it did not seem to help much. I was exhausted. After dressing I picked up my glasses and the CCB dossier on the bed-side table and took them with me to breakfast. Walking into the room I had seen nothing. I went straight to the coffee maker. It was only when I turned around that I saw without my glasses the outline of a grey dirty-looking figure sitting in my seat. As I have said I was suffering from a strange anxiety at that time and I gave a shout. The figure rose and seemed to thrust out towards me. In pure panic, I flung the coffee cup I had in my hand at it. And dropping my glasses and the dossier to the floor, I grabbed a chair to keep this shadowy figure away from me.

I have never been any good at throwing. The cup and its contents flew hopelessly to the right of the man. Coffee slopped onto the one side of the white table cloth and onto the carpet. The figure then started to soak up the mess on the table with his napkin and Jean came running out of the kitchen with a frying pan in her hand. 'Good God, what the hell are you shrieking at Judge Manzini?'

'Who the hell are you!' I shouted at this figure, still holding the chair in my hands. I could still not make out what it was in front of me.

'Lieutenant Bobby Jordaan,' the figure said stretching out a hand, 'Oudtshoorn constabulary, Bomb Disposals Unit.'

'Who?'

'I am a police officer from Oudtshoorn. Lieutenant Jordaan.'

'Who sent you?' I demanded. 'Why are you here?'

'Nobody sent me. I sent myself.'

I put down the chair and bent down to pick up my glasses. The man and Jean came to help me pick up the pages of the dossier that lay scattered on the floor. 'Get away!' I shouted, my nerves still on edge. 'Don't touch anything! These are sensitive government documents. Get away. Don't touch them.' The two backed off and allowed me to recover both the dossier and myself. Then standing up I put on my glasses to have a look at the man in front of me. He was tall and sunburnt and if I hadn't have been in such a state I would have seen that he had a kind looking face.

'Who sent you here?' I demanded again.

'As I've said to you sir, nobody sent me.'

'Then why the fuck are you here? I don't believe you.'

'Sir, if you would like to take a seat. I am very sorry for having given you such a fright.' The man pulled out a chair for me to sit down on.

'I don't need to sit down. What I need, is for you to tell me just why you are here.'

'Of course, of course, please, I didn't mean to frighten you. I can explain.'

'I'm not frightened. I just want answers. God damn you!'

'Yes sir, of course sir. It's just we've had reports that there was an official in Albertsburg who's come to investigate. I'm on leave, so I have thought maybe I would come over and give you some help.'

'Well, I don't need help, so you've wasted your time. You might as well pack your stuff up and leave right now.'

What I had taken in in our first exchanges was that this man's accent was neutral in a middle-class way. It sounded as if he had spent time in one of our bigger cities. But somewhere in his speech were the sounds and grammar of a person brought up in the country. Just where I could not say.

'Can I finish my breakfast first? I've paid for it.'

I did not answer and he began again to mop up the coffee I had thrown at him.

'Who reported to you that I was here?' I asked.

'Athi, the bus driver at Prince Albert for one. His cousin works in our charge office.'

'Who else?'

'The traders in the mountains reported seeing a man in a suit walking around the valley.'

'When you say traders, you mean the Kwerekwere?'

'Some of them are.'

'So, they *are* in the mountains?'

'Oh ja, now that Mandel has gone these guys drift in and out of the valley.'

'I knew there was somebody around here.'

'Oh ja, but they avoid Albertsburg like the plague. There're a lot of spoek stories about this place.'

'Like what?

'There's one of a ghost with a *doek* on his face, dragging a box behind him. And one of a *tokoloshe* with an eye that watches over the town and crawls over the ruins at night.'

Just the thought of that sent a shiver down me.

'The *Kwerekwere* are illegal now, you know that,' I said referring to the recent law passed through parliament that revoked all foreigners' refugee statuses. 'Who were these people telling you stories? Why are they not in custody?'

'An old man was picked up with a young boy just outside Oudtshoorn. The boy needed medical attention.'

'Did you arrest them?'

'We treated them.'

'So, the answer to that is no?'

'We gave them medical attention and let them go.'

'No wonder this country is in the state that it is in. When the police can't obey the law. Jean, I would like my breakfast now.' Jean had fetched some towels and was also soaking up the coffee on the carpet. 'I am sorry about that. I had a bad night's sleep. I don't have my contact lenses in.'

It is easy to see now that my lived experience is very different to the way I now feel and think about my period in Albertsburg. At the time I was adamant, perhaps even obsessed, that the police should uphold the laws. To me the rule of law is still paramount. As I have said before, my current thoughts now depend on the advantage of hindsight. But I confess these were not the thoughts I had at the time. One has to realise that hindsight is in some ways an obstacle to understanding lived experience. The threat of the *Kwerekwere* seemed real to me and the country at that time. The law against them appeared, to many of us, to be a justified response to that threat. I had felt then that part of the problem in the country was a direct result of the foreigners. Even what had happened at Albertsburg was in some way attributable to them. And they were out there, watching us, stealing from us and spreading their magic.

Jordaan fetched me another coffee. 'I'd still like to be of assistance to you,' he said as he sat down.

'And what exactly do you think you can help me with? If you can't do your job by arresting an illegal alien, what good can you be to me?'

'Well, I shall help you to find out what's caused the explosion.'

'Who knows you are here?' I asked.

'The Captain in Oudtshoorn and a few others.'

'The Captain gave his consent?'

'He didn't need to, I'm on leave. But he's thought it would be a good idea for me to help you.'

'And his name?' I said taking out my phone.

'Captain April.'

'And yours is Lieutenant Jordaan, Robert?'

'Correct.' He pushed his ID across the table towards me.

I sent a message and received one some seconds later.

'Can you get messages? I've been trying to find some reception all morning.' Jordaan bent his head towards me in an attempt to look at my phone. I took it away and slipped it in my pocket.

'Alright Lieutenant, let me take you to the site after I've had breakfast,' I said.

He raised his eyebrows. 'Ja alright, I'll get clean and be back here in 10 minutes.'

I realised that there was no use fighting with this man. He was in the valley and whatever his real business was here, it was best, for the moment, to play along. To give him some work to do would at least keep him out of any other mischief he might be up to. His presence and attitude did bother me though.

'That's a piece of luck,' Jean said bringing me my breakfast.

'Yes, isn't it,' I answered wondering just how this piece of luck had really come about. 'Have you ever come across him before?' I asked.

'He says we were at school together. That I was a year or so ahead. But I don't remember him. You know how these things are, you never remember the younger ones.'

'What kind of accent would you say he had?'

'Oh its Klein Karoo with a mix of wealth.'

'Are you sure of that?' I asked.

'Oh yes, he was telling me about the school we went to. He remembers things about me that I haven't thought of in years.'

'So you trust his story?'

'Don't you?'

I shrugged.

Jordaan was a fit looking man in his late thirties. His hair was cropped short off his scalp and he had the air of a man who had spent much of his life outdoors. He was vigorous and he seemed honest and straightforward. But I did not trust his story that he had come to help me – and on that score I was right.

As most people who know their history are aware, I did send a text message to Zané Tlali. It asked him to confirm this man's identity. It also asked if it was possible to send 'back up resources to deal with potential unforeseen and problematic matters'. This message is part of the public record and I do not deny that I sent it. Jordaan did worry me. One should never trust somebody who suddenly appears out of nowhere and who can do precisely the job that you need done. Like all judges, I do not believe in fate. Zané Tlali had been in contact with me and I thought, considering his new position of head of the CCB, his services might be useful. I should confess, I wondered if Jordaan's appearance might in fact be his doing. I was also slightly concerned that

Jordaan might be, what in those days was called, 'an agent of external interests'. It was both good practice and pragmatic to check with Tlali.

When Jordaan returned he had changed into blue shorts and a t-shirt. His muscular legs fitted into a pair of well-worn hiking boots. He carried with him a pilot case and wore a pair of green rubber gloves. 'Shall we go?' he asked as he watched me finish the last dregs of my coffee. 'In a minute,' I said, 'the ruins aren't going anywhere.'

After finishing up I went to fetch a few things from my room. When I came back Jean and the Lieutenant were standing outside at the gate, umbrellas in hand. A troop of dogs were gathered around them waiting excitedly.

We made our way to the courthouse with our umbrellas up in a short downpour of rain. 'So,' Jean said, 'the man dragging the box is you, Judge Manzini. But what is the cyclops I wonder?'

'Oh that's the dagga talking the 'white paths to truth'. The people here have always concocted some pretty strong hypnotic muti,' Jordaan said smiling and looking up towards Towerkop.

The mountains were covered in a misty cloud. The sun shone through in patches. Shadowy movements ran along their slopes and not for the first time I felt like there were people up there. 'Sometimes you don't even need the dagga to imagine,' Jordaan continued as if reading my thoughts. 'Judge, you must relax hey. There is nothing up there that will harm you down here.'

'I am not worried. It just gets to me that there are illegals there and the likes of you just ignore it. You are not doing your job.'

'I'm in the bomb unit. I am doing my job here. Personally, I think it's very strange that you never called us.'

'Logistics have nothing to do with me. I don't call the shots,' I snapped.

'Then who is it what does?' he asked in an almost accusatory tone.

'They've given me no budget. And don't take that tone with me again.'

We walked the rest of the way to the courthouse in silence. The dogs ran up and down the main road, barking and occasionally chasing at things down side roads only to return to Jean. When we got there, we stood in front of the charred remains. Its blackened concrete stuck out from the creepers that were covering it. Unappetising greyish fruit hung off the vines. The tower was the only recognisable piece left. It was still mostly intact and sat like a harpoon forced into the centre.

'One thing is for certain,' Jordaan began, 'it was a hell of a explosion. And it was either brought down by somebody who knew demolition work or there were some serious structural problems. See how the whole thing was collapsed in on itself. The weight of the tower brought it

down. It's a perfect job.' He took out his camera and began taking photographs. 'I would be interested in having a look at the plans of this building.'

'They will be in the City Hall,' Jean spoke up.

'What kind of explosives would you need to do this?' I asked.

'Ag ja, you could make this kind of thing if you knew something about chemistry or had a military training.'

'Tlali certainly had that,' I said.

Jordaan knelt down and took some things out of his briefcase. He then strapped a head torch on his forehead and placed glass vials into a moonbag around his waist. He then scrambled into the ruins and disappeared into its centre. Jean and I stood there for some time waiting for him, the dogs sat at our feet refusing to go near the ruins.

'What should we do if he doesn't come back?' Jean asked.

I shrugged. We waited some more and Jean became agitated after about forty-five minutes. She called out to Jordaan. Then receiving no response, she asked me to shout out. With this the dogs began to bark, but they still showed no interest in getting near to the ruins. Jean silenced them and we listened. But there was no sound of Jordaan calling back.

'I'm going in to go find him,' she said.

But just as she was climbing over the first of the concrete boulders in front of us we saw a blackened figure come out from amongst the concrete.

'Oh thank God,' Jean said on seeing him making his way towards us.

'God that's a hell of a place,' he said after he got back onto the road. He wiped the ash and sweat from his face with the sleeve of his t-shirt. 'You can get down into the actual courtroom, it is like a crypt in there. Not exactly pleasant, the concrete ceiling collapsed over the gallery and lawyers' benches. They must have been killed instantly. As for the others, well there was simply no escape.' He sat down exhausted and spat soot from his mouth. He remained sitting there, on the road, staring at the ruins shaking his head. Jean crouched down and put a hand on his shoulder. 'Will you take me there tomorrow? I want to see it.'

'No, I simply can't do that.'

'Why not?' Jean's voice was angry. 'I want to see it. It's where my husband is.'

'It's very dangerous. The concrete beams are not on their final resting places. There is still a heck of a lot of movement and falling masonry.'

Jean looked at him and then at the ruins but nothing more was said.

We began walking back to Jean's place. I could see Jean was not going to let the matter rest.

'Say if I went in there myself?' she said as we neared her gate.

'Mrs Albertson, you don't know the ways of these kind of collapses. We would be endangering yourself and myself.'

'Please Lieutenant Jordaan.'

'I think it's too dangerous. No, in fact it's not a question.'

'If the woman wants to go to see the resting place of her husband, she should have the right,' I offered.

'You are fucking mad. Mrs Albertson, you are the luckiest person alive not to have been in that hell.'

'But Lieutenant Jordaan, you went.'

'It's my job.'

'No, you never had to go.'

'She's right. I never asked you,' I said.

At this Jordaan became very angry with me. But Jean and I remained of the opinion that she should be allowed to go. Jean, I argued, needed it to heal her sense of loss. And if this meant putting her life in some danger I certainly was not going to get in her way.

By the time we were inside Lieutenant Jordaan would not talk to me. He went off to his room and had his lunch served to him there. Jean and I had ours together out on the stoep. She thanked me for standing up for her.

*****

The next day I hardly saw Jean and Jordaan. They had gone to the City Hall to search for the architectural plans of the courthouse. I went to the police station and broke into Mandel's office and tried to uncover any files that might be there on either Bain or the Tlalis. I found nothing on the engineer. All of those files had presumably been in the courthouse and were now lost. I did find a small folder on the Tlalis which amounted to a few notes on their movements and some thoughts on their political motivations. They were not of much help. Some of them were completely incomprehensible, as if the person writing them was drunk.

That night I found myself going to my room early. I took out all three files: the CCB's, O'Higgins' manuscript and Mandel's intelligence. I placed them next to me on the bed. However, it was my phone that I turned to first. I had received a message from Zané Tlali saying, as most know, that if I *'needed pre-judicial support'* that this could be arranged. By this I took him to mean providing me with a stipend or sending me a clerk. I thought very little of it. Firstly because I doubted they would actually send me anybody and secondly, with Jordaan here, I did not think I

needed it. It was with this in mind that I sent him the message *'No prejudicial action required at this moment. But will contact if required.'* There was also a message from earlier stating that I must keep the police officer in question in the valley.

But it was not these messages that occupied my mind that night, instead it was the internet. Again the social media sites were up – it seemed that at least some of the people controlling the state telecom company were not entirely loyal to the president. There were pictures of the inside of parliament which was now occupied and barricaded by certain radical elements of the opposition. I searched through the placards and the social media handles. One stated #RememberTheTlalis. And one of the many placards placed at the gates of parliament read O'HIGGINS DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE PRESIDENT.

There were also rumours all over social media that some members of the Party were either in custody or under house arrest. Most importantly Robert Kosaner, a once ally and friend of the Tlali's and most vocal critic of the president, was unaccounted for. Some said that he had been taken into custody on a charge of high treason, others were reporting a possible shooting. And then there were the images of Rooikat armoured cars and the Casspirs lining the streets around the so-called Devils Coop (the CCB's headquarters) and at the president's residence. I also received an email that night confirming that my findings were required by the president in four days.

# Chapter 5

The next day things became much clearer. Again I had not slept much. I had spent the night finishing the O'Higgins manuscript and checking my phone. There was still a frostiness between myself and Jordaan as I sat down in the dinning room. 'I think perhaps after breakfast we should have a meeting,' I said.

'Yes,' he said, 'we have uncovered a few things. And you shall also be pleased to know that I have agreed with Jean to take her down into the court. It might be an opportunity for you too to come see.'

'Yes of course, but do you think we will all fit?' The idea of being in a cramped claustrophobic environment made me anxious.

'Naturally. That should not be a problem.'

'Say if something should happened to us down there? Who will call for help?'

'How would you get help to us? Help is days away.'

'No,' I said firmly, 'I disagree. I think it would be better if I stayed above ground. Besides I've a fear of enclosed spaces. Could you not just take some pictures for me instead?' I asked.

'Sure. As you wish.'

'What have you found out?' I asked.

'Oh, various things.'

'Could you just give me an idea?'

'Well, there's ammonium nitrate around.'

'Meaning what?'

'Fertiliser.'

'What's that mean?'

'A possible improvised bomb. I'll have to do some more tests though.'

With this Jean came in with my breakfast. She was dressed in jeans, an old pair of running shoes and a dark woollen jersey. She put down my plate and I suddenly felt the urge to say something. 'Jean,' I said, 'I know that it might be a bit of a tough day for you but I would just like…'

'Don't worry Judge Mazini. I will be back if you need anything. Or were you trying to say something else?'

'I … oh never mind, we can talk about it when you get back,' I said. I should say that by then I had developed quite an affection for her.

When the two of them left I noticed that Jordaan had found a motorbike helmet for Jean, although he did not have one himself.

It was then that I sent the message to Tlali stating that *'prejudicial support may be required'*. By this I meant simply that I might need a clerk if Jordaan were to uncover more evidence. The deadline set by the president was a matter of days away and I had not begun writing up any of the findings.

More importantly it was the word 'fertiliser' that I could not stop thinking about. After I finished my bacon and eggs I went to my room and took the O'Higgins manuscript out of the safe and went down to the bottom of the garden with pen and paper. As I paged through the document I realised how often the word 'fertiliser' occurred. And as I searched the pages, the references began to pile up. Why was the judge so insistent on buying a specific type of fertiliser that she was told by Daniel Jacobson was unsuited for her purpose. What was the mysterious bag that Tlali was carrying back to the Jakkal en Vel the day Enoch was taken in? What were the judge and Boetsman doing down in the cellar that day? And why were the Tlalis at a pressure cooker with dust masks the day their neighbours destroyed their garden?

Things now seemed a lot clearer. I looked at my watch and realised that at least two hours had passed since the two had left. I was worried. I walked up to the house, locked my papers away and went out down the road towards the courthouse. The pack of dogs was sitting expectantly on the road at the ruin. I stood there for some time too. Then, after a while, I began to call out to them but everything was silent. Only the flapping of vine leaves in the wind suggested life.

It was while I stood there, waiting for them to return, that a flash caught my eye. It had come from the slopes of Towerkop. I immediately thought of the creature that Jordaan had mentioned. I called out again for the two of them and this time a distant murmur came from the rubble. I waited, and finally two figures emerged making their way towards me. But they disappeared again and did not reappear. With this I started to make my way over the boulders towards the place that I had last seen them. As I climbed up to the top of a slab I looked down and discovered that they were sitting amongst the ruins. Jean was crying and Jordaan was holding her hand looking into her face. They looked up to me and waved. 'I was worried,' I called out.

'We are coming now,' Jean shouted. They got up and started towards me. Jean's face was streaked in tears and ash. 'I am sorry,' I said as they got to me. She smiled and held my hand for a second and I too felt like I might begin to cry. 'It is one hell of a country we live in,' I said. Jordaan patted me on the shoulder and we began to clamber back towards the road.

The dogs leapt up at the two of them barking and chasing each other in circles. 'I was worried,' I said.

'We were just doing some housekeeping in there,' Jean gave a quivering smile.

'Well, I am just glad that you're both okay.'

On the walk back to Jean's house I mentioned the flash I had seen in the hope that I could lighten the mood. 'I think I've had a sighting of the *tokoloshe* under Towerkop. What is over there, by the way?' I said pointing in the direction of where I had seen the flash. 'Is that farmland?'

'It was a man called Enoch's farm. It was also where Bain, the person who we started calling 'the engineer', used to live,' Jean replied.

'Have you been there since the explosion?' I asked.

'No, there were too many things to do in town.'

'Perhaps we should go out there?' Jordaan suddenly pipped up. 'See what this cyclops might be.'

'Oh it's probably just a piece of glass in the veld. I don't think there is anything of much importance for me out there,' I said.

'But Bobbie is right. I think we should go and check up on the place,' Jean said.

'Ja why not?' Jordaan turned around to look at the peak in the distance.

I noticed that Jean had slipped her arm into Jordaan's and she was supporting herself against him as we walked. I also noticed that 'Lieutenant Jordaan' had become 'Bobbie'.

Once we had cleaned ourselves up and we'd had lunch we met at the bottom of the garden to talk over the findings. We cleared the table and Jordaan spread out the architectural plans they had found in the City Hall. He then took out a small notebook he carried around with him.

'So, tell me about this fertiliser bomb,' I said.

'It's a little more complicated than I first thought,' Jordaan began. 'First, there's traces of ammonium nitrate in the ruins.'

'Does that confirm that a fertiliser bomb was used?'

'No.'

'No?'

'It creates, I would say, a possibility but not a probability.'

'I don't understand.'

'Well it would seem that Jean … well perhaps she should explain.'

Jean looked at me from across the table. 'When the fire would not stop burning. I had tried water. I had hoses from various people's gardens trained on the blaze. But nothing would stop it. Then I had the idea that I might be able to cover some of the fire with soil. So I got the bulldozer from the Jacobsons.'

'How do you know how to use one of them?'

'Judge Manzini, I grew up on a farm. Anyway, I bulldozed some of the top soil the engineer had in the park. But I found that far from putting the fire out it seemed to ignite it further.'

'I did some tests on the soil there. It is bloody filled with ammonium nitrate,' Jordaan intervened.

'And you think this could account what you found in the ruins?'

'Yes, this could be an explanation.'

'How much sand did you put in.'

'About six bulldozer buckets. But also when I put Tlali's body in with the bulldozer I filled the bucket with several bags of fertiliser. I had seen how it burnt and I wanted to fully incinerate the body.'

'Nevertheless,' I intervened, 'the presence of ammonium nitrate could mean that a home-made bomb was used, correct?' I asked Jordaan.

'Oh for sure, it is a possibility. Certainly the way the building fell, looks like an explosion took place. But it could also be, as you lawyers put it, 'an act of God'. Look here.'

And with this Jordaan began to show me how the weakest part of the building was at the main supporting beam over the mezzanine level. This was, he said, where the ventilation machine was housed. 'If this beam was compromised,' he said, 'it could have led to the building's collapse, the tower would have been the driving force downwards. This would explain how the rest of the building collapsed inwards.'

'And the fire? What started that?'

'It is true that the fertiliser bomb theory explains the ferocity of the fire. But one can't discount that there may have been some God in that ventilation machine.'

'I don't believe in acts of God,' I said. 'This disaster was created by man. Or rather by a man and a woman,' I added.

'Who do you mean?' Jean asked.

'The Tlalis.'

'But that would be crazy. I knew them, they were not capable of something like this. I can't believe that. No, in fact I won't believe it.' Jean stood up her eyes looking at me with rage.

'Well, you better get used to the idea. We are all capable of misjudgements. I know that you think you knew them, and I mean this in the politest way possible, I would not go spreading around how close you were to them if you go to the capital. It will do you no good.'

With this I noticed that Jean's eyes began to well up and she hurriedly cleared the table of the tea cups and walked off, taking them to the kitchen.

'So,' Jordaan said, his eyes looking over me with hatred, 'you think that the judge and her husband murdered almost every living soul in this town? I find that very hard to believe.'

'I have little doubt of it,' I said.

I scrutinised Jordaan. Again, I wondered just why this man had come up here and what exactly his game was. But I would find that out soon enough.

'Of course,' he added, 'the only way you would ever find out the truth is by getting experts in to excavate the site. They would have to remove the collapsed ceiling. For that they would need some very heavy equipment.'

'Well, that seems very unlikely now. We must simply do our best. But I must say Lieutenant Jordaan your insights have been most helpful.'

# Chapter 6

By then I had received a pdf of Jordaan's file. He was from a family of old political dissidents. His mother and father had been part of a church group that performed various goodly acts of little significance. He had studied engineering and served at a very young age in the Free Army during the transition. He was in one of the units commanded by Tlali and Kosaner although he was very junior in the brigade. He was only seventeen at the time. It said that almost certainly he had had little personal contact with them. After the fall of the old regime he did his degree and then enlisted in the police force. There he had led a relatively sedentary life in Oudtshoorn with little to do and almost nothing to remark on. He was not known to be politically active. However, it was reasonable to assume that he was sympathetic to both Tlali and Kosaner. It was of course rumoured, at the time I was in Albertsburg, that Kosaner had been arrested, some said that he had possibly even been killed. Whether Jordaan knew this I could not tell.

I had also had another request answered in fairly emphatic terms. I had asked Zané Tlali what the political situation was like in the capital. He assured me that the president, what he called 'the democracy', was still in control of all the armed forces. What was more, the arrests of political dissidents had effectively ended an attempted coup. However, social media suggested a different story. Just by the very fact that the internet was up and running indicated that complete control of the armed forces did not mean complete control of the country itself. The precinct of Caledon Square, where all the political prisoners were being held, was surrounded by a large encamped crowd. Some images showed a crowd of hundreds of thousands. This was contested by the government's official channel which claimed the group numbered only a few thousand 'criminals'.

Whatever the truth was, the fact that there was any crowd at all was surprising in itself. Of course being in Albertsburg it was impossible to tell just what was going on. It was certainly not clear to me who had the upper hand. It was now, no doubt, a matter of what kind of resolve the military and the security cluster had to defend the president. Certainly, the messages I was receiving suggested that nobody in the top echelon was looking to jump ship.

What I did note was that the death of the Tlalis was now becoming a major part of the narrative of the opposition. Many seemed to be suggesting from the posters I saw that the Tlalis actions were those of true patriots. Of course, what those people thought the Tlalis had done was obscured to me via my distance. Furthermore I, much like Justice O'Higgins, was becoming concerned about how my judgment on the Abertsburg bombing may affect the country's stability.

My reading of the situation was far from accurate but from where I was sitting there seemed to be only two potential victors. The president or the violent opposition leader Julius Gusman. Gusman you must understand was a man known then as one who had been stoking the rhetorical fires of a violent uprising. An uprising that now seemed very real. With Kosaner either imprisoned, or potentially even dead, no middle way seemed, to me, to be the likely outcome. And although I was mistaken, it was this that I was fixated on. Fear had, I realise now, placed a spell on me. I could not think of anything other than two outcomes. One that the president would retain her position through the loyalty of the security cluster or two that Gusman would persuade the army to defect or simply to stand aside. If the second was the case, then I knew which side I would prefer. However, one solution began to seem clear to me, that both potential winning sides wanted the same thing. Both were urging me on to find the Tlalis guilty. The one because they wanted a scapegoat in order to act against people like Gusman, the other because I could give them a hero.

And it was with these thoughts in my mind that I walked with Jean and Jordaan along the road lined with fever trees up to Enoch's farm and to the house where 'the engineer' had lived. I do remember not being in a particularly healthy state of mind that day. I had not wanted to go for a walk. But not wanting to be left alone, I went with them. By the time we passed the crater that had once been Boetsman's pub all the dogs of the dorp had joined us and they ran at our feet barking and howling. It was about then that the messages were sent between Zane Tlali and myself:

Me: No prejudicial service required. Subject under control.
Tlali: Man in district with prejudicial instructions. Recall?
Me: Yes. Recall immediate! Am present and dealing with subject.

The rain swept in twice on our way there. As we passed the Tlali's property I noticed Jean crossed herself. I mentioned to her that she should not be so sentimental towards their memory. But neither Jordaan nor Jean responded.

The fever trees that lined the road seemed impenetrable. They hung over us in a thick canopy, only the one dead tree left a gap through which one could see Towerkop in the distance. As we walked I notice that my two companions were holding hands. Just as we passed the dead tree a dung beetle moved across our path, a sight which the dogs took surprisingly little interest in. Looking at it I began to sing the song my maid had taught me as a child.

*Gqirha lendlela nguqongqothwane*
*Seleqabele gqithapha nguqongqothwane*[24]

The irony was not lost on me that this song of the beetle, whose journey on the road points a better and brighter future, should be sung at such a time. A time that seemed so very dark for all of us.

'Judge Mazini,' Jean said looking at me, 'are you okay?'

'Oh, yes,' I said, 'there is nothing to worry about.'

They looked at me strangely and for some reason my heart was gripped by a sudden fear. The trees seemed to bend downwards. At that moment the screams of the wild seemed to fill my ears. This must have been nothing more than the cicadas, but you see the town had no sounds in it except the occasional barking of dogs. And this sudden riot of noise caught me off guard. All of a sudden, the bush was alive and the dogs sensing something too, went tearing off with yelps into the mealie fields; they ran as if chasing down a jackal.

I have often wondered what precisely brought on this moment. Perhaps it was simply a jackal that set the world around us on edge. Birds cried out and swarms of insects leapt from everywhere. I felt a sensation that I was about to witness something preternatural. This thought gripped me so fiercely that I said: 'I do not think we should go up to this place. Come let's go back. I know this sounds crazy but I don't like the idea of this cyclops. I really think we should go back.'

'Judge Manzini,' Jean said. 'I thought you didn't believe in these things.'

'I don't. I just feel like something bad is about to happen. Please let's turn around. For the love of god, let's just go back.'

Thinking about it now I cannot explain what came over me at that moment. The days in Albertsburg had somehow unsettled my psyche. Perhaps it was the feeling of death that seemed to hover everywhere that had rattled me. We were advancing into a world that was shrieking death at us with every sinew of its being. It was Jordaan who brought me back to myself.

'Jesus Christ get a grip, there is nothing to be afraid of,' he said. 'If there is something sinister up there, which I doubt, I have my service revolver.' And with this he showed us his brown hostler that sat hidden under his shirt.

'A gun,' I shouted, perhaps a little louder than was necessary, 'why do you have your gun with you?'

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[24] The diviner follows the road as a dung beetle
It is very steep from here for the dung beetle

'Judge Manzini, what's the matter with you. I think perhaps you should sit down.' Jean came over and in the kindest of manners she placed her hand on my forehead. 'You have got yourself into a complete funk. Come, sit down.'

'Please put the gun away,' I called to Jordaan who dutifully covered the weapon up again with his shirt.

Jean then began rubbing my back. And I noticed the dogs had not returned to us. They were still rushing about the mealie fields. The occasional bark would set off a cacophony of yelpings. They rushed through the dried papery leaves of the plantation which made the sounds of a rattle snake. 'You see,' I said, 'it is not just me, even the dogs are unsettled by something. It is not simply my imagination. I do think that we should just turn back.'

Jean had picked some plants from the surroundings and was now sitting with me rubbing my back and making me breathe in a crushed infusion of what smelt like lavender, dagga and rooibos. The barking then seemed to intensify at that moment. And then it stopped. They had something. The pack was pulling a seemingly heavy object through the field and the mealie plants were bending in their wake. Jordaan went through the line of fever trees. 'Be careful.' Jean called.

We could just make out the figure of that thin athletic policeman as he stood with the dogs, patting them in turn as they came to him. 'What is it?' Jean called out and we got up and went through the trees. I had no desire to see what they had with them but I had no intention of to sitting alone. 'Oh my God. What is that?' I asked seeing the flayed and torn body.

'It's a wild boar.' Jordaan was standing over it. 'God knows how they got it. They certainly could not have killed it on their own.' With this he knelt down and shooing the dogs with the call of 'hamba!' they temporarily let him in to inspected the carcass.

'What's wrong?' I asked seeing his face change to concern.

'Well perhaps your flashing eyed *tokolshe* really does exist. This thing was not killed by another animal.'

'*Kwerekwere*?' I offered.

He shook his head. 'Kwerekwere don't have hunting rifles. Then again nor does the *tokolshe*. Somebody else is here in the valley.'

'Should we not just turn around? If there is some madman up here with a gun, God knows what he might do to us.'

'Who says he or she is mad?' Jordaan asked. 'No, I think it's important that we do go up now and look at what is happening up there.'

I was against the idea, but not wanting to be alone we all went back to the road leaving the dogs to the carcass. As we came out of the line of fever trees, out of the thick muggy air that was

trapped in the thicket, I noticed the top of a house. Its two white chimneys stuck up above the bushes, their cowls glinted in the sunshine. The ostriches in the fields to our right rushed down the hill as if to ward us off. Their wings fluttered beside them, their legs worked like shafts of an engine. Jordaan and Jean walked towards them and stood at the fence. Dust and feathers came flying at us. Jean placed her hand in her pocket and pulled out some corn to which the birds scrummed to get closer. They pecked at it with a mechanical force that made her eventually pull her hand away. She laughed. 'I wonder where the rest of them are?'

We walked up to Enoch's house and stopped at a trench outside. Looking down at it I realised it was the one from which Enoch had viewed the engineer. Rusted corrugated iron lined the walls. A muddy, partly rotten, pair of army boots hung from a nail. The seat of the Land Rover lay in a stagnant pool of water. I saw that there had been something scrawled across the corrugated iron wall at the back. 'What does that say?' I asked pointing at it and Jordaan leapt down into the pit and shone his phone's torch on the wall. 'It says "Agent of the Dev…".'

'What could that mean?' I asked.

'Agent of the Devil,' Jean said. 'Poor Enoch, he became obsessed with the idea that the engineer was also an agent of supernatural forces. He went mad on his own *mampoer*. He was always susceptible to conspiracy theories but the impurity and strength of his brew sent him over the edge. I think it did for many of us. We all had our pressure cooker stills on the boil in those months.'

'And that was the engineer's house?' I said looking up the driveway. Jean nodded.

'I think I might go and have a look at it,' I said.

'Be careful.' Jordaan said looking at me quizzically. 'The *tokoloshe* might be there.'

'You know I am feeling fine now. Sorry about that earlier on. I am not sure what came over me.'

'Yes, that was strange,' said Jordaan and he looked up at Towerkop as if expecting to see something. But the mountain was white and silent.

While Jean and Jordaan went to check on the ostriches on the fields to the east, I walked up the engineer's driveway with a sudden sense of euphoric relaxation. For some reason I felt that whoever it was up here they would not harm us now. The house was in many ways just as I had imagined it from the O'Higgins' text. The chimney's cowls flashed in the sunlight as they swung in the breeze. I realised then that the flashing eye of the cyclops was no doubt this rather than the single flashing eye of a mythical creature.

I walked up to the back door and tried the handle. It was open. Inside I found the painting of *Boyhood of Cyrus* above the fireplace. I looked at it and then remembering those last few

perplexing passages of the O'Higgins manuscript I looked for the study. There I stood in front of *The Ring of Gyges* series for some time, wondering what the judge had meant when she said this was an allegory for Albertsburg.

That manuscript itself was of course filled with things that weren't true. O'Higgins was not honest. She and her husband had always been political schemers. Boetsman was certainly just a two-bit bootlegging crook, as no doubt was Daniel Jacobson. I had access to a file that showed that the Jacobson family had always sailed close to the legal wind. I would not have been surprised if they had a hand in killing that man Thales. What was more, I was deeply suspicious of just why Daniel Jacobson simply disappeared from the text after his imprisonment. He was in the courthouse along with the engineer and yet he simply did not receive another mention. Why? The judge and him were seemingly good friends. And then there was that man Clarence. She, I felt to begin with, was going to have an affair with him and then like the young Jacobson he simply falls away. There were rumours of O'Higgins' infidelities in the capital, particularly when her husband was exposed as a homosexual. I suppose we will never know the truth of these omissions from her story. But it is nevertheless suspicious. And then there was her son. Why was she so resistant to admitting his role in the government?

I carried on looking at the paintings trying to think of just how these might relate to Albertsburg. There was Enoch, the voyeur, and like Gyges there was the usurpation of power by Mandel. More than that I could not think of how this story had any bearing on what had happened. Perhaps what Jean had said about the town all drinking their way to madness was right. Perhaps this whole damn place went mad. All this talk of devils, shapeshifters, *tokoloshes* and leviathans probably was a result of drinking too much of their unregulated moonshine, this place was probably raving. They had all been poisoning themselves into acts of greater and greater lunacy. Arresting a man who had worked in the civil service on a charge of dereliction of duty; forcing the town to develop scurvy; blowing up the courthouse. These were no doubt the result of drink, simple. In this state of alcohol poisoning O'Higgins and her husband were no doubt driven to one of the greatest crimes ever committed in this country.

Of course I had no real proof of this. It was certainly not what the president wanted from me, nor the opposition. I can't tell you how resentful I felt at that moment. Perhaps because I had been terrified by some evil feelings just a few moments before, I was saying all of this aloud to myself, no doubt with a certain amount of anger. In fact I remember shouting in an attempt to convince myself of the job at hand: 'They have sent you here and you now will just bloody do what they want, do you hear me. To do anything else will only get you into more trouble.' Suddenly there was a noise in the house. 'Who's that?' I shouted out.

'It's only me,' I heard Jean's voice say, and with this the door began to open.

'Hold on a moment. I am just finishing with something. I just need to take a photograph of the room with the door closed.'

It took me a few moments to finish my work there. Then I called for Jean to enter. She popped her head in, her face changed from a smile to an expression of surprise. 'I thought Bobbie was in here with you,' she said.

'No, it's just me,' I said

'But I thought I heard voices.'

'Oh, I was just thinking things out aloud. Shall we go and find him? Has he found any signs of our cyclops?'

'No, nothing. Everything seems fine. It could have just been a hunter that strayed into the valley. I wouldn't mind having a look at these paintings though. The judge spoke to me about them.'

'Of course, of course. But I think we can see them better without the glare from outside,' I said closing the curtains and turning on the lights.

We stayed in there for some time and Jean showed her knowledge of art history. It was then that I began to realise what a truly awful position she found herself in. Without family and entirely alone, with no property to sell and nowhere to go. I think it was then, or perhaps a little later, that I asked her what she planned on doing. I had certainly begun, whether I expressed it to her or not, to feel that I needed to help this woman in some manner.

She carried on talking to me about the paintings, which she had clearly discussed with the O'Higgins. It was then that I began to wonder if the judge had mentioned to her the notion of the allegory. 'You know,' I said, 'the judge in her manuscript suggested that there was something in these pictures that related to the story of Albertsburg?'

She looked at me. 'An allegory? Hmm, well what are the themes?' she asked. 'Voyeurism and power. Well, I guess there is Enoch and Mandel but I guess that is not a particularly interesting allegory from an Albertsburg point of view. It does not really speak to Mandel's motivations. Gyges was driven by passion. Mandel was simply interested in political power. He was, in many ways, quite asexual. Enoch's voyeurism, although he admitted to viewing the engineer in the nude on a regular basis, too does not seem to have been motivated by attraction. Although who knows?'

As I reflect on it now it was perhaps Jean rather than I that first thought up the similarities to the story of Gyges and Albertsburg. But what this conversation left me with was a realisation of how poor Judge O'Higgins' interpretive abilities were. Of course, many have said that she was brave, courageous and single minded. I, however, never bought that line. What she almost certainly

did, was morally abhorrent. Despite the fact that the Truth Commission, that followed the fall of the president, questioned my findings, I still believe they are a reasonable evaluation of the evidence. And I outright deny that I colluded with the president and the security cluster in order to discredit the Tlalis and their friends. The simple boring fact remains that it is most probable that the Tlalis pulled off the bombing of the courthouse at Albertsburg.

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We spent some time in Bain's study that day. When Jean had finished with her attempt to understand Judge O'Higgins' evaluation, we realised that we had not heard from Jordaan for a while. I urged Jean that we should go and look for him. I allowed her to go before me and, finding the keys to the house, I locked it up and placed the bunch in my pocket. I then hurried after her with a sudden feeling of concern for Jordaan's safety. However, it was he who discovered us as we crossed the road to Enoch's property. He had descended from the line of trees that marked out the lower slopes of Towerkop behind us. He came down on us so quietly and with such stealth that he gave me quite a fright, for it seemed like quite suddenly he was next to us.

'Where have you been?' I asked in alarm

'Shh,' he said, placing his finger over his mouth. 'I was following some tracks up the mountain,' he whispered. 'There is a *tokoloshe* here.'

'What?'

'There's been somebody living by this place. It's been moving around here quite freely.'

'Who is it? *Kwerekwere*?'

'No, I don't think so. The stride pattern is small. It could be an old person, or perhaps a woman, it is difficult to say. But today it was in a hurry. It moved up to the cover of the trees up there very quickly.' He pointed up to where he had just come from. 'And one thing, it knows how to cover its tracks. Most of them are gone. But today, in its hurry, it could not cover up all of them. It's been watching us.'

'How do you know?' I asked, whispering with a feeling of terror gripping me again.

'I could feel it up there. The birds were unsettled by something. You could hear it.'

'It must be the Kwerekwere, that guy Boetsman said they knew how to cover tracks.' I said. 'Look! They are up there,' I shouted.

'Where?' Jordaan and Jean looked up to where I was pointing.

'Look, the silhouettes on the crest of Towerkop.'

They carried on looking just as the men standing up there, looking over us, slipped back and disappeared. 'There were men up there. Did you not see them?'

'No doubt…' It seemed as if Jordaan was going to offer something but he stopped himself. 'I think we should get out of here. This is really no concern of ours. And God knows what will happen if the dogs come up here and get on this person's tracks. So far he or she has done us no harm.'

'I agree,' I said.

'Hello! Are you okay out there?' Jordaan called out.

'Oh my God, what the hell are you doing?' I almost screamed.

'Hello!' 'Are you okay out er?' 'Oh my Gooo' the voices echoed back to us from up the valley.

Jordaan looked at Jean. 'One day Jean, I will tell you about Echo and Pan. My father used to read us the story. But come, let's go.'

Jordaan walked back with his arm around Jean. The dogs re-joined us at the fever trees having torn the boar's carcass apart. They ran at Jean's heals barking and biting at each other's ears. Jean and Jordaan walked together occasionally patting one of the dogs. I urged them on; I was eager to get back as my deadline was drawing near.

When we got to Jean's I began to formulate the commission's findings. I realised as I worked through the evidence that it would be simple and that no pre-judicial help would be required from Zané Tlali and I duly messaged him to this effect. Zané had by now become my point of contact with the government, as regrettable as that might seem. I received a message back saying that the government required the findings in 48 hours and that 'the prejudicial officer would clean up loose ends'. My reply to this stated that no cleaning up operation was required and that 'any further actions on your part might defeat my findings. Furthermore, I have set up safeguards to protect myself and the people around me in this matter.'

I do not feel ashamed admitting that, by then, I was worried about both my and Jean's safety. I knew that what safeguarded our lives was that Zané Tlali and his allies required my findings. And that possibly this alone was our guarantee. I had also become progressively worried about my judicial independence and government overreach. I had written a draft of an email, long since deleted, which I had planned to send to the international press if I was, in any way, unnecessarily intimidated.

# Chapter 7

I would like to make some concluding remarks on not only my commission of enquiry but also on the years that followed. At the time of writing those findings the country was at a tipping point. As far as I could tell radical members of the opposition had overrun parliament. The president was also threatening to launch a full-scale attack by the army on the opposition.

All the while I was stuck in Albertsburg buffered from these events and completely in the dark as to where the power lay. For the next two days Jean served me coffee while I wrote up my findings. I simply followed my conscience and portrayed the evidence that was before me. But the person or persons out at Enoch's farm troubled me and I encouraged both Bobbie and Jean that we should try to get to Oudtshoorn as quickly as possible. Oudtshoorn was, I knew, the best place for us to spend the next month or so. It was impossible to read the developing situation in the capital. What was more, the beginning of the president's fight back with the army was said to be a matter of days away.

Three nights after we visited Enoch's farm, having sent my findings to the Department of Justice, we packed Jean's bakkie in the dark of a moonless midnight. Of course, as Jordaan and Jean will testify, I was the one pushing for us to leave that place. The fact is that something in Albertsburg left me cold and my nerves were beginning to fray. There was just something wrong about that place. I am not sure I can say it was of a paranormal nature, I do not believe in such things, but the fact remains that something there had unsettled me.

It really did feel like we were escaping something as we drove out of the valley in the dark that night. We rode for much of the way up the pass without lights. Jordaan was at the wheel while Jean and I navigated, straining our eyes. Hers, I could see, were still full of tears. She had had to say goodbye to the dogs and cats. She and Jordaan had gone out in the dusk to feed them, lacing their food with poison. She had come back with a dirty pale Staffordshire bullterrier puppy. 'This one I just couldn't kill,' she said. It sat between us as we leant, as close as we could, towards the windscreen, shouting when it seemed like Jordaan was about to drive us over the edge.

Jean was confused by my insistence that our escape should be done under these conditions, but for once Jordaan was prepared to listen to me. 'Who is it that is up there at Bain's place?' Jordaan asked me as we sat in the front cab breathing against the windscreen. 'You know who it is! Who is it?'

'I don't know,' I said, 'but these bastards are right here at Jean's gate.'

'What do you mean?' He suddenly shouted at me. 'You mean the *Kwerekwere*? Who are you afraid of?'

'Jesus Christ, you know perfectly well who I mean. Not the bloody *Kwerekwere*! That other set of fucking barbarians. Don't stop, keep going!'

When we got there we managed to get the bakkie around the hole. Jean and I stood on the other side. She gave me the mangy little puppy to hold while she directed Jordaan with the help of a small torch. It was touch and go but he made it around and we got to Oudtshoorn early that morning. There we were welcomed in by Jordaan's sister.

I remained there, living with Jean, until after the army turned against the president. Bobbie had left to join the uprising. It was a real shock when I saw the president on national television a few days after that. She was in what looked like an underground bunker, waving the findings of my commission in her hand and saying that she would be soon 'cleansing society of all counter revolutionary forces'. This, sadly, placed my name at the forefront of her battle. She kept shouting out 'The Manzini Inquiry proves counter revolutionary forces are a reality' to the point that, had I been there, I would have shot her myself.

But her battle against these forces was one that she was to lose after droves of the army and police defected to Robert Kosaner. He had been found alive in a cellar, deep in the police detention centre at Caledon Square. The unit in the police force who had been ordered to kill him had kept him alive. They feared the consequences of killing a man who the majority of the people were now supporting.

As many know, in the Truth Commission, that followed Kosaner's victory, I had to testify as to what my relationship with Zané Tlali had been. Although many thought that Tlali had fled the country he was found hiding in one of the kitchen cupboards in the building known as the Devil's Coop. This bizarre discovery led to one of the more macabre events of Kosaner's revolution. Videos taken on phones were broadcast at the time of a dishevelled and emaciated man emerging out of the neo-gothic building. Many of the men who testified against me were videoed slapping him in the face and beating him with rubber hose pipes. It was there that he is said to have made a confession in which my name was mentioned. But no clear recording of that exists.

Finally, after about an hour of this torture, a rope was thrown over one of the gargoyles protruding from the first storey. This they used to hoist him up by the neck. He barely put up a fight. And there his body hung for several days. Kosaner, who was under heavy guard in the president's residence, demanded on public television that his body be removed. However, it hung there until, finally, the gargoyle broke away from the wall and Tlali's body and the carving fell down

the long flight of steps into the gutter of Roeland Street. There they lay together, untouched, for several days.

Many people at the Truth Commission claimed that I colluded with Tlali and his security cluster. It was there where the messages between Tlali and myself were made public. His phone was discovered and his password hacked. Of course, those who testified against me were, by their own heinous actions, largely discredited. What is more, I feel like I have sufficiently explained the nature of my correspondence with this hateful man.

### *Notes:*

- *I need perhaps to explain further my lack of a relationship with Tlali. I did not know him. My first encounter was his messages to me. I knew him only in passing.*

- *Jean and Bobbie, I know, have been suspicious of me for many years. I need to assure them that I saved them up there, that they were in danger. Can offer some details.*

- *Jean's letters must be sorted out: some destroyed, some returned. I know Jean believes I have had a relationship with somebody, she can be trusted, perhaps.*

# The Manzini Commission of Inquiry

## Section 5

**5. EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION OBTAINED**

***Introduction***

5.1. The Tlali family, originating from South Africa although Justice Miriam O'Higgins was partly, by her own admission, from settler stock. They were both active members of the resistance that fought against the previous regime. Stephen Tlali was trained by the clandestine military wing [The Free Army] of that resistance in both insurgency tactics and in military hardware. He rose quickly within The Free Army to the position of general. He also worked within the trade union movement – heading it after his release from jail. Justice O'Higgins worked within various civil society organizations as a lawyer. Both were arrested and served lengthy sentences under the terror of the martial law of the previous regime. Stephen Tlali led the miners, teachers and metal workers strike, that was said to have broken the last regime's resistance to freedom. This has more recently been historically questioned.

5.2 Later, on the dissolution of the regime, Stephen Tlali went on to become vice-president of the country serving for one and a half terms, before being unsuccessfully prosecuted for tax evasion and corruption. Rumours also abounded about his sexual persuasion. One of his male staff made public claims that he had been sexually abused by Tlali on several occasions. The accuser fled the country some weeks after the trial to prosecute Tlali fell apart.

5.3 Zane Tlali (Mr S Tlali and Justice O'Higgins' son) later confirmed his father was a homosexual in an interview for the state television broadcaster see www.youtube.com/bzerob.zane_tlali_confirms_fathers_status/ Stephen Tlali was soon after this declared unfit for further employment.

5.4 Tlali as vice-president legislated against the use of hostel buildings as miner accommodation and introduced the 'Living-out Wage Act'. This led to large scale mine closures, such as those at Albertsburg.

5.5 Judge O'Higgins was made a high-court judge after the fall of the previous regime. She went on to be made Judge President of the Appeal Court. She was later removed from this position and given the Judge Presidency of the Albertsburg district.

5.6 Both Mr S Tlali and Justice O'Higgins have over the last three years shown and expressed deep anger and antipathy towards the current administration. See articles:

1. www.ukulwadaily.com/tlali_calls_president_to_resign/
2. www.bzerob.com/tlalis_president_no_longer_moral_leader_of_the_people
3. www.ukulwadaily.com/tlalis_wife_doing_his_bidding_in_court_findings?/
4. www.bzerob.com/tlalis_acting_against_states_interests/

5.7 Further anti-government sentiments were expressed in evidence discovered in the Tlali's house in a document referred to in evidence as 'The O'Higgins Manuscript' (exhibit g).

1.a) Page 28 “This short conversation was in a way a stark barometer to the times. Of course I could not tell Bain’s politics nor he mine, although no doubt he knew mine which had, due to my redeployment, been widely discussed in the news. I was sure that we were sharers of a certain attitude towards the government and yet we were both too inhibited by what was happening to speak openly.”

1.b) Page 34 ‘With this government?’ I said, ‘I would have more faith in the Easter Rabbit arriving to fix it over Christmas.’ At this they laughed and then the husband looked slightly concerned when I clicked my tongue and shook my head in annoyance at the status quo.

1.c) Page 43 Certainly I knew that for the government colluding with the likes of Mandel could only at best be a piece temporary political expediency.

1.d) Page 49 ‘Signs!’ Boetsman spat in disgust. ‘What will signs do?’

1.e) Page 75 What is more, Mandel’s government-backed administrative and political grip is not the only compounding evil. There has been the government’s own continued encroachment into the functionings of the judiciary and its movement towards its own martial state.’

1.f) Page 78 ‘They are a mechanism to show that: firstly Mandel and the government are corrupt, secondly that there is an alternative voice to Mandel’s and the government’s, thirdly that the resistance is peaceful and but most importantly they are a sign to Mandel that he is not in complete control of the town.’

It is here where I remain confused as to the silence of both the National and Provincial Governments and their seeming refusal to provide any evidence of Bain’s previous employment. Of this I can make only two rational conjectures. One, they are incompetent and they have not managed to expedite the request for information. Two, they are colluding with Mandel and are keeping evidence away from us purposely and have deleted evidence of his employment as a civil servant. Both of these possibilities are, in my experience, entirely consistent with other cases I have overseen. And it is above all the latter tendency in government that has become my concern not only for Albertsburg but the country as a whole.

5.8 On the date stipulated in the preamble Albertsburg’s courthouse was destroyed in a cataclysmic explosion killing all 598 people inside.

**INTERVIEW WITH LIEUTENANT ROBERT ‘BOBBIE’ JORDAAN – Police explosions expert and trained civil engineer**

5.7 The interview with Lieutenant Jordaan was held in the mayor of Albertsburg’s lounge. He informed me of the following:

1.a) Lieutenant Jordaan informed me the building of the courthouse was almost certainly brought down by an internal explosion of catastrophic force. Stating that in his professional opinion it occurred at

in the room noted as ‘plant room’ of the plans provided in Appendix IV. The cross support of the beam being the weakest section of the building which supported the tower.

a.b) In his opinion the bomb seems to have been pin pointed by somebody who understood the building intimately.

a.c) Lieutenant Jordaan found the presence of ammonium nitrate at the site. A substance found in common and agricultural fertilizers. It is most commonly used in homemade explosive devices with the power to destroy entire buildings see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oklahoma_City_bombing

a.d) Lieutenant Jordaan said that in his opinion it was more likely to have been the work of a person or persons producing and employing explosives than an act of God.

**CONTENTS OF THE O’HIGGINS MANUSCRIPT**

5.8 The manuscript referred to as ‘The O’Higgins Manuscript’ was discovered in the household of the Tlali’s. No computers were found in the household itself. All are presumed to have been destroyed in the explosion at the courthouse, however, this document was found saved in the printer. It was discovered in the presence of the mayor, Mrs Jean Albertson. It is an account of Albertsburg from when the Swartberg Pass was washed away and up to the final day of the trial of the Joseph Bain (The Engineer of Albertsburg). These findings relate to this document:

a. a) Judge O’Higgins refers to herself buying large amounts of fertilizer. The references to this are as follows:

I. Page 10 she notes herself buying the substance to which the salesman (Mr Daniel Jacobson) remarks ‘This is a lot of fertilizer for such a small lawn such as yours’

II. Page 40 when speaking to Joseph Bain she suggests that she might need more fertilizer when she is caught out lying to him about her conspiratorial and illegal consultation with the Jacobsons while they are in jail before an important town meeting.

III. When the O’Higgins is clearly in a meeting with the mercenary Mr Giambabtista ‘Boetsman’ Fidanxha

a. b) Page 53 Judge O’Higgins also refers to Mr S Tlali (her husband) carrying a sack bought from Jacobson and Daughters (the fertilizer sellers) back to the clandestine and possibly revolutionary meeting at Captain Fidanxha’s Jakkal en Vel.

a. c) Page 63 Judge O’Higgins refers to her and her husband being at a pressure cooker at the stove. They are described as wearing dust masks and seem to be working with chemicals. Pressure cookers are regularly used as the outer casing of improvised explosive devices https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pressure_cooker_bomb

a. d) At the same day as the incident at the pressure cookers they are noted as saying after having a fight with the neighbours who are later associated with a pro-government movement O'Higgns quotes her and her husband talking of the 'one solution' to the problem"

'There is only one solution left to us.' [Judge O'Higgins]

'Certainly this pellet gun won't be the solution.' [Stephen Tlali]

a. e) Page 66 Mr S Tlali makes a reference to the 'handy' skills that he had when he was in the Free Army.

a. f) Again in the final passages Judge O'Higgins makes reference to the notion of a final solution when she states that [Page 78] 'all other possible solutions have been exhausted'.

a. g) Judge Tlali quite openly confesses to the fact, on regular occasions, that she is looking to overthrow the government-backed police constabulary of Albertsburg. See page 41 where Judge O'Higgins openly solicits Mr J Bain's help in this regard. Also see page 46 where Judge O'Higgins meets with Captain 'Boetsman' Fidanxha, Mr J Bain and Mr Daniel Jacobson where a discussion was held with regards to the overthrow of pro-government Captain Mandel

a. h) This final passage there is also a clear indication as to the state of mind both she and her husband [Mr S Tlali] are in as well as the 'diabolical' plan they formulated together.

a. i) Another reason to believe that Judge O'Higgins has something more than simply an irregular judgment is the difference in spelling between the 'judgment' (the correct spelling of a legal judgment) and the judgement that she utilizes in the last paragraph of the manuscript. This, at least to the legal practitioner, suggests that she had another kind of judgement in mind for the town. This is made clear with her regular reference to the notion of biblical judgement that lies heavy throughout the text.

a. j) Her allusion to the fact that she will be soon facing divine judgement after taking 'devastating action I have decided to perform'.

a. k) Or at least the group of people sitting before me in the court did. No doubt a town with these people would have been worth preserving. After what has happened subsequently it is sometimes difficult to remember this. (Manzini: suggest that she is an active agent in its destruction) p.20

a. l) Of course, even then, I knew that I would not be here long enough p23 Manzini: she still had another 4 years left in Albertsburg

a. n) 'Boetsman, thus far all we have had is words used against us and we must reply with words. I will not consider violence. For the logic of violence, when embarked on, ends only once it has pathologically consumed and destroyed everybody in its wake. Perhaps, one day we will find ourselves back in that position, but now we can still use words, thank god. We must show, with words, that there is an alternative voice to Mandel and the government. The resistance must be peaceful, we will only damage our cause with violence.'Manzini Reference to violence. P. 59

b. o)‘There is only one solution left to us.’ I said. ‘Certainly this pellet gun won’t be the solution.’ He laughed wistfully. Manzini violence is the solution. P74

6**. OBESERVATIONS**

Having considered the evidence uncovered during the investigation against the relevant regulatory framework, I make the following observations:

6.1 The Tlalis had expressed, on a regular and public basis, their anger and antipathy towards the current government and president.

6.2 Stephen Tlali was trained in the use of weapons systems and the manufacture of explosive devices during his time in the Free Army.

6.3 In the document referred to as ‘The O’Higgins Manuscript’ there are several references to her hatred of the current government and the president.

6.4 Justice O’Higgins and Mr S Tlali purchased fertiliser at a capacity beyond simple domestic use.

6.5 Justice O’Higgins and Mr S Tlali were engaged in the chemical production of unnamed chemical substances in their house using a pressure cooker – a piece of equipment widely used in terrorist bombings.

6.6 Lieutenant R Jordaan has found significant traces of ammonium nitrate (fertiliser) at the site of the courthouse.

6.6 The investigation has proven to my satisfaction that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Justice O’Higgins and her husband, Mr Stephen Tlali, performed a ‘devastating’ act against the courthouse and the people of Albertsburg.

6.7 I further believe that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that they were leading an organized and planned attack against the police constabulary of Albertsburg, which they felt may have broader implications for the state itself.

# Part III

# The Strand

# Chapter 1

I had been looking after Manzini for about two weeks before he died. He was very frail when I first arrived, but the doctors had given him a chance. It was a hope that he himself did not believe in, but, at the very least, it was something with which to combat the negativity that pervaded the house. It made me sad to see him sitting on the couch in the lounge when I first walked in. His body could not quite hold itself up straight, and he leaned slightly to his side on a bed of scatter cushions. A silk paisley scarf was tied loosely at his throat, a matching handkerchief protruded from the pocket of his houndstooth jacket. His hair had a purplish tinge to it and the whites of his eyes were almost orange with the cirrhosis. His face seemed like a death's head, covered in stretched velum with mottled patches of grey stubble. His clothes hung off his frame like a coat held up by a stick and, despite their expense, he now could not escape looking like something of a bergie.

I cannot really say I had developed too great an affection for him, but he was a marker for me. And that was why I was there to look after him. Each time I saw him, it was like finding a picture of the person you went with to your final year dance. Or like looking at a bracelet that you used to wear as a young girl. You might not have liked them, but they were sentimental totems. The time I had spent in Albertsburg and Oudtshoorn with him still meant something to me.

There was, the doctors said, still some small chance that he could recover enough to get the liver transplant. But this was dependent on him not drinking. He, however, was preparing for his death. In the week or so I was there, he demanded that Rebecca, his domestic, take him to his study early each morning where, with the door locked, he fretted over a document he was writing. On spending several hours on it each day he would then come out and hobble around the house hunting for drink; searching in all the spots around the house where he used to hide his bottles.

When he was caught in this search he would, of course, claim to be looking for a pen or book. 'You haven't seen my Mont Blanc pen have you? It was a treasured gift,' he said when I found him with his hand behind the bookcase in one of the spare bedrooms. But we knew what he was after. These were the spots where Rebecca and I had found hidden bottles of vodka. We had, at the beginning of the week, done a thorough search and had thrown these clandestine stashes down the sink. On finding nothing he would then usually accuse Rebecca of having stolen one or other of his possessions. And a terrible row would ensue.

'No master,' Rebecca would shout back, 'I have worked for you for thirty-five years and have never taken nothing from you. This madam,' she would say, pointing at me, 'and I are trying to keep you alive. You will die, master, if you drink any more.'

'You liar! I will fire you.'

Rebecca raising her hands would shout, 'Okay! If you want this death then you must die. Come, we will take you there now, to where they burn the bodies! Come let's go to the burial place at Thaba Bosui. We will put you there. Come!'

'Drink! Who said I wanted a drink? You fucking mad bitch. Where's the gold pen I had? You've stolen it, I know you have. I will fire you for stealing from me! I know the law. I'm a bloody judge!' And having exhausted himself by shouting he would then beg me to help him to get to the couch. Something I was not entirely happy in doing. But when Rebecca would come to his help I could hardly refuse.

These kinds of fights occurred regularly and normally ended with Rebecca turning on the hoover to drown out any further threats from Manzini as he continued to shout at her from the couch. I often felt like the two of them were acting out the ends of a dysfunctional marriage. They both had their threats. He, the sack, and she, the name of the ancestral burial place. You could see though that the mention of Thaba Bosui sent Manzini into a panic. It was always Rebecca's last gambit. After those words were spoken he would make a concerted effort to take his medication. But we all knew that this was the end.

Manzini had been dependent on drink for many years. I knew that. He had been given early retirement, because his judgments had become progressively more erratic. His life had not been easy after his commission's findings at Albertsburg. If I am to be honest it was only because he always wanted to help Bobbie and myself that I had remained friendly with him. He had put us up in a flat that he owned in the capital when I went to reunite with Bobbie after he joined the People's Defence Units. After the Kosaner Revolution was over, Manzini also gave us some money to get married and then helped to put me through a postgraduate degree.

Bobbie, however, had never entirely trusted him. Manzini had, after all, cut a relatively discreditable figure at the Truth Commission. His story at the TC had, many said, sailed very close to the line between invention and truth. His friendship with Zané Tlali was never fully explained. If there had not been an urgent need to maintain the courts after the Revolution, Manzini might well have spent time in jail. The Kosaner government had certainly never trusted him, although they had allowed him to remain a judge.

On the fourth day of my stay with him he had, in fact, begun to show slight signs of improvement. Although still very weak he had eaten his breakfast and he seemed somehow less

irritable. We had taken him out to sit on the deck of his beach house mansion overlooking the bay. He sat wrapped in a blue Sotho blanket, an ochre pashmina was wound around his neck over which sat his whale spotting binoculars. And I sat reading with Jess, my old deaf Staffie, lying at my feet.

Despite the many years that had past we had never spoken to each other about what had happened in Albertsburg. It was, I knew, something he wanted to wish away. What was more, I had no particular desire to talk to him about it either. The only thing that I ever wanted from him was a copy of O'Higgins' manuscript. Despite the Manzini Commission being widely accessible, O'Higgin's confession had been, Manzini told me, destroyed by the now disbanded CCB. This I never quite believed. All that I knew of it were the fragments contained in Manzini's report. But sitting there that day with death rubbing up so close to him he broke his silence.

'I made a mistake with my Albertsburg judgment,' he suddenly broke out in his hoarse and exhausted voice. 'Not that my independence as a judge should be questioned. It shouldn't. I was always politically non-aligned.' Manzini spoke lowering the binoculars from his eyes. He was talking as if thinking aloud. I was not even sure if he knew he was speaking to me. His sickly eyes were focused with their usual intensity on the haze of the horizon.

Silence, I felt, would draw him on. 'Well clearly,' he said, clearing his throat, 'I was trusted in some capacity by the previous regime – I can't deny that,' he paused. As he thought, his leather gloved hand tapped apprehensively on the table next to him. 'But that was only because of my independence.'

I smiled at him. His hands were shaking as he once again placed the binoculars to his eyes. 'You know, I never foresaw Kosaner getting out of jail. Once they had arrested him I thought that was tickets. If I had foreseen that, well, things may have been different.'

'In what sense? You mean your findings?'

'Oh no, not them. No. What I mean is, I might have delayed publishing them. Then I wouldn't have been caught in the middle of that bloody fucking political game. It wasn't that the findings were wrong; it was what use those swines put them to.'

'So, you still think O'Higgins and her husband did it?'

'Oh yes. No doubt about that in my mind. My mistake was rushing to finish the findings. But at the time I thought it was either or. If I had known Kosaner was alive, I would have acted differently. But at the time I thought he was dead, I mean what else was I meant to bloody think. They said he was dead, you see? And besides, everybody used to say that he wouldn't act. That he was a coward. That fucking Tlali shithouse told me that.'

'So why did you go ahead?' I asked bending down to stroke Jess on the head, who had begun

to growl at imaginary dogs in her dreams.

'I felt that the centrists, like myself, would have to either accept the president or would have to deal with the radical opposition led by Gusman. And besides, I thought the president had dealt with Kosaner,' he paused. 'They had such intentionally ambiguous terms back then for that kind of thing: like "removed him from the political landscape" or "taken him from the service of the country." Tickets.' He drew his index finger across the yellowed papery skin of his throat. He laughed at this, in his usual immoderate manner. A laugh which set off a bout of sickly coughing.

I handed him a glass of water and waited for him to recover before asking: 'Wasn't Zané Tlali's particular phrase with regards to killing somebody "we have acted *prejudicially* against the subject in question"?'

'Was it? Perhaps it was that. I can't remember. It was long ago.'

It was strange, and perhaps even convenient, that Manzini should have had this sudden loss of memory. The use of the word 'prejudicial' in Zané Tlali and Manzini's messages to each other had been scrutinised by the Truth Commission. And although the TC could not decide on the word's use in context, it was believed by some that Tlali was possibly telling Manzini that CCB hit squads were operating near the valley in Albertsburg. Of course, the only people that could be killed in the valley – besides the shadowy *Kwerekwere* – were Bobbie and myself. But Manzini had pleaded with us that this was not the case. As I have said Manzini after Albertsburg had always gone out of his way to help us. Whether this was motivated by a guilty conscience or not, we never knew while he was alive. But I was prepared, most of the time, to take him at face value. He had, we thought, perhaps saved our lives by getting us out of the valley that night. By then he possibly knew that both his life was in danger as well.

'I still have no love for Kosaner though. But things have, I suppose, improved slightly.' Manzini finally said. I did not respond and we sat there for some time without talking. It was Jess who broke the silence. She ran up to the railing, growling at something below us. 'When are you going to put that bloody thing down?' Manzini said without removing his eyes from his eyeglasses. I got up. 'I sometimes wonder how we were ever friends,' I said to him placing my hand on his shoulder.

'Desperate times, create strange bedfellows,' he replied. But of course, literally speaking, Manzini never seemed to have any bedfellows. Or certainly none that I ever saw. And although we had kept on friendly terms for many years he had never once spoken about his love life. I knew he had been in love once, he had told me as much in Albertsburg.

I had remained friends with Manzini for several reasons. Since Albertsburg he had taken an interest in gardening and botanical paintings. He had commissioned an artist friend of mine to

paint several works for him. We were also part of a garden club together. Although he had not participated in it for the last two years, having had some argument with our chairperson over something that neither wished to talk about.

Gardening had become an obsession for him. In those last weeks when he was well enough I would spend the afternoons with him in the garden. He would sit under a large umbrella on the top tier of the lawn and he would direct me to fulfil certain tasks – pruning mainly. Gardening, I thought, had filled the gap of not having a relationship. But there was just the occasional hint that there was somebody in Manzini's life. I suspected a man, but this person never materialised in my presence. The truth of it was, that although homosexuality is less of a taboo these days in this country, somebody like Manzini was always going to find it difficult to adjust. It was almost, I felt at times, as if he had some nostalgia for the way things were under the previous regimes.

Despite the two days of scrutiny Manzini was subjected to at the Truth Commission, he had not done too badly. Naturally he did not rise to the heights that *he* no doubt believed he was destined to, but he continued as a judge of the High Court. He had, however, remained largely friendless. In fact I would say that I was perhaps one of his only friends. Bobbie was unwilling, most of the time, to come with me when I did visit him. Bobbie, himself, had risen to the position of colonel in the PDU. He had in fact acted as a (slightly reluctant) character witness for Manzini at the Truth Commission out of a sense of duty. It was something he claimed that had ultimately damaged his reputation in the armed forces.

Bobbie had always doubted Manzini's testimony. 'Nobody who was being contacted by Zané Tlali's CCB in those days was up to any good, I can assure you,' Bobbie used to say. He nevertheless felt that Manzini had got us out of the valley and out of financial ruin, and for that we owed him something. And so we had left it at that. Bobbie, as he used to say, scored the game as 1-1 pending extra-time.

Bobbie left the PDU about a year after the Truth Commission and set up a small demolitions company. I had gone to study art history at a much depleted but fast recovering university. I ended up taking up a position as head of the botanical prints at the National Gallery. It was quite a job, as great a deal of the collection had been badly damaged, partly through mismanagement and partly due to the fact that the Gallery had been damaged during the riots when Kosaner was establishing an interim government.

# Chapter 2

As I say, I was shocked to see Manzini when I first arrived at his beach house. The day before I had received a call from Rachel saying that she had found him, lying naked on his bedroom floor, unable to get up. I finished my work at the gallery and took the long drive over the mountains to see him. His eyes glowed a deep orange. And, although he had dressed for my visit, he was relatively unresponsive. He picked at his food when we had dinner and mumbled under his breath that people were trying to poison him.

Once Rachel and I had got him to bed, I went down into the kitchen to help her clean up. 'How is the master?' I asked.

'Yoh, madam, he is very bad. He won't do what the doctor says.'

'Still drinking?'

'Always drinking, drinking, drinking. You know the doctor says he mustn't but this man, he never listens. And he fights with me. Always fighting, drinking. Madam, I don't know what to do.' Rachel began to cry as she stood over the sink washing the plates. I touched her arm and then put mine over her shoulders. She wouldn't stop washing though.

'You know Rachel, you mustn't call me madam, it's Jean.'

'Yes, Mrs Jordaan.' She looked at me, whipping her tears away on her sleeves.

'Is there still drink in the house?'

'Yes Mrs. Jordaan.'

'Then we must find it and pour it out.'

'Yoh, he will get very angry.

'Better angry than dead.'

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Things got better and then worse. It was during the end of the second week. He was complaining of pains shooting everywhere through his body. We had been told this was the side effect of going cold turkey. He was on a lounger under the umbrella in the garden fidgeting with a set of worry beads that he carried with him. His mind was drifting a little but he had a sudden moment of lucidity. 'Jean,' he said, 'come here please.' I walked across the lawn to him, secateurs in hand. I stooped under the umbrella and sat down on the chair next to him.

'What is it Kenneth?'

'I doubt they will let me have that transplant. And even if I do I am not sure how long I will

have after that.'

'You can't think like that,' I said, but I guess I knew it was true.

'Jean, I will leave a document behind. I just want to set some things straight about Albertsburg. And then there will be somebody who will come sniffing around looking for a few things – some books, letters and maybe my computer. There is a pile of things that I have set aside and an amount in my will that you must transfer to this person. As for the rest. Well, most of it could probably be burnt. But I must know something now,' he said looking at me with his orange sickly eyes and he stretched out his arm and grabbed mine. 'Has Bobbie ever told you anything about me?'

'Like what?'

'Oh, I don't know,' he paused letting go his weak grip on my arm, but he did not stop from looking at me. 'Have you kept something from me? Did he have some reason to hate me? Like, a specific reason?'

'No Kenneth, don't be silly.'

'But he's never liked me. Even now he won't enter my house.'

'That's not true.' I paused, and looking at him I felt like he did deserve an answer. 'I think, if I am to be honest, he has always thought you were a little closer to the old government than you claimed. I'm sorry if that hurts you.'

'That's it?' he looked into my eyes. 'No, that doesn't hurt me. It's wrong, but it doesn't hurt me. And you?'

'Me?' I asked.

'Yes, what do you hold against me?'

'Nothing, why? Would I be here if I did?'

'Jean, you may think of me as a fool. I am aware that my personality is not to everybody's liking. But I was not a judge for nothing. I may have misjudged in the past but I know one thing about you.'

'And what's that?'

'You are too good a person, too well-mannered to let a dislike affect your duties to somebody who helped you.'

'Kenneth, that's not true.'

He shrugged, and then groaned in pain. But he would not stop looking at me. 'Do you hold something against me?'

'No.'

'Do you suspect me of anything? I want to know so I can clear things up before…well

before…please, you must tell me.' He had taken to gripping my hand.

'I do hold one thing against you.'

His eyes narrowed and his head leant forward. 'Go on.'

'It's your claim that Judge O'Higgins blew up the courthouse. That's all. I knew her and I just simply don't believe it.' His eyes seemed to stare at me in disbelief. 'And if I had one request,' I continued, 'it would be for you to give me her manuscript.'

'Yes … I thought you might ask for that.' He lay back breathing out of sigh of pain.

'So you have a copy of it? Please Kenneth.'

'Jean,' he looked at me, 'I will have to think about it. It was a classified document.'

'Do you still have it?'

'I will have to look through my papers. I honestly can't remember. I'll think about it.' He closed his eyes and began to breathe heavily.

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'I think he still has a copy of O'Higgins's manuscript,' was the first thing I said to Bobbie when he picked up the phone.

'Ag, Jean. No man, you have to let this go.'

'Why?'

'Why? Because, for one thing, it has eaten at our relationship for fifteen years.'

'But Bobbie, you know, these were my friends. My husband died.'

'Okay Jean, what do you want me to do?'

'Come down here tomorrow and help me get this thing out of him.'

'Okay,' he sighed, 'just don't do anything stupid.'

'Please Bobbie he will destroy it if we don't stop him. I know it.'

'Sometimes Jean, I think that is the only reason why you remained friends with him.'

'Oh Bobbie don't say that kind of thing, it makes me feel awful.'

'Because it's true?'

'No, of course it's not true. This man helped me; he helped us.'

'Yes dear. Just sit tight. And Jean! Don't do anything until I am there, hey? Do you understand?'

'Yes Bobbie, of course.'

The house was quiet. Rebecca had gone to her living quarters and Manzini was in bed asleep. He had been in a great deal of pain that evening and I had given him a table spoon of liquid

morphine. I was lying in bed thinking, when those thoughts got the better of me. I slipped down the stairs towards the study taking with me as many of the keys from the locks of the house similar to those of Manzini's study. Using the torch on my phone to light the keyhole I placed each one in the lock hoping that one would be a close enough match to unlock the door. The fifth key I slipped into the lock with encouraging ease. I turned it and the lock although offering some resistance began to turn. Then with a little force it went the whole 180 degrees. I turned the handle of the door, but something else was holding it closed. I ran the torch up and down the door but could not find any other lock.

I went down the corridor to the guest toilet and without turning on the light I took out my phone.

'Jesus Jean, what are you doing?'

'Nothing,' I whispered. 'I've unlocked the study door,' I said.

'Oh Jesus Christ.'

'But there is something else holding it shut.'

'Jean, what are you up to?'

'I want that manuscript. I am sorry Bobbie but I am tired of this fucker keeping it from me.'

'Okay, okay, okay. Ja, so what's the problem?'

'I unlocked the door but something else is holding it closed.'

'Okay, check it out for a dead bolt lock. They can be very small these days, hey.'

'I've checked. There's nothing like that.'

'Okay, it could be a magnetic lock. Look if there's a metal plate on the top of the door between door and the frame.'

'And if there is?'

'Ja, you would have to trip the electricity. Then if it is attached to a battery you would have to wait some hours, maybe days for that to run down. But besides even if you do get into the room, he will have it locked away in some safe or cabinet.'

'Bobbie, whose side are you on?'

'Look Jean, come on, just go to bed. I will come up tomorrow and we can both talk to Manzini.'

'But it might be my only chance. He might get rid of it first thing tomorrow if he decides he does not want me to see it.'

'I will come up first thing. I won't let him destroy it. Now go to bed.'

I went back to the door. I shone my torch up at the gap between the door and frame and found what looked like a metal plate of the kind Bobbie had spoken about. I walked back to my

room first checking on Manzini. I pushed his door open and found him sitting up on the side of the bed. 'Are you okay?' I asked.

His head turned towards me and I could see from the light of the passage that came into the room he was tired and confused. 'Toilet!' he whispered in a croaking sleepy voice. I went over to help him. He had managed to pull down his pyjama pants. His penis hung between his legs onto the bedsheets. I picked up the large glass jar that sat next to the bed, held it up and helped him put his penis into it. A thick brown stinking urine poured out, filling the jar half full. 'Thank you,' he said. His one arm propped himself up while the other lay helplessly between his legs. His head was swaying and he let out muffled grunts as if he were in some pain. I took the jar away once he had finished and helped him pull up his pants.

He slumped diagonally back onto the bed. I pulled him straight and got his head back onto the pillows. He was breathing heavily and groaned with each movement. I pulled the blankets and sheet up under his arms and laid them on top, next to his sides. 'Drink,' his voice whispered, 'water.' I took the bottle next to his bed and raising his head with my hand, I poured it into his mouth. He took several mouthfuls. 'More?' I asked.

'Yes, more.' I poured some more liquid into his mouth and then laid his head back onto the pillow.

'Thank you,' he whispered. His hand then reached out clumsily for mine and I held it for a second before placing it back next to his side. I then went back to my bed and waited for morning.

That morning I did not check on him as I usually did, instead I sat at the dining room table waiting for Bobbie to arrive. I did not wish to disturb Manzini. The longer he slept the more likely it was that we would be able to save the manuscript. I was on my second cup of coffee when I heard the screams. 'Madam, madam come,' Rebecca was shouting from somewhere in the house.

'What is it Rebecca?' I called out and got up from the table.

'The Master. He's dead! He's dead!'

I rushed up the stairs to find Manzini much as I had last seen him. He was lying, his blank eyes looking up at the ceiling, with the sheet and blankets tucked neatly under his arms. I could see that he was dead. 'Do something, do something. Madam,' Rebecca was screaming at me. But there was nothing I could do. His forehead was freezing cold to the touch. He had clearly died some hours ago. With this I took myself and Rebecca out of the room and closed the door.

She was crying and we held each other for a while. Unlike the day of the explosion at the courthouse, where everything seemed to move with an incredible speed while at the same time dragging without end, the world seemed only slower. We stood outside the room for some time. 'Madam, what should we do?' Rebecca said between sobs.

'Bobbie is coming now. He will sort it out.'

All I wanted was for Rebecca to stop crying. We went down to the kitchen, sat down at the table and put the kettle on. It might seem wrong to say this, but the only thing that then went through my head was that I would have a proper chance finding O'Higgins's manuscript. I think these kinds of disconnected thoughts can quite often occur in a state of shock. Certainly, similar random and emotionally disconnected thoughts had run through my head in Albertsburg on those first few days.

Bobbie was only a few minutes away by the time I got hold of him and I told him to hurry. Rebecca and I sat at the kitchen table together drinking tea. 'What will I do? I have worked for this master for 35 years now, since he was still a young man.'

'Don't worry Rebecca. I will make sure that you're okay.'

'Yes madam. This master, he was a strange one. But he was kind to me.'

'Yes, to me too,' I said.

Rebecca and I were, I thought then, perhaps the only people in the world who might actually cry for Manzini. When Bobbie arrived I opened the door and looked at him. 'He's dead.'

'Jean, my God, what have you done?'

'Nothing, he died in his sleep!' I almost shouted. I knew that Bobbie was looking for a message in my eyes. But I had none to give. I led him to the bedroom. Manzini was lying there still staring upwards with an expression I can only say I never saw him wearing while he was alive. It was one of peace, as if the mental strain of his psyche had left him to enter the next world, leaving only the body of a person at peace. A peace he had never experienced while he was alive. Bobbie walked over and placed the back of his hand on his forehead. 'No warmth at all. I would say he's been dead for several hours now.'

'What should we do?'

'Well we'll have to call the coroner, hey? Would that be okay?'

'Of course it would.'

'Okay, just checking. But before we call them, we should have a look at that study and see what he has in there. We would not want anybody from the police or special branch walking away with that bloody manuscript of yours.'

'And Rebecca?'

'Who's that?'

'The domestic worker.' My husband paused for a second looking at me. 'If we give her a good deal, she won't talk,' I continued.

'Tell her she can go back to her room. Where is the key to the study?'

'Here.' I said handing it to him. I had found it and a fob hanging around his neck.

'You go and deal with Rebecca.'

Once Rebecca was in her room I gave her something to calm her down and told her that Bobbie and I would deal with everything. I went back to discover Bobbie was in the study and was searching through Manzini's desk. 'Well there is one document for you,' he said pointing to a about thirty A4 pages. I picked them up with a real sense of eagerness. 'What is this?'

'Looks like some kind of draft of a confession. A setting the record straight. It was sitting on his desk. He's made a few hand-written hand notes at the end. He wanted to know what we have thought of him.'

We searched the room as hard as we could – Bobbie even picked the lock of the filing cabinet – but there was no sign of Judge O'Higgins' manuscript could be found. We looked for a safe behind the pictures or for false draws in his desk but nothing turned up. We found tax records, a will, musings on the law and a portfolio of all of his judgments beginning from the Kosaner period but there was nothing resembling O'Higgins' manuscript. More out of frustration than anything else I pressed the on button of the printer. The printer came on, but nothing happened. Bobbie looked at me. 'Jean, we're going to have to call the coroner.'

'I know.'

About an hour later two men from the coroner's office appeared in a bakkie and took the body away. We identified ourselves as friends. They showed little interest in the circumstances of his death. They simply put him on a dolly – he could not have weighed more than about 50kg by that stage – and placed a sheet over him and he disappeared into the system of the State's mortuary.

I spent a few days waiting for the coroner's report. But nothing came. After five days I was emailed to say that his ashes had not been claimed by a family member and asking if we could pick them up. When Bobbie and I went to collect them they were handed over to us in a small rough wooden casket labelled 'Manzini, Kenneth – Judge'.

That evening I gave Manzini's confession to Bobbie to read. After dinner he sat in the lounge at the lamp and did not move until he had finished. 'Well,' I said bringing him a rooibos tea when I saw that he had put the pages down on the coffee table, 'what do you think?'

'It's the most truthful piece of lying I've ever read.'

'I think I know what you are saying, but what do you mean?'

'Ja, like it's all there. There isn't a single conversation missed out on, not a single word that we spoke that is not there and not one event that's not present. But it's all lies, from the beginning to the end. I mean, do you even recognise this guy called Manzini? The person who appears in these pages is not the one either you or I knew.'

'There are parts of it that are true,' I replied. 'Like when he got the fright on seeing you in the dining room. That, for me, rung true. He was always filled with a terror of something. It was strange that in death he didn't struggle.'

'Ja, I guess so, but this confession is all just bullshit. And it wasn't that he was terrified all the time. In the Truth Commission he was darn right composed, it's what saved him. There really was something going on in Albertsburg, he was terrified for a good reason and this document is proof.'

'Is it?' I asked. 'It denies it.'

'Precisely. But why attempt to re-explain what he already explained in the TC. No, Manzini was always untrustworthy. And he took something to his grave.'

'You don't think he changed?' I asked. 'You were the one who stood up for him at the Commission.'

'Ja, that was a bloody mistake.'

# Chapter 3

There was far less fuss about Manzini's death than we had thought that there would be. Even the newspapers largely overlooked it. Those seemingly famous few months where his findings had been used as a justification for the brutal attempted crackdown on the opposition and those two awkward days when Manzini had testified at the Truth Commission on live television – those things that seemed so large in my mind – were all but forgotten.

A few days after his death one policeman arrived at his house and did some nosing around in his study. He looked at the computer, but found his access blocked. 'Do you have a password for this thing?' he asked me.

'No. I didn't know him that well.'

'Do you know anybody who does?'

'No, I'm afraid not.'

'Wife, children, parents?'

'No, he didn't have any of those.'

'Lonely man?'

'Yes, I guess he was,' I replied.

The policeman turned it off and left it lying on the table. He opened the filing cabinet but showed little interest in its contents. He picked one or two art works off the wall looking for a safe but finding nothing he left. 'I'll come back in a few days' time for the computer and a few other things,' he said at the front door. But we never saw him again. We went to see the executor of his will and it was confirmed that he had left the beach house and his art collection to us. There was also a note to us saying that we should pay Rebecca an amount for her retirement and that the rest was to go to a person called Jean De Port. We supposed that the pile of things he had left on the one chair in his study was for this person. But just who this person was, we had no idea at the time. A search on social media and with the police uncovered nobody of that name. Or certainly nobody of that name who would have been a person the judge would have known.

I took a further week off work to go through his things. Naturally I knew that I was really looking for the manuscript but I did a lot of organising too. Bobbie and I agreed that we would sell the house, that we would buy Rebecca a house near to where she wanted to retire and with the rest of it we would buy our own beach cottage somewhere further down the coast.

Despite having gone through most things in his bedroom and study I still believed the manuscript to be somewhere. So obsessive did the idea become to me that thoughts of what

Mandel had done to Boetsman's pub in search of treasure came to mind. But in the end I realised that the only place it could really be was on his computer. I was in the throes of a total obsession and I went as far as to ask Bobbie to get an old colleague to crack the password. I had promised Bobbie that this was the last time he would ever hear of this. But even after we had got into the computer there was no sign of it on his hard-drive. The manuscript had, like the files of the courthouse, seemingly dissolved into the ashes of history.

It was some days after having searched the laptop that a man came ringing at the gate on Rebecca's day off. I could see from the security camera that he was a man in his late middle age driving a family car. 'Hello, are you lost?' I asked.

'Hello, who's that?' A soft voice came through the intercom.

'I am a friend of the owner of the house. Are you lost?' I repeated.

'No, I am looking for Judge Manzini.'

'What business do you have with him?'

'Well. I'm a friend. I haven't heard from him in a while. I have an appointment...'

'You better come inside,' I said pressing the button for the electric gate. I watched the man on the screen getting out of the car. He rang the bell at the front door and on opening it I found a timid looking bald headed man in front of me.

'Is he dead?' were the first words that came from his mouth.

'I am afraid so…' I began and he took my hand that was stretched out to him with both of his.

'Thank you,' he said and then turning, with tears welling in his eyes, he began to return to his car. 'Thank you,' he said again as he got to the driver's door.

'Where are you going? Come back,' I called. 'Please come back. Come inside.'

'No, I will not disturb you.'

'You are not disturbing me,' I said following him. 'Please come in, I beg you.'

The man reluctantly got out of his car and I took him by his arm and led him up to the house again. 'Come let's have some tea,' I said sitting him down in the kitchen.

'I was a friend,' he began. His face was red and his eyes had not cleared of tears.

'I know. You are Jean De Port.'

'Yes. How do you know that?'

'You're in his will.'

'The flat and money?'

'Yes.'

'And this place?'

'I am afraid he left it to my husband and me. We were going to split it with Rebecca if that's okay?'

'Oh yes. I think Kenneth would be fine with that. I really have no use for it.' He paused and stared helplessly out the window. 'You and the garden club were the only things he had after Albertsburg. He spoke of you and your husband often. Oh dear, I am sorry to have upset you.'

'No, that is okay,' I said wiping tears that seemed to have almost inexplicably appeared in my eyes. 'I am afraid to say he never mentioned you.'

'No, he wouldn't have.'

'So,' I said handing him a mug of tea, 'there are some things for you, a pile of books that he set aside, some letters and an envelope. I have not touched them. And I need your bank details. How long did you know him?'

'We were at university together.'

'God, that long.'

'Oh don't worry, we both wanted to live like this. There was never any question of being modern. My family would not have stood for it. And in the old days, well it would not have been possible.'

'Did the old regime know about him?'

'I really didn't know. I suspected that they did. But Kenneth never spoke of those things. We had some real fights about it though.'

I was completely lost for words. I had no idea what to say to this man in front of me.

'I do have one request though. Now that I think about it,' he said.

'Yes, what's that?'

'I would like his computer.'

'What would you want that for?' I asked thinking only of my manuscript.

'As you may realise Kenneth was private person, so am I. We had no love for sensation. I know that you are a good person. He told me you were. He would often tell me this. In fact, it quite upset him sometimes, he was an admirer. Of course, not in that sense. The computer is the only thing that I would worry about.'

I could see no reason that I could legitimately offer that could deny him this request.

'I mean,' he continued, 'things are fine with this kind of thing these days. But as Kenneth used to say 'what goes in one direction, can always go in the other'. I would worry. And my family they would never understand. De Port is not my real name. Kenneth had it changed for me.'

'Of course,' I said. 'Of course, you can have it.' I was, I knew, slightly unwilling to let the computer go despite the fact that I had searched through it. I had a sudden feeling that this was

my last chance to find the judge's manuscript. But as I handed it to him with the pile of books and a few other things, I felt that I was putting an obsession to bed. If it was in his laptop, then it was lost to me. I would simply have to trust my own feelings. That is, trust that my friend, Judge O'Higgins, was not somebody capable of killing a whole town.

'I would like to have one last look around, if I may?' he asked.

'Of course you can. And please take anything you want.' I was slightly intrigued as to where this man might go. And looking at the books he had with him I suddenly had the urge to search through them. The fear that this man had come to take the manuscript away from me caught hold once more.

'Come,' I said, 'I will take those from you while you go around.'

I put his books down on the dining room table and, as he walked up the stairs, I flipped through them. A book of Wordsworth's poetry, Goethe's *Faust*, *The Fall*, a book on Rossetti with an inscription saying 'To my Lilith, happy birthday' but no signs of a hidden manuscript. I took a deep breath. 'Get a grip Jean,' I breathed to myself.

With this I followed Manzini's lover up the stairs and found him in the spare bedroom looking at a copy of a Rossetti painting of a woman standing among roses. It was a painting that Manzini had got an artist friend of mine to copy for him. 'Does it have a meaning?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said, his eyes incandescent with tears.

'He did love roses,' I said looking at him. 'I am so sorry.'

'Did he love roses? I was never sure. It was an obsession more than a love. And don't be sorry. He was a useless drunkard. In some ways, I hated him. If you don't mind I just would like some time.'

'Of course,' I said stepping out of the room. 'You can have the painting if you want it.'

'Oh no, I don't want it.'

I stepped outside, not sure if I should remain waiting for him in the passage. He was in there for some minutes before he came out.

'I am sorry,' he said, 'but you spend a lifetime with somebody, you are bound to both love and hate them.'

'Of course,' I said, 'I know that.'

'Yes, you do. He told me.'

I put my hand on his arm but he showed no further signs of emotion.

As De Port left the house I told him that we had planned to take Manzini's ashes up to the burial place at Thaba Bosui. 'Yes, he would've liked that,' he said.

'You could come if you want.'

'No, I'm afraid I can't.' And he turned away from me and walked to his car.

I have often wondered just who this man was. To date I have never discovered his identity. I often wondered if he came to take my manuscript from me and had done so with a sleight of hand. One day, a few weeks later in the grips of one of these thoughts I went to the flat that Manzini had put Bobbie and me up in when I first arrived in the capital. I rang the buzzer, expecting De Port to answer, but I discovered a young married couple living there. They claimed never to have heard of Manzini or De Port and that they did not know the owner. They rented the flat from an agency. When I asked what agency, they closed the door on me.

# Chapter 4

We sold Manzini's beach house some months later but we did stay there a few times before it went. This was mainly to organise the packing up of his numerable unwanted possessions. Books and clothes were sent to charity shops. And Bobbie one Sunday, according to Manzini's wishes, made a bonfire of the papers he kept in his study. As we stood at this blaze, the evening darkness progressing around us, I could not help but remember the fire of the courthouse. Its flames on the first nights of the blaze rose up, towering above the town, leaping higher than the mountains. Albertsburg was lit by the blaze, orange and rose flashing on all the surfaces of the houses. The bonfire had a smaller but similar effect in the garden and I stood there remembering the devastation and the heat. I recalled standing in Albertsburg, alone, holding a green garden hose against an inferno. 'I wonder if we are destroying anything important. I hope my manuscript isn't in there,' I said as I stood with my arm linked into Bobbie's.

'It's possible. But then maybe it's better this way.'

'What do you mean?'

'The country's forgotten Manzini and Albertsburg, perhaps it should just stay forgotten. So what if a few pieces of history go up in flames. Nobody really seems to care.'

'I care and I want to remember,' I said.

'I know.' And he turned and kissed me affectionately.

'It's amazing that the authorities took so little interest. They would have thrown his ashes into an unmarked pit if it wasn't for us.'

'It's maybe what he deserved.'

'Bobbie don't say that. Having met his boyfriend I felt a real sadness for him. It could not have been easy.'

'Ja, it's kind of strange that it would be left to us to give his death some dignity. I wonder if he would have done us the same.'

'We should throw some of those paintings of his in here too,' I said after a short silence. The heat was burning my cheeks and eyes. 'Those copies he got Catherine to paint should also be put into the fire of forgetting too.'

'No, don't do that. We can find another home for them. And besides what would you tell Catherine.'

'Well one thing I can tell you, Bobbie Jordaan, they are not going to find a way into our house.'

'That one painting of the woman brushing her hair isn't that bad. I could see it above our fireplace now.'

'*In* our fireplace, maybe.'

To be fair though there were some nice pieces of art that he had collected over the years that he left me: a Thomas Baines, an Irma Stern landscape, some Kentridge silhouettes, a Gerard Sekoto, and some interesting botanical studies of various periods. But his reason for having copies made of famous works – much like the engineer's grandfather had done – was then obscure to me. I rather snobbishly put this down to the nouveau riche element to his tastes or perhaps an intellectual insecurity. Amongst these paintings was the Rossetti in the one guest bedroom. There was also a copy of Van Eyck's *The Just Judges* which sat over the bed in the same room. I, at the time, was completely unaware that he was playing some kind of game, no doubt with me. For that guest room was always the one that he had Rebecca make up for me when I stayed there. Why I didn't remove any of these slightly annoying objects sooner was no doubt because most of the time I spent at his beach house was taken up with going through his documents and searching his bedroom.

It was only about a week after the bonfire that the paintings made sense. I was working in the garden, in my rose bed. Bobbie was sitting on a deck chair at the pool reading the news on his tablet when I came to sit with him carrying a series of cuttings. 'I have never really understood your interest in roses,' he said. 'You grow so many other more interesting flowers. I can understand Manzini doing it. He had no imagination. But why you?'

'There are so many differences in them,' I replied. 'It's an interest in difference. Or at least it is for me. Each one has singular set of needs and a different outcome.'

'Look it's not like I haven't taken an interest in your roses. I could probably name some of them. Hold one of them up and I'll see how good I've got.'

With this I picked up a rose from my bunch. 'That's a Mister Lincoln.'

'Good.'

'Oh, that one I don't know.'

'Oh my God, Bobbie, this one's called Jean.'

'Sorry. Okay I know that one,' he said, pointing to one in the bunch that lay in front of him. 'That's an Albertina Sisulu. And I will tell you something about it, it is the rose Manzini got Catherine to paint into that painting that hangs in the guest bedroom.'

'How do you know that?' I asked with surprise.

'Ag, I remember Catherine telling you once at a dinner party. She said that Manzini had wanted the work painted with that particular rose.'

I stopped holding up flowers. I remembered Catherine telling me that story. Manzini had been insistent that the painting had to be done with those roses. He was constantly sending bunches of them to her house. She had thought, at the time, he was trying to come onto her. Bobbie carried on talking and I took out my phone and googled Rossetti. Not having much of an interest in the Pre-Raphaelites I was not aware that the name of the painting was 'Lady Lilith'.

'Bobbie, I need to go to the beach house now.'

'But we'll have to drive there over dinner time.'

'We'll buy some on the way. Please just humour me,' I said. 'I think I might know where the manuscript is.'

'Ag Jean, no man.'

'Please Bobbie, this is the last time I will ever mention it.'

'Jean, you've said this shit before. You're mad, man. I really don't know why I do these things for you.'

'Love?'

'It's mental illness, I think.'

We got to the beach house at about nine that evening. At that time of the night, in the middle of winter, the house had a cold hollow emptiness to it. Shaking off this feeling I rushed through the hall and up the stairs to the guest bedroom. I am not entirely sure what happened next. Jess, I remember, was at my heels. She was barking in confusion. When I got there, I discovered the painting's frame was bolted to the wall. I knew then that I was on the right track. I wrenched the frame from the wall and then all went black.

I woke to find myself on the floor with somebody checking my pulse. Jess was whining somewhere. The painting and parts of the frame lay torn in pieces to the side of me. Other parts of the frame were still attached to the wall. And there was the smell of burnt flesh.

'What happened?' I said noticing that my left arm lay next to me and seemed paralysed. 'Where are we Albert?'

'Albert?'

'What's happened. I don't feel well.'

'Jean, just lie back.'

'What's happened?'

'Jean, I am not sure, Jean, Jean!'

My arm felt horribly numb, I could feel hands holding my neck straight. Then a mouth seemed to come over mine breathing into me. I felt my chest raise and then there was blackness. There were noises, my body was being moved around, hands were on me, many hands and voices.

A light was shining in the distance.

****

'Well,' my husband said entering the ward, 'how are you feeling?'

'Surprisingly well thank you, although my left arm doesn't seem to want to move. What happened?'

'The wellness would be the morphine speaking. You should be experiencing a relatively severe headache.'

'Ah the wonders of morphine,' I said. 'How on earth did I get here?'

'The wonders of electricity. Whatever that safe contains, Manzini was pretty keen that nobody was to get hold of it. It's booby-trapped. There was enough electric current running through it to murder a rhinoceros. You, my dearest wife, are lucky to be alive,' he said sitting down and taking my right hand. 'You obviously brushed the safe with your upper arm as you were destroying Catherine's painting. If you had gripped the handle, ja well, you would've gone to meet Manzini.'

'Have you managed to open it?' I asked.

'I've gotten it out of the wall. Finding the source of the electricity was bloody difficult, it wasn't linked to the mains. But the only way of getting into it is to blow it. It's gotten a pretty sophisticated lock and code system.'

'Bobbie, I don't know why you put up with me.'

'I don't know either, hey. Come now, don't cry, no that was a joke. No, Jean, you've never been any trouble to me. And when you have it has been a kind of good trouble. No, you mustn't cry.'

Bobbie sat with me for some time before he told me: 'Of course in blowing the lock, I could destroy the contents.'

'Oh no, you mustn't do that,' I smiled at him.

'You're lucky you are married to the best man in the blowing up business,' he said holding my right hand.

'What are the chances that you could destroy what is in there?'

'Let's say 30%. Jean,' he suddenly said lowering his voice and then going to check to see if anybody was around, 'I am worried.'

'About what Bobbie?'

'About what's in that safe.'

'I'm not.'

'Jean, you know, hey, you could find something in there that shall upset you.'

'I am aware of that, but I am prepared for it. I have spent the last fifteen years preparing myself.'

'Also,' again he lowered his voice, 'you might find things out, that, well, it could put us in danger.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean the CCB,' he paused, 'they might have been disbanded but there still people in the secret services who were the old president's keepers.'

'I thought they'd been purged?'

'Only the junior ones; the ones who didn't matter that much. The only person really to be exposed in the Truth Commission was Zané Tlali and luckily for everybody he was dead at the time. It was easy for them to find against him. Look at Manzini, he survived largely intact. There were lots in the CCB that, like Manzini, went straight back to their old jobs. They won't want you scratching at the surface.'

'Bobbie, what are you saying to me?'

'I just want to make sure that you understand.'

'I want to know what happened.'

'Alright then.'

He held my hand and I lay there in silence until sleep and morphine finally took me over.

It was another day before I could leave the hospital. My heart had been beating irregularly and I had a large burn mark on my upper left arm where I had brushed against the safe. The left-hand side of my body was still painful for the next couple of days and I spent this time at home wondering and fretting about the contents of the safe. I was lying asleep on the couch with the TV on when Bobbie arrived home. 'How did it go?' I asked raising myself.

'Did you not get my message?'

'I've been sleeping. What happened?'

'Well let's just say, I bring you your manuscript partly smoked but undamaged. There are some other bits and bobs that were in there – photographs and stuff. I've put them into a folder for you. There are few pictures of him and some guy on holiday. Other than that there doesn't seem to be very much.'

# Chapter 5

The manuscript still lay unbound in the folder Manzini had placed it into in O'Higgins' study that day. Its pages were well thumbed, notes had been scrawled in the margins and Post-it Notes protruded throughout. I did not read it immediately. In fact I did not know quite what to do with it at first. I had waited for this for so long that in the first few hours of having it in my hands, I simply looked at each page. It was as if each one had the potential to reveal a world that I had long left behind. I glanced at a few of the passages that Manzini had marked up and then put all the pages back into the folder.

It was at about nine o'clock that night, when Bobbie had sat down to watch a game of soccer, that I went to my study. I took the pages out of their torn and ragged folder and I began to read. A flood of emotions came over me, I could not hold them back. I began to cry quietly for some minutes and the tears hid the words from my eyes. I squeezed them out, wiping them away with my fingers until, finally, the document came once more into focus.

The words again brought out tears as I realised that it was my friend talking to me, my friend whose absence in my life suddenly became overwhelming. As I continued it was as if she was there with me in the room. I could hear her voice in the sentences. And I felt that if I turned around at any moment I would find her sitting there, on the chair behind me, in her black robes, her face unchanged by time.

Those idiosyncratic mannerisms of speech were all there in her writing. And behind them was that caring and engaged person whose greatest shame was not her redeployment and her husband's fall from grace, but her son. For me the pages seemed to be filled with him. She mentioned him to me only once, at Boetsman's, but that once was enough. I knew that few moments ever went by when he was not in her thoughts. He was an invisible presence in her life and indeed in our lives in Albertsburg. The manuscript itself might not be that revealing to those who did not know her. She might at times seem like something of a cold fish, but for me the manuscript seemed saturated in emotion and warmth.

What surprised me was how I came off as somebody much harder and more in control than I ever felt I was. In those days I seemed simply to be lurching from one set of troubles to the next, simply trying to keep my husband and the world from imploding. As for the rest of the people, they appeared as true to life as any writer could render them. She could have been a little less hard on Enoch who was not quite as ogre-like and stupid as she portrayed him. This was no doubt the result of him having accused her of having slept with Bain. Poor Enoch, he was just slightly mad.

Manzini's reading of it, as I knew, was entirely made up and self-serving. Of course, he was

right about certain omissions. Daniel did not disappear from our world after he was arrested. He was always in court with Bain, his legs manacled. He too was allowed to roam the town at certain hours of the day. And then there was Boetsman. O'Higgins did leave out that she had also been implicated in the making of illicit alcohol with Daniel and Boetie. Quite why Daniel is not there in the last half is mystery and why she did not mention her involvement in the scheme to keep the Jakkal and Vel alive is strange but not something that worries me.

I realise too that there is a certain ambiguity to O'Higgins portrayal particularly in the last section. And perhaps she was, as perhaps we all were, at the time, bosbefok – a little mad. Who could not have been, living under those conditions?

It is difficult for me to remember those times without pain and confusion. But even before I was to discover the photograph, I was satisfied that this manuscript went a long way to vindicating her. Perhaps the only thing I never understood was why Stephen Tlali had stayed at home that day. And why he had hanged himself. It is a question I still ask and it is one that will almost certainly now never be answered.

The next days I sat reading O'Higgins' and Tlali's documents over again. And began to type them out in the form that, if you are reading this, you have found them. I had not taken much of an interest in the other papers that Bobbie had recovered from the safe. As he said, many of them were simply pictures of Manzini with what turned out to be Jean De Port. We had gone to Manzini's beach house that weekend to sort out a few final things before the transfer. I had been working in his study. It was about lunch time when I began going through these pictures, mainly so see what I should throw out. There was a side of Manzini in them that I had never witnessed before. In one he had his arm slipped over De Port's shoulders in front of a basilica in what looked like Italy. Another showed Jean directing a loving glance towards him as they sat in some unidentifiable restaurant on the Mediterranean.

These sudden feelings of goodwill towards him were, however, irreparably destroyed when I opened a brown sealed envelope that lay innocuously amongst the photos. From this I pulled out a colour print of a photograph. Its general graininess both as a result of a low resolution camera as well as the printer that was running out of yellow did not conceal the fact that it was a photo of an identity card. What was more, the face that was staring back at me was one, although younger, I knew very well. At first my sudden shock at seeing it staring back at me from the past confused me. For I did not fully understand what I was looking at. Then after some moments I called for Bobbie, who came rushing from the kitchen.

'Jean! What? Oh my God, I thought you were being attacked.'

'Well, I think maybe I am.'

'What? What are you talking about.'

I extended my arm out to him with the piece of printed A4 paper in my hand. He took it from me and looked at it. 'I don't understand, who is this?'

It is a strange trick of memory that one could have lived with somebody for so long that one can forget that they have not been with you your whole life. My immediate thought was that Bobbie had gone mad.

'Oh my God, what do you mean?'

'Jean, I don't know who this is. I have never seen this man before. Is this Mandel?'

'No, God no, Bobbie, it's Joseph Bain!' I said. He still did not seem to understand. 'It's the engineer.'

He looked at the page again and sat down with his eyebrows raised. 'So, Bain worked for the Civil Cooperation Bureau?'

'Oh God, Bobbie what does that mean?' I shouted in a state of complete confusion. Bobbie looked at me.

'Jean, sit down.'

'What does it mean Bobbie?'

'I've no idea. It certainly means that his name was not Joseph Bain.' Bobbie took out the magnifying glass that lay on the desk. 'The surname is a four-letter word though. It's not the best copy ever made and the photograph is out of focus. But it looks like 'Roux' rather than Bain. That is definitely an x at the end. His name was Roux I would say.'

'Bobbie who cares what his name was. What on earth does this mean?'

'Ja, my guess would be that this guy was sent out by the CCB to 'mind' the Tlalis, and possibly to act against them with, as they used to say, 'extreme prejudice'. He was probably sent up there by their own son.' Bobbie continued to look over the image with the magnifying glass. 'The C10 code, on the bottom right, means he was in the hit squads. These guys are still in the woodwork.'

'Hit squad?'

'No doubt he was sent to Albertsburg ultimately to kill. Or perhaps even blow up a courthouse. That's what those guys did.'

'Civil Bureau, civil servant, civil engineer. Bobbie!' I began to cry. 'We had no idea. Do you think Mandel knew?'

Bobbie said nothing and continued to inspect the image. Then looking up at me as I sat at my computer he said: 'Jean! Don't!'

'My God, what?'

‘Don’t google anything. Do not put this man’s name into google.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because.’

‘Why?’

‘Because within a day we will have some man here, I’m telling you. Just leave it out.’

# Chapter 6

I could not sleep that night. Too many thoughts rustled my mind. As I lay there Manzini's confession kept coming into my head. How could he have written the things that he did? At three in the morning I got up. Bobbie rolled over. 'Come Jean stop thinking. Let's talk about it tomorrow morning.'

'It is the morning.'

He sighed and reached out to me with his arm, but I pushed it away and got up. 'Jean, don't put anything into a computer, do you hear me?'

I left the bedroom and went down into the study to begin working through Manzini's text. How had Manzini come across this ID? Had he been sent it with all the other papers in the files that he carried with him to Albertsburg? Somehow I did not think so. I remember him leaving that file on the outdoor table once after lunch. And its papers were often lying about on this desk in his room. The two objects he kept under close and paranoid scrutiny were his phone and the O'Higgins manuscript.

I began to focus on the time we went to Enoch's farm. Did he meet somebody up there? I had always thought there was something very strange about that day. I remember now that I thought at the time that there were two voices in Bain's study. But I had accepted his explanation, that he was talking to himself. I had no reason not to. So, if there was another person, who was it? Was it possibly Bain or whatever his real name was? Had he survived the explosion? Or was it somebody else up there? Who had owned that house before the arrival of Bain? I could not really remember, in fact I was not even aware of its presence before Bain arrived. All records of it would have been destroyed in the courthouse or perhaps they would be in the City Hall. And God knows what had happened to that place now.

The question that then began to bother me was, how would Bain have made his escape? I went back to the Judge's manuscript. What was Bain doing overlooking the excavation of the Jakkal en Vel? What did he mean when he said to the judge that they were 'getting close'? Did he perhaps not mean they were getting close to opening the storm water drain which ran in a direct line to his cell. With this open he would then be able to make his escape. There was certainly no other way he would have been able to have got out.

All these thoughts went through my mind in the next few hours. And when Bobbie finally got up and made me breakfast all these theories came flooding out. He listened to me without interjecting. 'What happened that day up at Enoch's?' I asked.

'Ja,' he said, 'there was somebody there. I never told you. I caught just the slightest glimpse

of him making his way up through the trees. He was army trained. I remember I walked the whole way back with my arm around you and my hand on my gun. I was jumpy as a lizard.'

'Did you know that this person was in contact with Manzini?'

'I wasn't sure.'

'But you suspected.'

'Ja and I knew that we could be in quite serious danger, when it became clear what training this guy had. I knew that if Manzini was in contact with this man then if we stuck to Manzini we would probably be safe. So when he said it was time to leave I realised he was not in clear control of the situation anymore. That's when I knew we must get out.'

'Oh Bobbie, what are we going to do?'

'What do you mean?'

'We are not just going to do nothing?'

'We absolutely *are* going to do nothing!' He put down the pan and looked at me in a way I rarely ever see him do.

'What do you mean?'

'We are going to do precisely nothing.'

'But why?'

'Jean!' he yelled. 'You will stop this right now. There is nothing more for you to find. For God's sake. Do you think all the spoeks have gone. Do you think Manzini was terrified and trembling over nothing? I can assure you nothing much has really changed. As your friend Tlali said, this plague is held in the furniture of this place. Spoeks are spoeks. They kill and intrigue for whoever is their paymaster. They certainly never reveal past operations. That is the first rule of the game.'

'Do not shout at me like this!'

'Jean, come now man, you know as much as you will ever do about this.'

'But I still don't know what happened.'

'Jean!'

'What! Stop shouting.'

'Okay, I will tell you what happened. The Tlalis were almost certainly marked for death by the CCB. Whether they fought back and accidentally killed everybody we'll never really know. I, like you, would prefer to think that they didn't. Whether it is Roux or the Tlalis or the ventilation system, you just got to drop it now. We will never know. You have to accept that. And if you think the people in the security cluster who knew of the operation are going to let you know what the plan was, then you are mistaken. If they know of Roux alias Joseph Bain, well then they were part

of it – they will take that to the grave. And they will take you to the grave if you are not careful. Come, let's go outside onto the stoep and have breakfast. You are tired. Let's have some food.'

There were whales in the bay that morning, playfully breaching near the rocky cliffs to the west, their tales occasionally flailing in the air. I, however, was not interested in looking at anything beyond my plate nor was I interested in eating what was on it. My breakfast went cold as I pushed it around. Bobbie did not say anything, except occasionally mentioning what the whales were doing in the bay. After a while he came to sit next to me and put his arm around my shoulders. I leaned towards him and slipped mine around his stomach.