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Let's Go Home: Stories and
Portraits

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For Mamma, Derra and Wapie: The voice of this book



If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding
gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13 verse 1 (NIV)



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The Photograph

‘I am. I am. I am.’

‘Yes!’

‘Issie Liesie, my toe didn’t even touch the line.’

‘Is Jonie. You’re out!’

‘But ...’

‘Ha a nee you’re out. It is my turn!’

Marelize and I were still arguing about whose turn it was to play hokkie when Antie Pyma Hinkepink came through the yard. While I was watching her hinkepink past us towards Antie Molla’s house, I thought of a rhyme when us children sees her coming down the street.

Antie Mona hinkepink through the street

To bother everyone with her gossiping

The dog runs loose

Her husband is a ninkapoop

And her poor children cry for food.

An Molla was in the kitchen but I could see she was watching us playing through the window. Why is she looking at us like that? I thought. First at Antie Pyma, then at me, and then with her hands over her mouth? An Molla knocked on the kitchen window with her eyebrows pulled skew. Any child knows that means: ‘Get inside, or else...’

I was too busy looking at all the women from Dahlia Straat, Skool Straat and Roos Straat running towards my street, and I wanted to run with, to see what was going on. I was just about to skidaddle when An Molla grabbed me by my collar.

‘In met djou,’ she says, ‘daai is grootmens goed, you and Marelize must grate polony for the kosbakke.’

I smiled because I knew she only cared even though sometimes she came across as strict. Sometimes I would ask Liewe Jesus if I could trade my Ma for Liesie's Ma. I wished I had such a nice Ma like hers. Ma Emmie said she is a weglê eier from a white man. She has pitch-black hair like sneeuwitjie's and she wears her hair in a long vlegsel that hanged like a horse's tail behind her back, and she is not brown like us, she was amper white like a real boer. I liked An Molla's house. It was always full of laughter and they liked singing for Jesus and on Friday's I would go to youth practice, and wear skirts and doekies that you tie like a bolla behind your head. Best of all is, they always had milk and Coke in the fridge, not like in our house where we drank powder milk in our cereal because Ma said milk was for madams and queens and we weren't either. Sometimes An Molla even asked me to comb her hair when she came from work at the fish factory. I combed it carefully and handled it like something precious. Her hair always smelt like Colgate Apple shampoo. Afterwards when I got home in the evening, I untangled my hair and combed it out and imagined I had hair like hers, but mine was brittle and kroes and had never grown past my ears.

I was thinking about all of this whilst I was supposed to help Liesie grate polony. And whilst An Molla has been outside. Through the window I saw her cross the street to join Antie Pyma and the others outside my place.

'Your mother is looking for you,' says An Molla entering through the kitchen door. 'Ma, my Ma knows I'm sleeping over,' I say dikbek.

'Man moetie tee praatie,' she says with her voice a bit louder this time.

I nod my head while I look at my dirty feet ash gray from all the games we played today. I am a bit sad that I can't sleep over, but I would never answer back to big people.

'Naand Oom friekie' I say in a low voice, 'naand almal' I greet to everyone in the sitting room watching Bold and the Beautiful.

When I got home our whole yard was full of people. Even people from HOP Land were there. It is probably that stupid brother of mine, I thought to myself. I wish he would just disappear, but Ma mos always take his side. I felt that she forgot that I'm also her child. As I walked through our yard everybody was whispering behind their breaths. Agies, I thought. They

like gossiping about us, because Ma and Derra are always fighting, because he is always drunk. I stood standing in the door and watched my Ma sob really loud while An Zin and An Kêtie comforted her. Ma was looking at the ceiling mumbling, ‘It’s not him, it can’t be him.’ I was so confused because everyone gave me that, “I’m sorry” looks, but no one said a thing, they just watched my Ma cry.

I did not go to school the next day and Ma was up early, cleaning and turning out the house. The house became quiet, that made me feel restless and I got up. Our house is made from suursteen bricks, a fabriek huis, an opskuld huis, Ma would remind Derra. I could see the living room from my room. Derra was sitting next to the CD player, listening to Kfm, with his head almost resting on his lap. Ma returned from An Griet, the Funeral Antie. The moment Ma came home, she just looked at Derra, but their eyes were screaming, “It is your fault!” Later on I decided to go to Derra because I felt bad for hating my brother for dying.

‘Derra?’ I asked.

‘Yes Jonie?’ He said.

‘Is Derra and Ma angry at me?’

‘No kint this is not about you.’



He did not look at me once, like me being there made it worse. I knew he was lying to me. I left him there and went back to my room that Ma had cleaned by now, sweeping and dusting like her life depended on it. I lay on my pillow with my head at the foot side like Ma when she thinks about everything, hugging my teddy so tight almost like that would make it hug me back, but I became restless and so I walked passed Derra very quietly and pushed my bike out the tool hokkie.

As soon as I got on the bike I paddled so hard it felt like I was riding on the wind up Ridderspoor Straat, Lelie straat and past Beverly Hills Plakkerskamp. The closer I got to the shore the more I could smell the Fynbos, making my nose tickle a bit, and the smell of Her, the sea, so familiar. It lingers in your lungs like the early morning mist resting on our roofs. The sea was my only sure thing. My backpack started to wriggle. I knew who it was. I was in such a rush I took the bag my dog Suzie likes to sleep in. My back was wet and so was Suzie’s tail shivering like jelly. I walked towards the shore to wash my shirt. The sea seemed angry that morning, the waves did not tumble forward and calmly rest on my feet like other days. She pushed forward a

lot of bamboes, always a bad sign. I soaked my shirt in the blue water. I looked down at my body. I am the only one that doesn't have tieties in my class. My older cousin told me that if I put chicken stront on it, it would grow faster. I put my shirt carefully on a rock and Suzie and I baked in the sun. I smiled because it felt like the sun was hugging me and Suzie licked me on the nose. She knows when I'm sad. She loves me the most, just like that moment, quiet and precious.

When I got home I gently rested my bike against the wall. My aunt, An Ragel was waiting for me. She grabbed me by the ear.

'Liepe Heiland! Waar was jy? Jou ma het genoeg om haar oor the bekommeg, gat in da so!' my aunt scowls.

I completely ignored my aunt while I take Suzie from my backpack. I wanted to see ma, I was sad and Ma always knew how to make me happy. I was scared and it felt like our house was swallowing me. I walked in on her unpacking my brother's closet, and then packing the clothes back again. I didn't know what to say. I just leaned my head against her shoulder, but she pushed me away. She looked at me very angry, her eyes and her glasses misty.

'Go play outside,' she said.

I stood there frozen, giving her a dead stare.

'Get out!' She said.

That was ten years ago and I still feel like that little girl when I come home to visit Ma from college. Nowadays Ma looks old. Her face is small and tired. I do not recognize her anymore. Everything about her irritates me. She snaps at everything I do and sometimes she just comes to my room and looks at me. I hate being here with her and our life. The house no longer smells like Jik and washing powder. The walls have turned yellow from all the cigarette smoke and the white ceilings are filled with specks of mold. It reminds me of stale bread. As a child, Ma would always tell me that stale bread gives you a nice voice. I think she is right because all those stale bread I ate on Sundays with her and Derra. When Derra lost his job I got me a job as a singer in a jazz café in town. It keeps the food on the table. The cups are half washed and the cupboards are almost empty just a bottle of fish oil, flour, a packet of yeast and pot of salt. The fridge is switched off and stands in the kitchen like an ornament. I am standing at the door observing our street, it is still as busy, with neighbors doing washing and gossiping.

‘Oumatjie! Jony! Jony Felicity Gibson! Why don’t you ever answer me when I call you?’

It is Ma who is calling me. I walk towards her room, she is scratching through my things. Sometimes it seems like she looks through my things hoping to find me there. She doesn’t even notice that I am standing next to her.

‘Look what I found!’ She says excitedly.

She gives it to me. It’s a picture of my brother and me.

‘He was darm a beautiful child,’ she says smiling.

‘Ja,’ I say, ‘Ma se oogappel,’ in a resentful way.

She turns with her hands making fist in her hips, ‘Hi! No child, I have never treated you children like vis en vleis,’ she says.

I look at Ma sitting with her legs crossed on the tapyt floor laughing at the picture. I can’t help but join her.

‘Look Oumatjie,’ she says, ‘it’s you! Always a koddige kind,’ she sighs. ‘You know when you were born you were so small you could fit into a shoebox. Pa said that it was a blessing, such children become clever children. Ai, that man was never wrong. Ma Emmie was very concerned, she was too scared to hold you, “oe gotta kindjie gat die dingetjie lewe,” Ma Emmie said with her peep voice. ‘You were two years old,’ she goes on with a smile on her face, the same sort of smile that I imagine she would have had the day it was taken.

‘Look, Antie Giena, she looks drunk,’ I say.

‘Yes,’ Ma says, ‘she is the biggest holy clown in Aster Straat now, and there is the Old Jim too, I miss the old devil.’

‘Why did they call him Old Jim a Duiwel?’

‘Loved women,’ she says simply. ‘And here stands Pa, your oupa,’ she continues. ‘Pa loved you, spoiled you rotten, tot in die afgrond in. I remember this one time, you were just starting to crawl, and we were living by Koekie them on the hill, when you fell off the blerrie steps. Pa could only think of one person to blame... “Wapie!” We say together.

‘When I got home the poor child was in tears and on top of that Pa only bought you sweets, so I had to run to Andries Kafee to get him some with my last pay. You know he really did love you, your brother,’ she says, ‘he would abba you on his back. The day I brought you home he looked at you all the time with his little legs hanging from the bed kicking and kiss you on your little forehead.’ She goes on talking ‘Ai,’ she says, ‘you mos remember Annie Têtjiek nê?’

‘Yes’ I say, ‘that lady with the voice that sound like a hooter.’

That one looked after you’, she continues, ‘she only worked for me for a week. I was so thankful at the time. I couldn’t stay home anymore, you mos know your pa was drinking, as hy mos syp,dan syp hy sy werk onder sy gat uit.I nogal paid her R20, die blêddie fool,’ Ma says. ‘Then one day’, she continues, ‘I come from work and as soon as I put my bag down she starts scowling like a crazy a hoener’. Annie says, “this damn klimetjie tells ME that I’m too drunk to look after HER, can you believe it?’ ‘Dê’, she says, ‘take your fokken kind! I will get my money later. Bye!’” Ma laughs as she tells me about Annie.

‘What did I say?’ I asked laughing.

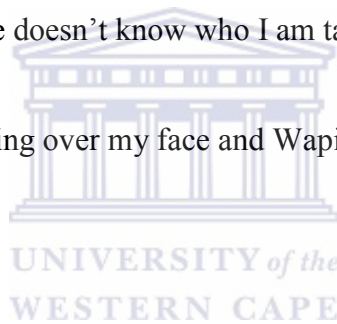
‘You loved counting teeth. You must have overheard me talk to Giena,’ she says.

‘Ma, uhm do you still miss him?’ I ask.

‘Who?’ She asks, acting like she doesn’t know who I am talking about.

‘Wapie,’ I say.

‘Ja’ she says, ‘I miss you,’ rubbing over my face and Wapie’s face on the photo.



Fraans

God became a ghost when I came to work on the boats in Gansbaai. Boet Haas got me a job as a cook on *Marlene*. *Marlene* was the most beautiful boat I had ever seen. She lay next to *Blougans* and *Kolgans* in the Ou Hawe.

The sea is a strange thing. If I wade in the water, she feels light, like nothing. When we were on sea it was a different thing. When we cast our nets she became rammetjie uitnek. *Marlene* had to bore through the sea like a drill machine.

She sank the other day and I knew *Marlene* was tired of her beatings. We were on standby a lot those days because of the strong wind. I think the sea sank us on purpose to show us wie's Baas en wie's Klaas. But I'm glad the sea took her. I would not have wanted to bury her anywhere else. I came walking down Gousblom Street, my heart just as heavy as my wet clothes. Sophia was leaning over the door; she looked at me as if I make her sick. I'd almost died and she only had bitter words to spare.

'Now can you see, Fraans, God is talking with you? It's because that skipper is Lucifer himself that the boat sink. You work, work, work but we are still poor and we are still hungry. You are drinking our lives away, gemors. Wapie can't eat bread and coffee, people will talk hy is kla so min en dun.'

My thoughts quieted down her scowls. Why, God, are you punishing me like this? Every job I find I lose. Everything I touch dies. Once I tasted that bitter sweet wine it controlled me, but my Sophia doesn't understand, my brother Japie doesn't understand and his children are too dead to understand. I killed them with Japie's car. It is my fault. How many times do I have to say I'm sorry? I am tired. Well, if you're not listening, then I am glad to die with the devil in my heart. It would not make a difference anyways.

'Dit help nie jy kyk in my bek nie, lafaard,' Sophia said.

'Man fok jou en jou God, Sophia! Fo-, 'I said.

She pushed me out and locked the door. I fell backwards, my head spinning for a while, a deep anger burning in my chest. Lying there, I felt like I could lift that house from its roots and kill her with my bare hands. But I was too tired so I got up silently and left her.

Just like the day Pêreberg turned its back on me and I walked that orange muddy road like a dog with its tail between its legs. Standing next to the road, hoping for a lift, the air was clean and pot blou and not a single cloud in sight. It will be a cold night, I thought, holding on to my

papsak. A bakkie stopped, klim op the driver said. I smelled the air again. It smelled of the fish maize Kallie them made at the factory. It was a familiar smell that clung to our lives. It was the smell they had to endure to put bread on the table.

The bakkie stopped at Stanford's Cross. I got off and the bakkie drove towards Hermanus. I turned right towards Pêreberg. My vroujie Sophia is the moer in with me, I thought while I walked Paardenberg's road. How could I tell this hard-headed woman of mine that I loved her? She'd become so hard. The soft voice that I fell in love with in church choir had changed into a thunderstorm. I had never cheated on her. But then when she smiled it reminded me of our wedding. It had been a simple one. Auntie Loesie had lent her wedding dress and Ragel had made her a wyl of one of her finest curtains and had needled some pink sewejaartjies to it to make it nice. The Ingelse called the sewejaartjie flowers 'everlastings'. She was still my everlasting. I remembered the church stoep. It had looked so beautiful that year, the grape vines wrapped around the afdakkie and the krismis flowers in full bloom. There were blue ones and pink ones. It was the one moment I kept at hand for that just in case out of the blue sadness.

My head beat from the pain. Sophia stabbed me with a butter knife in my head.

'This earth will cartwheel before you lift your hands for me, Janwap. Isn't it enough that you fok op our lives with your wine? I am tired,' she says while she sobs. Her eyes are so empty that I can't recognise my wife.

I hit Klein Wapie so hard his little body is probably black and blue. I was so angry at the bogsnuiters calling me Oom. I grabbed him by the arm and showed him my veins. 'You see this arm. This is Rooi blood running through these veins, running through your veins.'

'My pa is by Jesus, the boy tells me.'

I grab him by the neck. 'You better call me pa now or you vrek today, boetaitjie!'

The child was so scared he pissed in his pants. Toe moer ek hom sommer daaroor ook. If Sophia didn't come out of the house, he would've been dead. At least he would have died knowing Fraans Rooi was his dad.

I had walked this orange road so many times. I could smell the fynbos air and the little mud houses in the distance. The one facing the laslappie fields were ours once. I walked to Stêword and got a lift on a sheep's bakkie to Pêreberg. Here, Meteens didn't look after the house any more. There was not a single pumpkin on the roof and the great fig tree didn't carry fruit. I wouldn't blame her; she was black with burden and her earth rotten. As children, Japie and I

always picked figs for Ketoet's church bazaar fig jam. The tree was like a mother; there was always milk coming out of her branches when we picked the figs. They were Adam's figs: big and purple and sweet. One day, I decided to take a stick and write my name on her trunk and when I was finished it looked like it was bleeding. I tried to heal her with her milk that came out of her branches when we picked the figs.

Life on the farm was slow, but waited for no one. We woke up the same time the earth did. Sometimes before the rooster could yawn, even before the varkblomme opened their petals near the vlei. Since Oom died the whole kroos went to go look for a home in Stêword. The day I decided to draai stokkies, I walked the devil's road willingly into his claws. Satangs kinnens, Ma Ragel would say. The pine cone trees were darm still here. If you stood on the stoep looking at the beautiful still life, it looks like art, God's art.

The evening before I ran away from home, Dolf, Kallie en Oom Dui were sitting round the gëllie busy to sit en verkoop nôsens. While we were laughing and chatting, I looked at the warm coals the ones that still had pieces of red in them. My eyes stood still, looking deeper and deeper into the coal. I realised that the piece of red was actually a little flame trapped inside the already-dead coal. There was a knot in my throat and I almost cried. I was that little flame. I knew if I took my things and left, Oubaas Grobelaar would never allow me to visit my family again. I would have to pay him with money. Oubaas Grobelaar gave me my first job on the farm as a wine-marker. I was good at reading and writing. Every Friday I wrote everyone's name on those two litre bottles and filled them with black wine, ticked their names in the book as I paid everyone, paid myself. I would have to leave these thoughts here and start new ones elsewhere. Liela had also decided to work in town; we hadn't seen her in years. I would have to leave the kaiings and skaap pootjie we braaied as children in the Dover oven. Those memories didn't belong to me alone. All I had was this book I picked up years ago. It is all I will take with me tomorrow, I thought.

My first book had no cover, not even a name. Then and there I decided I would make that book mine, because no one wanted it. I started reading the book with no name, my *myne* book. It was the best piece of rubbish that I picked up at the rubbish hole close to our house in a longtime. I was so proud of it. I stuck it under my white school shirt. It smelled of cow dung but it didn't traak me because I'd never had something that was mine alone. That's the day my love for words was born. I kept rhymes and stories in my mind that I would whisper to myself later

when I was alone. Words were everywhere. In the morning when Klaasvakie's sleeping dust was still in my eyes, our little huisie smelled like bak brood and moer koffie that simmered on the Dover stove and the BB tobacco smoke floating from Katoet's pyp. All those smells I could spell. All those smells I could taste like the moer koffie and the kaiings on my bread. It's darn all that Meteens could not get a hold of. I drank Meteens out of my life ever since I left Pêreberg.

When we were still wet behind the ears, Japie and I were playing down by Sileja-them's road playing with our spinning tops. We were still arguing about whose spinning tops should be on the ground to get an ertjie when Meteens came staggering down the hill with a black stallion that he stole from Willowdale, a neighbouring farm. He asked us to look after the thing. We decided to take it for a gallop when Ounooi the teefhond ran under the horse's legs. The horse had such a fright that he stood on his two hooves kicking with his front legs, neighing like a hysterical woman. Japie had already run away. I was the only one lying there, moaning on the ground. Meteens came to see why there was such a noise and he beginte go mad when he saw the horse donner into the bos.

Meteens is my eldest sister's husband. He said he caught Ketoet with his watches. He is always dressed grênd with leather boots and five watches on each arm.

'Jou gemors why did you let the horse run wild? Djulle ga gemoer word vedag! Bloody gedrogte!'

I could see Mêg run out of the house holding on to her dress.

'Ag leave the child, he is smaller than you.'

'You tell me fokkol, jou dikgat, djou useless bitch. Loep help Sileja in the kitchen.

Mêg didn't give him any gesig. She was a kind meisiekind. 'Is jy ok, klonkie, wat's fout,' she asked.

'My foot,my toe,' I moan.

She tore a piece off from her dress and made it into a knot.

'Dê, she says. Bite on it.'

'Huh, why ... Aaah it's sore,' I scream.

'Ag, don't be such a *tjankbalie*. It will heal soon.'

She snapped my toe back to its position. Siestog, Ouma Ragel always said, she is a sagte hart kind. I didn't have a Ma but Mêggie was a Ma to me. She taught me how to iron a shirt in its

naat and she was the one who forced her last R2 into my hand. It was still a lot of money then. She always told me, Klonkie, you must never hide your tears. It's the only thing that brings the heart a little bit of light. Mooi leer by die skool and carry God in your heart always, she greeted, standing by the gate with her arms folded.

All these memories made my eyelids heavy, lullabying me into a deep sleep. It really felt okay to sleep on my brother's lawn waiting for him to get home. I need to say sorry ...

'Fraans! Fraans! Liewe Here, is it really you? What are you doing on Pêreberg? Jinne, man, look at you. Japie spat on the grass because the stench made him nauseous. He had been away for two days to help Baas Fourie with the sow; she gave birth to seven piglets the day before. It was a difficult birth. And now he had to deal with his drunken brother who he last saw at the funeral eight years ago. How long had I been lying here?'

'Boeta, I waited for you the Sunday afternoon.'

'You're gesuip, Fraans. It's blêddie Tuesday.'

'I'm sorry, Japie. Ekkiritie bedoelie. I lost control of the wheel, it was so misty and the road was muddy. I'm sorry sorry, my boeta.'

'Bedaar! What are you talking about?'

'Adrie and Korrietjie.'

Japie sat with me on the grass. His eyes were wet but he'd promised himself he'd never cry, but his heart became small when he saw me lying there drunk and helpless.

'Boeta?'

'Yes, Fraans.'

'Do you still remember that rympie Juffrou Sheila taught us in school?'

'Which one?'

'Lamtietie damtietie doe-doe, my liefstetjie.'

'Yes. Why?'

'Sing it with me, Japie.'

'You should stop drinking, Fransie. Oom Tas is driving you mad. This is pure dronk verdriet ... ag toe,man ... Okay, then. You will have to start first'

'Lamtietie damtietie doe-doe, my liefstetjie, we both started.'

Moederhart rowertjie, dierbaarste diefstetjie
Luister hoe fluister die wind deur die boompjetjie
Heen en weer wieg hy hom al oor die stroompetjie

Doe-doe-doe blaretjie, slapenstyd nadertjie
Doe-doe-doe blommetjie, nag is aan kommetjie
So sing die windtjie vir blaartjies en blommetjies?

Japie and I both started laughing. Japie took a deep breath. The tears made his heart lighter.
‘It’s in the past now, Japie said, talking to the sky, with a vague look in his eyes.’
‘Please forgive me, Japie. I looked at my brother, smiling. I had not felt like this in years.’
‘Forgive yourself first, Fraans,’ Japie says. ‘Forgive yourself.’



Secrets

I knew that if Ma found out about Boeta and me, she would probably lock me up. My mother had never liked the Groenewalds. She always said that they were evil people and that we shouldn't mix with that sort.

'Meng jou met die semels en die varke vreet jou op', that's what Ma says about people she thinks are sinful.

Boeta used to hand me letters under the desk in Afrikaans class. I never guessed that I would fall in love with 'Boeta the Mail Boy'. But nou ja, I do not question our stolen times together. It was so secret neither my sisters nor God knew. He told me that he wanted to build houses like his father who had built the klipkerkie in Dempers Street. I liked talking to him and listening to his ideas about life. Sometimes we just went to go and sit at the vlei and talk. No one visited it anymore and it was close to church so I would always have an excuse if Ma asked.

For a long time we only held hands. Then, after a few weeks, Boeta let me rest my head on his shoulders or sometimes he lay on my lap and we would talk about all kinds of things. About exams and about life here in Strandtjiesvlei. When Hellie wrote to me about the bright lights in Cape Town, I showed him the letter. In it my sister had included a R5 note and a picture of her and a handsome man. She was wearing a pink dress and sandals and he was wearing high-waist pants and a tucked shirt and sun-glasses. He was a mechanic and he had a car which he drove her around in. Boeta smiled and said he would make an even better life for us. My heart began to beat really fast when our fingers gently crossed into each other's.

When we kissed for the first time, he looked at me smiling.

'What?' I asked.

'Do you know our eyes are the same?'

I did not know what to say. He rubbed his nose against mine.

When I got home, I went straight to my bedroom. I couldn't believe what had just happened. It was our secret. There was a knock on my door. It was Ma.

‘I got Mrs Williams at the shop, Father Williams’ wife.’

My eyes went big in my head, immediately I thought, oh my God she found out! Why else would the Pastor’s wife be speaking to her? I could hear my heart beat in my chest.

‘Father Williams wants to see you tomorrow.’

‘Oh, thank you Ma.’

‘Just don’t be late, it sounds important.’

I felt relief. My secret about Boeta was still safe. I knew why Father Williams was looking for me. He was helping me apply for the teaching college in Wellington. Father Williams was hoping I would get a bursary, but we both knew it was going to be difficult. This was another secret I was keeping from Ma. I knew she would not have approved. She would have thought I was reaching above my station. Boeta. The bursary. When had I started to keep so much from my mother?

I woke up the next morning. I was almost late for my duties at the church. If Ma had not woke me up so violently I would have overslept.

‘What is it with you?’

I was rushing to get dressed and gather my things together.

‘That shirt is not ironed.’ She scowled. ‘No child of mine walks about in town with a creased shirt. What will the people say? We are gossiped about enough. Het jy muisneste in jou kop?’

‘No Ma’, I replied fixing my cardigan. When I got to the church and Father Williams’ study I knocked very gently. I was shivering from nerves like a wet dog.

‘Come inside Lieda, have a seat.’

‘Good morning.’

Father William’s eyes look concerned. We had been waiting for a response for some time now. I took the brown envelope. It had my address on it.

TO MISS LIEDA APLOON

12 APPEL STREET

RIETJIES FONTEIN

7220.

‘Well go on,’ he said, ‘it is not going to open itself.’

I opened the letter, hands shivering.

‘Dear Miss Aploon’ I began to read.

The letter made me feel so important I have never been called a Miss before.

‘I got in and the bursary too’.

‘Congratulations Lieda. I know you have your concerns but you must tell your mother. I’m sure she will be delighted.’

‘Maybe if you tell her, Father Williams, she will understand.’

‘It is not my place Lieda. I am very sorry. You will have to tell her yourself.’

‘How? She will never listen to me. Look what happened to my sisters.’

Ma had stopped talking to my sisters when they moved to Cape Town.

‘Why don’t you write her a letter?’

‘Letter? I will think about it. Thank you Father.’

‘Good luck Lieda.’

As I walked home I tried to think about all that was happening to me. Boeta. Our love. And now Wellington next year if I did well enough in my exams. I knew I would pass them. I had been studying very hard, and I got A’s for most of my subjects during the year. But I was scared about telling Ma this news. I knew she wanted me to work for Miss Wilkenson. To

settle down here and look after her. She always complained about her hands and feet. I didn't want to be like Ma. I didn't want to die in Strandjiesfontuin.

On the day our exam results were due, all of the Standard Tens got up early to wait for Oom Japie to deliver *Die Burger*. I knew my name would not be so hard to look for because it's fifth on the class list. We thought we could buy it from Oom Japie directly, but he said it belonged to the shop. So we had to wait until Mr. Ford came to open up the shop.

The newspaper was R1. We clubbed together and bought a newspaper and Hans Olivier's read out the names, 'Cindy Abrahams, Johan Abrahams...Lieda Aploon.' Boeta was so happy he ran towards me. But realizing what he was about to do, he stopped and walked towards me and shook my hands. We didn't want the rest of the class to know that we were seeing each other.

'Congratulations Lieda.' Boeta said, trying to hide his smile.

'See you at youth practice tonight, Boeta.'

My friends Bettie, Sheila and Dawn gathered around to congratulate me. They already found work, working as flower packers like their mothers. They seemed to be excited working as blomme meisies.

Later that day, I could not keep my eyes off Boeta at Youth Practice. I watched him laughing with his friends, hands in his white pants' side pockets and blue tucked in shirt. Father Williams brought along a camera and we all stood huddled up together trying to get into the picture. The boys were sitting on their knees with big afros, the girls with pastel coloured cardigans and of course Lennie the youth league's clown, lying on his side, with his tongue sticking out.

Everyone was busy playing dominoes and cards when Boeta asked if he could have a word outside. I could see Adam sticking his elbow into Paul's ribs, but I tried to give them no attention. We went out the back and stood in the corner between the toilets and the big guava tree. It was quiet and the night air was warm and there was not a single cloud in the sky.

I was shivering so badly not because I was cold, but because I was so nervous. He gave me his leather jacket. ‘Daarso, just like Michael Jackson’s’

‘Boeta?’

‘Yes?’

‘Do you think we will always recognise each other, like we do now? Even after I go to Wellington?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It’s just that this, what we have – I don’t even know what to call it’,

‘Love,’ he interrupted.

‘Yes, love.’ I agreed, half smiling. Suddenly my smile disappeared, ‘Boeta, I don’t want keep this secret anymore. It feels wrong to lie to Ma.’

‘I agree, so what do we do?’

‘I don’t know Boeta, really I don’t.’

‘Well if she chases you away you can stay with us.’

‘No, that would break Ma’s heart. You know how she feels about your family.’

‘So keep the secret rather?’

‘Yes, let’s.’

Two more weeks passed. Boeta and I saw each other whenever we could. Soon it would be time for me to leave for Wellington. I had already packed my suitcase along with my diary, my photo album, Ouma’s brooch and the photo of the youth league. I had pushed it under my bed, out of Ma’s sight. I hadn’t yet found the courage to tell her about the bursary, but I wrote her a letter explaining why I was going. I was checking the suitcase was still out of sight when Ma called me from the back.

‘Would you do the groceries today? The list is on the kitchen table.’

‘Yes Ma.’

She went on tending to her asters, Stink Afrikaners and daisies.

Ma was totally unaware of me and my new life waiting for me and Boeta, I thought as I walked to the shop. We, her three children always knew not to ask questions, just trust and obey, I thought. Ma can keep her secrets I don’t want to know why she doesn’t like the Groenewalds. I looked down at the shopping list. Fish oil, butter, eggs, sugar and some moer koffie, usual stuff and of course some sunlight soap, always on the list. Ma washes every day of her life. When I got home, Ma was sitting in the living room with a letter lying on the table.

‘Who is this boy writing to you?’

‘Where did Ma get that?’

‘Count your words girlie. Don’t play around. If you want to screw around, you do that under your own roof, not under my roof. Do you want to end up like your sisters, they put me to shame.’

‘It’s not like that Ma, I say. We are not...he is a kind person, he makes me happy.’

‘I want to meet this Boeta, invite him over for dinner.’

‘Yes ma, you will like him, he lives in...’

‘I am sure he can explain himself to me and also explain why he did not have the decency to ask me for permission.’

I ran out of the house towards Dempers Street no.2. When I got to the house, Boeta’s father was standing over the hekkie, smoking tobacco out of his pipe.

‘Good afternoon Uncle Ouboeta is Boeta home?’

‘Sak Sarel,Gedorie, don’t choke on your spit. Boeta is not here girlie. He went to Hermanus for that building job. He is planning on learning from the boss himself.’

‘When will he be back Oom?’

‘Six or seven I think, yes six or seven.’

‘Uhm my Ma invited him to dinner.’

‘Ne? Julle klogoed van vandag.’ He chuckles.

Ma made cabbage bredie, with lamb pieces, rice and beetroot made with a bit of vinegar and sugar. We sat at the kitchen table looking at the candle burning. My mother believed that you never eat without the guest so we just sat here, waiting for Boeta. I didn’t mind, I had a lot on my mind and it seemed Ma did too, sitting across the table. We heard the hekkie go open and Ma got up to answer the door.

‘Oh.’ I heard Ma say in the kitchen, ‘Who are you looking for?’

‘My dad said you invited me.’

It was Boeta’s voice. I got up and went to stand a few steps behind my mother in the kitchen. Boeta was still standing in the doorway. Ma looked from him to me and froze.

‘May I come in?’ He asked, politely.

‘No, never are you allowed to come here, get out of here. Don’t ever come near my daughter, you bastard!’

‘I don’t understand, Mrs Aploon?’

‘Did your father put you up to this? He probably did. The bastard!’

‘Ma what is going on?’ I had never seen my mother behave this way before.

‘You stay out of this Lieda .Go to your room!’

‘You and your father are sick people! How could you do this to me and my daughter? Have you no shame. Your father broke my heart, all those years ago and now he wants to do the same, using his children.’

‘Excuse me ma’am I have no idea what you are talking about. I love your daughter I was going to ask you if I could marry Lieda.’

‘WHAT?!’ She screams, ‘Sit jy op die paal, mytjie?’ She slammed the door in Boeta face.

‘Huh? No Ma. No! How can you even ask me that? He would never...’

But Ma was so angry I was scared to approach her. She slumped down at the kitchen table. When she looked up I saw that she was white as a laken. ‘He would, he would, and that’s what his father did. He said we were going to get married.’ Her voice was trembling and so was she.

‘What?’ I asked, ‘Who were you going to marry?’

Ma looked at me, straight into my face. The tears were sliding down her cheeks now. ‘Boeta’s father.’ she whispered. ‘We were, until his cousin told me he was married already. I gave myself for him. He left me to suffer by myself, my husband had died a year ago, and he was my comfort. He left me alone to suffer in 1975, I had three children. And he had the audacity to come live here with his family. It shred me to pieces, but I got a job at missies and raised my children by myself. You. I raised you by myself, without his help. Now that bastard and his son come here and try and mess up my life!’

‘I’m sure you have the wrong person in mind’ I say. Boeta’s father...you... we are... that would make Boeta.’

‘Yes, you are, you are... kyk bietjie, your eyes, they are the same. It’s his... George Groenewald’s eyes.’

I sat with my back against the wall, too shocked to cry. I could see Boeta’s eyes gleaming. Did he know. Did Boeta know. He could not have known.

‘I had to protect you. From them. Now you can see why I told not to mix with them.’

‘THEY DIDN’T KNOW MA. THEY DIDN’T KNOW. UNCLE OUBOETA DIDN’T KNOW MA, YOU DIDN’T TELL HIM.’

She walked past me, to her room, and prayed loudly. I got up. My whole body ached. My heart was broken. I went to my room and took out my suitcase from under the bed and walked

over to Father Williams' house. I didn't say anything to Ma. I didn't tell her where I was going. Mrs Williams welcomed me.

'May I stay here for the night, it's probably better as we leaving early tomorrow morning for college.'

'Hi kint, have you been crying, is it your mother?'

'She doesn't want you to go?'

I just nodded my head and let Mrs. Williams take my suitcase.

'Ag she will come by, once she understands. Every mother is scared for her children's well-being.'



The Fire

Mollie remembers the child. The one that kept on pulling on her sleeve whenever Mollie stands in her garden to look over the fence at the pieces of wood that stayed from the hok that burnt out a month ago in her neighbour's yard. Mollie remembers the people that carried buckets and buckets of water to kill the fire. She recalls the *bollings* smoke and fire that roared out of that hok until there was only ashes and burnt wood. She remembers how the child's mother silent-cried. She felt sorry for the poor thing. Yes she remembers how the child pulled on her sleeve once its soul had slipped from its body and it was looking for someone like her, with her gifts to help it pass on to the other side. *Hy mos* wanted to go to his mother to say goodbye. He knew he wasn't a real child, you see. He understood. He wanted to go and say goodbye for the last time. He was brave at first but then when he was at his mother's side he panicked. You know how little ghosts are. Sometimes they don't want to go. He clung to his mother tightly until he disappeared bit by bit. You can't interfere with Holy Ghost's work, you see. When He says it is your time it is your time. Still, Mollie did feel sorry for the child.

Mollie didn't see the child's ruined body but Gerhardus said he burnt ugly. When they found him he was kneeling and his hands were burnt to his face. *Maar nou ja*, Mollie is not one to dwell in the past. Today she is going to visit Jonathan's wife about Jonathan. Maybe Jonathan's wife didn't understand her the last time. She already prayed about this.

Mollie pulls on a cardigan. Today is *Bobbejaan's* weather, not good for her chesty coughs. She has been neglecting her pills, but flushes them down the toilet so that the clinic volunteer wouldn't notice. She can't take that medicine it makes her sleepy and then she can't do Holy Ghost's work. The pills makes her forget about Holy Ghost and the last time he made her cough blood for forgetting to do her work, besides Holy Ghost is telling her today Jonathan's wife will have a change of heart. Mollie takes her handbag and locks up the house and goes next door.

Ai siestog, poor Jonathan she thinks looking at the burnt pieces of wood. She doesn't want to go to his wife just yet, but then Mollie thinks she doesn't feel sorry for Jonathan. Jonathan is becoming a problem. A big problem. Did she know he was going to shoot himself, yes she did, but toe sukkel with a soul that doesn't want to go to Holy Ghost is a stubborn soul. He is worse than a child. *Wie jy!* And by the way, she is the one that has to put up with his guilty

thoughts when she is trying to sleep at night. It is starting to work on her nerves she thinks to herself. She needs to get her sleep. I am not today's child you know. Every night when Jonathan comes to haunt the scene of the fire and comfort his still grieving wife, she hears him pray the same thing.

'Ag Here, please help. This hok is my life. I forgot to lock the door. I was marking papers. I wasn't thinking. I forgot. I can see they think it's because of me. Here what do I do now?'

Weeks have passed and those words shout through her dreams and disturb her until she has no choice but to turn on the light and get up and make herself a cup of tea. Mollie walks to Jonathan's house. She reckons the wife can help. Maybe then Jonathan will listen. Stubborn as he is. She has to try. If she can only get him away from Delie and Sakkie. Holy Ghost doesn't want them. They are rubbish. He that is Jonathan plays that board game with Sakkie. She eavesdrop on them paal. All the time. They think they can hide from her and Holy Ghost. But no one can. Not that little child too scared to go to the other side and not them either. She will explain all this to his wife again, even though Jonathan's widow only gets angry. Mollie doesn't care, she thinks and she walks slowly up the path to the front door because her legs are paining her a little today.

Mollie has been going to his wife every week since Jonathan shot himself and this whole mess started. But the woman just shuts the door in her face, like she is some stranger, some nuisance. But Holy Ghost says she will listen this time. The last time she was like a demon. Chased her away like a dog. But Mollie is not a coward and no one can defy Holy Ghost. Not that little child, not Jonathan and not this widow with no manners and no respect for Holy Ghost business.

Mollie knocks on the door. Mollie notices the curtain twitching slightly. So the widow has seen her coming.

'Go away Antie. I warn you. You're crazy.'

'Jonathan,' Mollie starts...

'Come one step closer and I shoot you with boiling water. I swear it!'

‘Jonathan doesn't...’ she continues.

‘My kettle is on Antie. Leave me alone mal teef!’

Mollie has heard those words so much it doesn't touch her.

‘Do you think you can stop Holy’s Ghost’s will?’ she cries out to the widow behind the door. ‘Either you are with Him or against Him, Hester. And if you are against Him I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes, comes Judg...’

The door swings open and a bucket of piss whizzes past Mollie, catching her cheek. The door slams again.

Does she think *that* will stop Mollie? I am no stranger to piss. She is loyal to Holy Ghost! She will knock again. Mollie raises her hand to bang on the door but just then she notices Jonathan out of the corner of her eye. He is passing by at the end of the road. The widow can wait till tomorrow, Mollie decides. She will follow Jonathan who has started to walk-run now that he has seen her.

She hinke-pink hinke-pink to Roos Straat towards the half-built house. Sakkie en Delie have lived there ever since they died. She doesn’t like them. Holy Ghost said that Sakkie and Delie cannot be taken over because when Mollie tried to take them to Holy Ghost they were too drunk and Holy Ghost banished them. Jonathan cannot be mixing with those two sinners. What if Jonathan is drunk when he needs to go to Holy Ghost? Even before she reaches the house she can hear Sakkie’s and Jonathan’s conversation.

‘You will have to stop smoking dagga, Sakkie. Heerlikheid. One of these days you'll have no brains left.’

‘Keep your word. Why are you so? What’s the matter?’

‘It is that Mollie woman. She keeps on meddling.’

‘She will carry on meddling. Dê, here is a beer.’

‘Nê. I want to stop drinking.’

‘Stop drinking? For what?’

‘Yes. I want to start over’

‘Start over? There is fokkol of starting over man. Forget about it. We are already dead. Let's rather play chess.’

Sakkie laughs like a bad enjin looking at Jonathan confused. Jonathan moves his king out of the way across his bishop. Sakkie attacks with his castle and takes Jonathan's knight.

Ag kak, Jonathan thinks. He didn't see that move coming. Ou Sakkie is getting good at this. Sakkie grabs the beer and takes a deep swallow. He has a triumphant look on his face. Let him, Jonathan thinks. When I was alive and he was alive, I always thought I was too good for the likes of him. Death has taught me a lesson or two, Jonathan thinks.

‘When are you going to teach me to write chess?’ Sakkie asks.

‘When you decide to clean the yard. You can't let Delie slave herself off like that. You look like a gimba, getting fatter by the day.’

‘Oh no that *vroumens* is like that. It is just like her. By the way my fat is none of your business. It's your move.’

Jonathan doesn't really know how the game will turn out but he moves his pawn for move sake. Sakkie looks at the chess board. He looks left and then right then up and down. He smiles.

‘Check mate!’

‘You're playing Sakkie.’ Jonathan says confidently. He checks and realizes he's trapped. ‘O’, he says. Sakkie grabs the beer bottle again and takes two gulps. He offers Jonathan who again shakes his head.

‘You must stay away from that Mollie something. That one is bedonnerd. Even we dead know it. Befok I tell you. Oh and by the way she is standing behind the house busy koekeloering us- listening in.’

‘I can hear you Sakkie.’ Mollie calls from behind the walls. ‘You and your insults mean

nothing to me but Holy Ghost, He is listening and He is taking note.'

'Magtag Mollie don't do that. For what do you want to call like that behind the house? Come in!'

'Just tell Jonathan to come with me!' She calls.

'I am staying here, Mollie.' Jonathan replies. 'Go and get someone else to go with you. I saw Antoon died. Go and bother him. I am staying here. Did you hear me Mollie? I am staying here!'

'You can't stay here. Listen to Antie Mollie. You messing with Holy Ghost's plans.'

'Man, Molly I am going to start over. I never had the time to do the things I wanted to do. I have world's time. Did you hear that Mollie? I have the world's time.'

'Ag leave, it Jonathan.' Sakkie says clearing the board and putting the chess pieces back in the bag. 'She will spook you till kingdom come. Go home Mollie. You heard him.' Sakkie says.

'You leave me off Sakkie! It is between Jonathan and me.'

'FOK OFF!' Sakkie and Jonathan chorused.

Mollie was stung. It took a lot to hurt her feelings but they didn't have to speak so ugly with her. After all, she was doing this for Jonathan's sake.

'Can you see now, Holy Ghost he doesn't want to do it. What is Holy Ghost going to do now huh?' Mollie asked.

'Go home. Not today. Mollie. Holy Ghost will work His Magic. But not today.'

When she got home she locked after her and got into bed. She has not been feeling well. This chest of hers. Maybe it was how Jonathan spoke to her. Sakkie, she expected no better from him. But Jonathan has always been a gentle man when he was alive. He was never rude to her like some of the others in this town were. He was educated mos. To educated to speak to a tired old woman with such a filthy ungrateful mouth. Holy Ghost I am tired. Molly thinks to herself. Too

tired for all of this. Will Holy Ghost mind if your Mollie just lies down here for a bit. Just a short while, Holy Ghost.

I am not dropping my responsibilities. It is just I am not feeling myself today. I need to rest. Just for a bit. Just a little.

* * *

The clinic volunteer who brought Mollie's medicine called the police when after the second visit the old woman still didn't open the door. Jonathan who was standing with Mollie watched how the police broke open the door. A policeman came out vomiting on the grass. It stank but the house was clean. They can say what they want about Mollie, that she was mad and a nuisance and all that but her mother taught her well about keeping house.

Later on Delie and Sakkie joined Jonathan and Mollie to watch them carry out Mollie's body. Mollie couldn't be bothered being dead. Mollie has a lot of work to do. Holy Ghost we got Jonathan she thinks. It looks like Holy Ghost's plan is definitely going to work this time. There is no escaping me now. I have got all eternity to twist his arm.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized building with columns and the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE" below it.

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

The Pair of Glasses

There is a man in our kitchen. He looks like a teacher, with his glasses blocking his nostrils. I am sitting in front of the stove looking after the fire. The man talks about school. He talks about my teacher and me not doing my work. I am too old for Sub b, Mr. Appel reckons and this man has come to talk to Ouma about it.

Mr Appel doesn't like me. He hits me with the *kweper* lat. Once I got twenty strikes from Mr Appel and my hands were swollen and blue. Grandma would not hear of it and she walked to school and told Mr. Appel about his A's and B's and C's. He has not bothered me since. Now this man is sitting in our kitchen. A white man. I have never heard Ouma speak so grand. He calls me to the table.

'Why don't you do your sums and letters?'

I look at Ouma first.

'Toe answer.' Ouma says.

'I don't understand it Ouma, it is too hard.'

'That is a lie. You help your sister with her work and she is standard 4 already. I hear you spell and count and say your *maal tafels*.'

The man looks at me. He takes out a book.

'Read this please?'

Somebody must have told him. What if they send me away like they did Fiela? She couldn't learn and they sent her to the Elim Tehuis. No one has seen Fiela since that day in class. She was sitting and drawing and the next thing I knew she started shaking on the floor and there were *kweil* on the floor, a big puddle of it and teacher took a big spoon and put it in Fiela's mouth. We all sat very quietly and watched.

I look at the blurry words. I see a B here and D there. They can't find out so I keep me dumb. The man asks me to spell 'doubt' for him. My *Engelse* teacher said this is a word that is tricky

only clever people won't get caught because the letters are quiet. I spell D-O-U-B-T. The man looked at me. I thought I was going to be taken away then and there.

'Very good.'

'Spell "Onse Vader".'

I spell and spell and spell, doesn't matter what word the man asks, I spell. Then he asks me to read and I close my eyes. I couldn't do it. I shut my eyes hoping everyone would go away. Ouma and the white man look very confused when I eventually open my eyes and realized they were still there.

'You can go and play outside now. I need to speak to your Ouma.'

I ran out of the kitchen as fast as I could. Just now Ouma will wring my ears for being naughty to the white man, I thought.

After about half an hour, the man left our house and Ouma walked with him to the gate. The neighbours almost fell over their doors from hanging and being busy.

'Come inside.' She told me and gave me a rusk. Usually we only got rusks when we had done something good but I didn't ask questions. I just took the rusk, glad that white man hadn't taken me away and that Ouma wasn't asking me to read anymore.

That evening Ouma invited the Father to come to our house to pray for me. The Father read from the Bible and Sissie and I hummed "Give me power my lord", while Ouma prayed.

She was praying for guidance and for money for my eyes and can God please be with me and Sissie. The white man told the school that I needed glasses and Ouma did not have the money. She never asked me why I didn't tell her about my eyes.

Then one afternoon Ouma got a letter. The white man got money from the government to get me glasses. Ouma and I went with the Father to Caledon to fetch the glasses. They were big thick glasses that looked like a kaleidoscope too heavy for my face to carry. I looked in the mirror. I looked funny, but it didn't bother me. I could see. On our way home I read everything. The name of the car we were driving *Toyota Carola*. I read the road signs Caledon R406. I giggled.

‘Why does Ouma’s child laugh?’

‘I didn’t know that Caledon cost R406, Ouma.’

Ouma and Father laughed so hard.

‘No my child,’ Father said. ‘The R 406 is the name of the road child.’

‘And look over there Ouma Volstruise and cows and sheep!’

The world looked so new and green. I looked and looked until my eyes started burning. I wanted everything to stay in my new glasses.

I read, ‘Dempers street.’ That is our street’s name. I couldn’t read it before. I couldn’t wait to show Oupa and Sissie my new glasses.

When we got home Oupa was sitting in front of the *gallie blik* with Sissie. I couldn’t wait to tell them what I saw. I jumped out of the car and ran to Sissie to show her my glasses. Sissie was laughing pointing at my glasses.

‘You have coke glasses!’ She pointed at me laughing, ‘coke glasses!’

The colour of my glasses was brown and it had a golden chain so that it could hang around my neck. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever owned but Sissie just laughed and laughed.

‘*Gat weg hieso* you *klein karnallie*.’ scolded Oupa as she ran into the street.

‘You can run but if you come back *slat ek jou gatvelle blerrie* hooligan!’

Ouma said goodbye to Father. When she came into the house she asked Oupa what was going on because by now I was crying.

‘That *karnalie* laughed at the child. Bloody fool!’ he shouted after Sissie.

‘Come here Oupa’s child. She is just jealous.’ He put his arms around me.

When it got dark Sissie had to come home and Ouma hit her with her church shoes. From our room I could hear Ouma talk in breaths whilst she was hitting Sissie.

‘Jy moet ophou- *ouw ouw ouw*-you must stop- clap clap clap- jy moet ophou!’ Until Ouma finally ran out of breath.

I heard Sissie cry, ‘*Hoeeeee-hoeeeee- haaaaaaa-haaaaaa.*’

‘Stop crying or do you want a hiding again?’

‘No-no.’ She sniffed.

She really did deserve it but I ended up crying from inside the room. I went to the bedroom where Sissie was *snikking*. Her legs were red and I put my cold hands thinking it would make it better. Crying *hoeeeee hoeeeee* with her.

‘Stop crying you *dommie!*’ Sissie said.

‘I am sorry Sissie.’

‘I am sorry too *flooitjie*. I think your glasses are really nice. You just looked really different.’

As Sissie and I lay there, crying together, we heard Ouma and Oupa arguing.

‘I am not sending her to school.’

‘And why not Aletta?’

‘Did you see that *verdomde* Sissie laughing at Lelie like that today? No, the children will laugh. I won’t allow it. And the neighbours...’

‘Stop fiddling with your fingers. *Het jy nie geloof nie* and fok *die* blinking neighbours man. It’s not their business what goes on in this house. I might be a *suipgat*, but I still wear the pants in this house.’

‘The pants that you left at Marta’s house.’

‘Woman. Don’t start with that nonsense. You know she needs me as well.’

‘Those bastard. *As my sonde my nie ontsien nie*. If it wasn’t for my prayers to wash that *vuilgoed* she planted at our house. Jesus.’

‘I am leaving.’

‘Yes go to your meit!’

Ouma woke us up at seven. She told Sissie and me to hurry up and wash, she wanted to talk to us before breakfast. On Sundays we have pokkenpo pap or krummeltjie pap for breakfast. But because it was a school day there were thick slices of baked bread with worsvet on it and coffee.

At the table Ouma spoke to Sissie.

‘You look after Lelie, you hear me.’

‘Yes Ouma.’

Ouma fetched the Bible from next to her bed.

‘Do you promise the Lord?’

Sissie had to put her hands on the Bible and Ouma looked happy again.

On our way to school Sissie said, ‘Look Lelie I can’t look after you whole day. I have cricket and rugby with the boys during breaks. But if they mess with you, you call me.’

Sissie made two fists like a boxer, punching the air.

‘I’ll pot them,’ she says, ‘like Ouma did that Antie Marta.’

When the bell rang, I pushed my glasses up a little. I didn’t care that children might laugh at me and call me names. I knew that I was going to be clever. I could prove *Meester* wrong and I knew that I wouldn’t get stroked with a *kweper lat* because now I could see. Being able to see after so many years of hiding that I couldn’t, was the best part of me and I wouldn’t let anyone ruin it.

The Funeral Singer

Ouma loves singing “Like a bridge over troubled water”, but the thing she loves the most is just going to funerals. Ouma always says it is funny how people constantly die here in Blompark, but it is not like the people are getting any less. Because the young girls around here are popping out babies like rabbits.

‘God talks about this in the Bible somewhere in the last book. Children will have children. The earth will burn by itself and burn the sins, because water doesn’t seem to be able to wash sins, not even if Father Wiese can bless the water into holy water. *Sodom and Ghemora kindjie Sodom and Ghemora,*’ she always says.

Everyone respected Ouma. Everyone listened to her when she spoke and she was always welcomed at funerals like she was family. She sang and cried and greeted people at the funeral. After the funeral she helped the family in the kitchen, handed out curry and rice, doughnuts and chocolate cake, *mos bolletjies* and tea to all those that has come from far to come to the funeral. If there’s one thing Ouma hates it is funeral crashers and don’t think you can take a chance. She knows everyone. She needn’t say anything. She has the stink eye as people call it.

‘*Daai vrou kan mens vrek kyk met daai oë van haar.*’

People say that Ouma’s stink eye would even scare God if he came to the funeral uninvited. Of course Ouma doesn’t know that people are saying these things about her. I have to help with serving tea and handing out cake to the people and as I am passing by I hear these things. I never tell her. I also will never tell her what they said about me and my sister that day at oom RoadKing’s funeral.

‘*Oe siestog, that child needs new shoes. Where’s the father?*’

‘Don’t you know men? Their father is not *Klora* like us. You can *mos* think *Kloras* don’t have yellow hair like that. Ouma Ragel *kan ma veniet* say, she has German blood from her mother’s side. All her daughters are *sleg*, especially that one’s mother.’

‘*Ja my mother told me birth is no child’s play. In soes ‘n piesang uit soos ‘n pynappel.*’

They laughed as if I was not there and I didn't show that I knew that they were talking about me.

One day Ouma took my sister Leticia and I to the choir practice. Ouma can play the piano and sometimes Oupa would *tokkel* on the guitar and Leticia and I would sing old *Afrikaanse treffers* like “sproetjies”, “Jantjie kom huistoe” and my favourite “Die Harlekyn”. I have a low husky voice and Leticia sounded like an angel and when we sang together it sounded like Ouma's piano. Oupa said we sounded like Florence Nightingale. She was a brave nurse that helped the sick and at night. She would sing so beautifully that those who suffered would die peacefully and those who wanted to live would regain hope or so Oupa tells us.

‘*n Riem onder die hart is djulle vir my*’ Oupa would say whenever we sang together. And that's when Ouma decided we must go to the choir and sing for the Lord. We didn't want to go. Ouma said that we were called by the Lord to sing his message. She knew we were going to help Father Wiese save many souls in church.

‘Well, are you ashamed of God? God says if you're ashamed of his gifts he bestowed to you, he will deny you. Are you ashamed of God?’

‘No Ouma,’ we say together.

‘Right. Put on your Sunday school dresses and makes sure you put on your bobby socks. We might be poor but we are not hooligans.’

We were walking behind Ouma like ducklings down the *stofpad* to the Saint Joseph's Anglican Church with our sheet music under our arms.

‘Now don't pay attention to Ousie Maria's eye and if I catch you laughing at Johêna trek *ek julle gatvêlle vir julle af*, do hear me?’

‘Yes Ouma,’ we say together.

The other week Johêna asked if she could sing in front of the choir. She said that she felt the Lord. She grabbed Father Allies' hand and placed it on her bosom.

‘Do you also feel it Father? I want to sing for the Lord, praise his glory.Can I?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he says sounding like a frog. ‘You may sing.’

He took his hand from her bosom and run-walked to the altar where the church choir was practicing funeral songs for future funerals, because you never know, Ouma says.

So after the welcoming, Father announced that Johêna wanted to sing something for the *congregayson*. Father speaks funny, but everyone thinks it is very fancy. After Johêna sang there was an uncomfortable silence, a few people cleaning their throats, others making the church benches screech. By this time Father Allies had left. There was silence and then I couldn’t help keeping in my laugh, so I giggled then a few of the other Sunday school children laughed and then everyone laughed, till they were crying from laughter.

All this time Johêna is standing in front, her eyes big like gutties in her head, her face red. I didn’t mean to laugh it was just so funny. She was supposed to sing “Die liefde van Jesus is Wonderbaar”, but she sang the way her brother had taught her.

She sang ‘*die lieste van Jesus is bond gebrand...bond gebrand vir my.*’

Poor Johêna didn’t know that she was singing that the loins of Jesus is burned black and blue.’ That is what that *verduiwelde* Tallies taught her to sing, Ouma explained when she spoke to Ousie Maria.

‘You should discipline that half-naaitjie of yours,’ she tells Ouma.

My grandmother told Maria, ‘*Loop bars,loop skuit op die ys.*Go in your glory’

Ouma says she can put up with a lot of things, but she can’t stand foolish people. They are from the devil. Ouma especially doesn’t like her because she is friends with Grandpa’s second wife and to make things worse, Ouma and the second wife both live in the same street. He has one child with Ouma, our mother who we have never met and three others with Antie Marta. There was a time when Oupa couldn’t stay away from Antie Marta and Ouma prayed and prayed and prayed until she decided to go to the *Slim mense* in Bredarsdorp. Sissie tells the story much better than me because I was too small at the time.

‘One day there goes Ouma with Father to Bredarsdorp. When she comes back, she has a cross face,’ tells Sissie. ‘She started throwing salt in the house and she slept with the Bible open next to her. She also got herbs to drink to cleanse her.’

Sissie says one morning Ouma gets up and cleans the house and throws salt around the house as always. She puts on her funeral clothes and grabs Sissie by the hand and up the street they go to Antie Marta’s house. Glup glup glup with her church shoes, black ones that shines. When they got to Antie Marta’s house, Ouma calls one of the bastards to come to the gate. She won’t set foot inside Antie Marta’s house or even her yard.

‘Where is your mother?’

‘Inside with Pappa.’

Ouma’s face goes sour.

‘Ask your mother if it is possible for her to come and see me this afternoon at three?’

‘I couldn’t believe it Ouma actually invited her enemy,’ Sissie tells me.

Then they went down the street glup glup glup. At home they made the living rooms nice and put out Ouma’s best china with the windmills. It was like the Mother’s Union was coming over for afternoon prayer.

‘So we wait for three o’clock. Then from outside Antie Marta was calling, “Aletta!”

Ouma sends me to the kitchen door to let her in.’

Sissie was sent to look after me in our room, but she sang me to sleep and then stood behind the living rooms wall. She heard Ouma say after a long time of silence.

‘Tell Danie to come home.’

‘He doesn’t want to come here.’ Antie Marta replied. Marta was much younger than Ouma. And Sissie said she sounded scared when she went on, ‘Look I’ll leave I don’t want trouble.’

Sissie peered around the corner. Next thing Ouma grabs Antie Marta and starts praying the Our Father. Antie Marta screams like a whistle. Ouma reached for Marta's private parts. That's what Sissie says.

'Ouma pulled out all of her skaam hairs. I couldn't believe it. I didn't know Ouma was so strong.'

'You crazy bitch! I'll go to the police!' Antie Marta screamed.

The *Slim mense* had told Ouma that Marta's power was in her *skaam* hairs and that is why Oupa Danie can't come home because it makes him crazy. The neighbours all know what happened with Ouma and Marta. Because afterwards Marta told everyone. People were very shocked and started gossiping that there was something wrong with Ouma in the brain. I guess that is why no one except Father ever comes to our house. When Ouma gets sad she would sit in front of the piano and play the soft keys that feels like it could go on forever. I know she plays for a lot of things, her hartseer. Today I decided to go and stand next to her. I didn't know how to say sorry, so I just asked, 'Ouma will you teach me how to play like you?' Ouma's smile was so forever-and-ever. I think that everything will turn out for the best soon enough.

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Hanna

I remember the day Hanna got sick. She cried all day, ever since that morning when Ma had to go and fetch Hanna at the shop because she wanted a tjokolok and tjips.

‘No,’ Mamma said, ‘there’s no more.’

But Hanna didn’t believe her. While Ma and I were at the washing line she walked off to the shop and sat there crying like an owl for tjokoloks.

‘I want Gom!’ She screams like a pig being slaughtered. ‘Gom buy sakkewa.’ ‘Gom buy suckers now!’ Gom was what Hanna called my Uncle Jerome. She never said his name properly. He’s dead too, like Antie Lena, but I don’t think Hanna knew.

I was the only one that understood Hanna’s special language. Sometimes she would tell me how people laughed at her.

‘Hulle lag in my in.’ ‘They laugh inside me.’

You couldn’t really cheer her up when she was sad. So when she cried, we just let her. But she could be happy too. Sometimes she grabbed a broom and started singing. Then Ma would sing in Soprano, I would chirp in with them and we would miela, miela , miela like a real choir. Then Hanna would laugh.

Hanna had been staying with us since Antie Lena’s funeral. Before Hanna got sick, Ma had been struggling to keep Hanna happy so that she wouldn’t notice Antie Lena passed away. Antie Lena was the closest thing to Hanna. Oorle Antie Lena reckoned that Hanna thought that Antie Lena was her mother. Antie Lena was the spitting image of Ouma. But our money was drying up and ma told Antie Nettie, our next door neighbor, she couldn’t afford all the luxuries for Hanna anymore.

‘Why don’t you call Charmaine, Daleen. Forget about your pride. I mean she has Hanna’s money.’

‘No I can’t Nettie. The Lord will provide.’

‘Ai it’s so tragic Kuintjie. I wish you well.’

Ma and Antie Charmaine had a fight at Antie Lena's funeral. They did it in front of the grave, the flowers and all the people, even the Pastor. At first they argued with their hands and tjie-tjie-tjied. Then Antie Charmaine said,

'You owe me.'

'Excuse me. Owe you?' said Ma, her hands on her hips.

'Yes. All those years my mother had to look after you. Or did you forget how your mother left you on our doorsteps. If it wasn't for my mother where would you be, huh?'

'I would be here nonetheless, Charmaine. I am here by God's grace and no one else's. We are not kids anymore. You think all those times I had to do your chores and those times you made me feel like a nothing. Well those days are over!'

'Well Hanna is staying with you. It's the least you can do for the family.'

'For the family? For the family? Why don't you tell the family how you sold your mother's house from under her and how you gambled the money at the casino? Do you know how you broke your mother's heart? She didn't die of a heart attack. You killed her. Every day she prayed that you would become better. You don't deserve her forgiveness. I will take Hanna ma God slaap nie. The wheel will turn cousin. It will.'

Ma was so calm when she spoke to Antie Charmaine. Antie Charmaine looked like someone threw flour in her face. She couldn't say a word and her eyes were big in her head. Everyone was whispering and then Antie Charmaine walked with her black upstairs-shoes to her golden car and drove off. We hadn't heard from her since and ma refused to ask her for money.

That morning, the morning Hanna got sick, there was nothing Ma could do to make Hanna leave that shop. In the end she had to lie and say that *Gom* was looking for Hanna and if she didn't come home Gom would take her to the Needle. That's what Hanna thought was the name for the doctor.

'Get up this instant, Hanna!' I remember Ma shouting at Hanna.

‘A person would never think that Hanna was 56 years old already. She looks like a chubby child. Oh and look she is even talking her own little language.’ Nettie said, the day after the shop thing.

‘Yes.’ Ma replied, ‘she has been saying she wants a doll for a Christmas. Just ask her...’

Nettie looked at Hanna who was sitting on the floor looking at the hem of her dress, ‘And what does Hanna want for Krismis?’

‘Pop. Ma Koep. Mamma buy doll’

‘Shame doesn’t she know Antie Lena passed away?’

Ma shook her head, ‘I don’t want to break her heart.’

But then Hanna got sick again, Hanna couldn’t stop crying. She knew Antie Lena was not coming back.

‘Mamma in die kissie. Mamma weg.’ Mamma is gone, Mamma in the coffin.

Ma just smoked, smoked, smoked, and trembled throughout Hanna’s howling.

‘She’s found out about Antie Lena.’ Ma told me when I asked her what was wrong with Hanna.

In the end, Ma sent me to go and buy her chocolate at Andries Kafee. But now Hanna didn’t want it.

Hanna was sad for three weeks. Sometimes she would stop and just lay there. People from our street brought her cheese sandwiches and ‘stamp en stoot soup’ but she didn’t want that either. Ma was struggling to make her eat. The doctor said maybe it’s her tummy, and gave her syrup.

She got thinner and thinner. She looked like an old woman and her face sunk in. She looked scary and her eyes looked like they wanted to fall out. Especially when she was sleeping, because she was born with eyelids that couldn’t close all the way.

‘Ma is Hanna going to be okay?’ I asked one night after the doctor had left.

‘Yes dear. Ma’s going to be with her all night. Go to sleep.’

The next morning when I got up the house was quiet. I walked to the kitchen and saw Nettie busy cooking porridge stirring with the one hand and resting the other one in her side.

‘Where’s my Ma?’

‘Môre hond. Don’t you greet?’

I realized I was being rude. That was Nettie’s way of saying ‘don’t you greet?’

I ate as fast as I could because Nettie is a funny old woman. She always looks at me funny. Like she can see through me. I gulped up my porridge and ran outside to play with Tokolosie.

‘Jy I was waiting for you whole time my broe,’ Tokolosie said excitedly. ‘Here was a taxi with big red lights with a machine inside it and they flied zoop down the street with your Ma and Hanna. What happened?’

I pulled up my shoulders, ‘Let’s play gutties rather.’

Ma came home only later on with an entjie in the mouth. She wouldn’t talk about Hanna. Wouldn’t say she was dead. She and Nettie were cleaning the whole day. Then the next day we had church in our house and then it was the funeral. Ma could just have told me Hanna was dead or maybe it was obvious. I don’t know, but she could have told me. I was angry about that but thought that maybe it was because of Wapie that she didn’t want to talk about death and dying. There were a lot of people at the funeral, more than at Antie Lena’s even. The service was not so long. We had it at our house and then at the graveyard. Afterwards there was cake and tea at the church hall. Ma was running up and down, serving people and welcoming and smiling. Ma was still talking to Nettie when Antie Charmaine walked in. She was wearing the same upstairs-shoes that she wore to Antie Lena’s funeral. This time though, she had big sunglasses on too.

The whole hall went quiet looking at her like they were somehow thinking that this would chase Antie Charmaine away. But she clicked clicked clicked towards Ma.

‘I am sorry Daleen. I...’

‘Let’s talk outside, Charmaine.’

I ran after them and Ma didn't chase me away. We got into the golden car and the whole time Ma looked like she was inspecting Antie Charmaine. I don't think Antie Charmaine noticed. We drove to the graveyard, to Hanna's place. We got out and walked and walked towards the newly dug grave. When we were there, Antie Charmaine took out an envelope.

'This is for you. Open it.'

Ma opened the envelope and reads the rectangle paper. 'This is so much money. I can't take...'

'Please take it was Hanna's, Mamma left it for her in her last testament. I am sure you will need it'

'No. I can't accept it. And don't come here assume what my family needs. We have enough to get by.'

'Ag you know I didn't mean it like that, Daleen.'

'Well you know what Ouma always said *Erf geld is swerf geld*'

'Well what must I then do with the money?'

'I don't know. Maybe, Charmaine, you can buy Hanna and your Ma a nice tombstone.'

'Maybe. We can talk about it later then?'

Ma was standing next to her and she wanted to put her arms around Antie Charmaine but by accident she knocked her big sunglasses off her face and Antie Charmaine had a big blue poep eye. Charmaine quickly put her glasses back on and left Ma standing with her mouth hanging open.

'Wait Charmaine! Come here! The cheque!' Ma called after her but she had already driven off.

'Liewe aarde' Ma said with her hands over her mouth. 'No wonder. Antie Lena could have said something instead of praying for Charmaine. If I had known...' Ma fixed the flowers around Hanna's cross and looked at me playing toktokkies in the sand.

‘Not a word to anyone about this. You hear me meisiekind’ Ma tells me.

Too scared to talk, I just nodded my head fast.

‘Our business is our business.’ said Ma. ‘Come, let’s go home.’



Lelik

The dog just came here one day. No one knew where he came from and I don't think anyone was looking for him. The dog looked brandsiek like a pavement special, a mix between a poodle and a husky. Shame, the poor thing was ugly and that was the end of it. I felt so sorry for him, so I let him sleep in my yard. I gave bones and leftovers for the dog to eat, but he stayed thin. Later on, we got used to each other. He never listened to my commands, but he would walk all the way to the Stop sign at the end of our street and wait there for me until I returned from the Andries Café in Skool Street. One day I thought; ag give the poor thing a name. I started calling him Snuffles then Fluffy, then Ore, but he never responded when I called him those names. Until old Hennie came over for coffee and a few ginger cookies one day. He actually lived here, in my house but sometimes he forgot. He didn't remember who he was or where he came from – it's the wine that made like that, so I treated him like he was a long lost cousin, or someone visiting from a faraway country. Hennie liked that. He changed his role every day.

That day the dog comes up to Hennie and starts sniffing his ankles. Hennie says,

'Shu, but that is a bloody ugly dog!'

Suddenly the dog sits up, waving his tail excitedly.

'That's it!' I cried, 'The blerrie dog's name is Lelik! You know Hennie, I have been looking for a name for the thing for quite some time now. I think he likes the name Lelik.' I say.

But enough about the dog. Let me tell you more about Old Hennie. He is maar a strange oomie, a wanderer. He has nine fingers and he has an Afrikaans accent that sounds like skop, skiet and donner American movie we watch every Friday on *Etv*. Heaven knows where he got it, and I never cared to ask, now that I think about it. Years ago, Hennie worked in a butchery, next to Susan's in town. One day he wanted to steal meat, he had to close the shop that evening, but he was too drunk and ended up cutting off his index finger, shame. I am not even his child, but I had to look after him, because he murdered all his brain cells with the papsak. It was very bad. One evening he came home, I was hanging over the gate watching him come down the road, just like an ouroeke. He stood there with a business man smile and asked me very politely.

'Do you know where Josephine Fielies lives?'

I burst out laughing. You see, of course I am Josephine Fielies and he didn't even remember it, so soft has his brain got from all the drinking. I laughed until it felt like my stomach muscles were pulling apart. Until I found myself crying. I couldn't believe that Hennie had just asked me

where I, Josephine Fielies lived. I took him by the arm and invited him in for a cup of coffee, still hot. He drank it like it was cool drink, in one go. It's as if his body forgot to react to the pain. He had forgotten how to be human. That is what I told myself. Afterwards he went into the bedroom to rest after his third cup of boere troos as he calls it when he is the rich boer from Baardskeerdersbos. He seemed a bit weak. I knew that soon it would be my responsibility to change his nappies also. His body was getting weaker by the day. That is what I told myself. Sometimes he just sat there like he was dead, his entire body unable to move. He mumbled nonsense things like, 'Spider webs, spider webs, spider webs' and went back to looking like a statue.

Once, it was a Monday morning and I was busy making cabbage stew. I didn't hear him come to the kitchen and he screamed, 'Spinnerakke!' The lord must forgive me for my French , maar ek het my binne in my moer geskrik. All you saw was a wooden spoon and cabbage flying in the air.

'Hygend! The focking jong.'

Old Hennie and Lelik became best friends. Wherever Hennie was, so was Lelik. Old Hennie couldn't walk so fast anymore, that is why Lelik walked behind him, and if you dared to touch Hennie, Lelik would *vreet* your ankles. It was like the dog was protecting the old man. So at least I didn't worry too much, Lelik was there to look after Hennie if he got himself into any trouble. So it was strange when one day Lelik came home by himself without Hennie. But I just thought to myself, maybe it is because old Hennie is walking slower, or visiting a neighbour. After a few hours and still no Hennie I went to check whether Hennie was sitting at the edge of the street sign, made from concrete. It was his usual spot to smoke his pipe. But Hennie was nowhere to be seen. I became worried when the street lights began to lighten up the street. Darkness was coming and still no Hennie. I then walked over to his son's house, and we drove to the police, because that son of Hennie's has a car now. That house used to be Hennie's. But the son had made it his and didn't worry about his father who was too sick to know home from the street. The police officer stood behind the counter and told us to come back in 72 hours, only then can they declare him as missing. I swear it was the longest 72 hours of my life. After 72 hours we went back. Still no Hennie. The policeman made us fill in a form. He asked if we had any photos. I only had one, of when we were younger, before Hennie's brain went demekar. When he still worked at the factory. It doesn't look much like him now but I still gave it to the policeman.

People started looking, the dogs and the inspectors were looking, and the local newspaper asked the community to be on the lookout. Months later his face was even on the TV. Everyone searched, except for Lelik.

Meanwhile Hennie's eldest son took over the house, and shamelessly put his two brothers out. Maybe it served them right for not taking care of their father properly. The eldest couldn't wait to turn the house into a hotel, for him and his family. Ticket, his younger brother lives with me in the old caravan in the back yard. Skerul the second eldest sleeps with his meide, he has one in almost every part of Gansbaai. How the eldest got the house is a mystery. When I asked the brothers how they got put out, they just say, 'we don't want to talk about it now.' I didn't ask further because I take pride in keeping my nose out of other people's business. To think the eldest brother didn't give me a blue cent, not a blooming tiekie for looking after his father. But the lord will provide, it is no use complaining, He will provide. And Lelik he is still living here with me, barely leaving the yard.

I cannot believe it has been eight years since Hennie went missing. I for one still believe to this day that Hennie is alive. One of these good days he will return from his long trip and visit. I wonder what he will be this time probably a Frenchman or an Ingels Jintelman. I will invite him in for coffee like before and we will eat lamingtons and oliebolle, those are his favourite. At the moment Lelik is my only hope. I know Lelik knows where his friend is. The only problem is I talk and Lelik barks.

Senna's Cricket Song

Every evening before Senna goes to sleep she dreams the story her father told her when she was a little girl. The room she has in Blikkie's dorp only has a bed and the cupboard that came with her when she moved in with her uncle when she was ten years old. Her suitcase is on top of the cupboard. She sleeps on the single bed. They have a bathroom, kitchen and a Wendy house attached to the house that has become her room even though most of Aunty Liedja's things are in her room. Oom Mannie decided to make her the room. He said that she was getting too big to share a room with them. This room smells like tobacco and sweat whenever her uncle has paid her a visit. He made a quick visit tonight, he doesn't like that her stomach has grown so big. Goeie Griet he said, you look like a watermelon.' She has only her dreams to hang on to, when Oom Mannie leaves her room at night. When she dreams the sun becomes as flat as the horizon and she and Pappa would sit there on the bank where they listen to all the songs that comes from the dam.

'Can you hear the crickets, Senna? Can you hear what they are singing about?' Pappa asks.

'Ag it is easy Pappa. They are singing for the night. Pappa told me so the last time'

'And why do you think they sing for the night?'

Senna looks around and notices the Pear tree that stands there doer by Oom Fanie's house. From afar the little house looks like a white square with a yellow dot inside of it. The answer can surely not be there Senna think to herself and decides to throw her look to the road. The Boer's bakkie drove by a moment ago but the orange dust stands there waiting for everything to go to sleep. Senna turns to her Pappa and looks for the answers in his eyes, half smiling at her.

'I don't know Pappa. Please tell me, toe asseblief.'

'All right. One day there was a woman by the name of Ou Tante Koba. She had a hunchback and smelled like tobacco that crept through her polka-dot doekie like a little grey cloud. She knew all the secrets of Paardenberg. But then one day she told the secret to a farmer and the farmer told his wife and soon the whole Paardenberg knew the secret.'

'Now, what was the Secret Pappa?'

‘We don’t know. You see everytime someone spread the secret to someone else they were cursed. They went deaf and dumb. They couldn’t speak.’

‘Owuh. So that is why Pappa don’t know?’

‘Yes, but I think it is because the night sings back to them Senna. Just try for yourself.’

Senna calls her name to the woods as loud as she could. She heard the night echo back her name and when she laughed it did the same.

Senna’s dream ends with her Pappa’s arms around her, but then she wakes up and she loses him. She wants to stay with Pappa, but Pappa is dead. She lives with her Aunty Liedja and her husband Oom Mannie now.

Oom Mannie told her that she will never leave because she belongs to him. He says this with a threat in his eyes, looking at her, at her watermelon. She is scared of him but he is the only one that tells her that, she is his everything. He is her first kiss when she was twelve. He still brings her Chomps chocolates and lollipops on a Friday. She must always keep her clean, but his body smells like fish maize, like a woman who is unclean.

They came to fetch her when she was seven with Baas Flakkas’ Isuzu bakkie with the grey and black stripes. She didn’t have other people until Antie Liedja came to fetch her. It was always her and Pappa. Pappa was supposed to be with her because they were each other’s family but he had died now and until 7 months ago she was alone. She doesn’t mind her Antie Liedja complaining about her anymore.

‘We don’t have money to keep on another child. Can’t she stay with someone else? Let the welfare deal with it.’

Hi nee Liedja, we can’t do that. Just throw her away like that. The government gives money for babies. Everyone in Blikkies dorp calls it The Mandela Fund. She has nowhere to go Liedja. You know there is no one left on Paardenberg.

Well it is not my fault my brother went and threw his live away. Why did he go to work if he knew he was had the cough? He wasn’t thinking. He could have left Paardenberg when we left. He loved that farm too much and look where it got him. No we must clean up his rubbish.

For a few good years Senna had hoped that they would give her away to someone else but she is going to be sixteen soon and she is still stuck here. And she has not seen the farm since. She wakes up with Antie Liedja's scowling. She is never satisfied with what Senna does. The kitchen is not shiny enough. The floors need scrubbing. Antie Liedja said that she had to work to pay off her father's funeral. Senna has learned to put up with it because she know by eleven Antie Liedja leaves the house to play on the little machines at the hotel in town. She sits there whole day and plays the machines but she has never won the jackpot. Antie Liedja tells Oom Mannie that she goes there to double her pay. She plays out all the money and sometimes there is not even enough for bread then she has to ask the neighbours. But she that is Senna must be grateful because she has gotten too big to do all the chores.

Today Senna looks at herself very attentively in the mirror. She is in Antie Liedja's room. Sometimes she puts on her church clothes and pretends to be her, but she can't fit into them anymore, so now she just looks at herself. Her breasts feel sensitive and heavy. Her old bra's doesn't fit her anymore. Her stomach has grown as big as a watermelon and her naval makes a point like the end of a balloon.

'We must hope and pray that Antie Liedja brings some food for us watermelontjie'. She talks softly to her stomach, while both her hands rest on her stomach.

'Do you know Pappa would have loved to see you? I can bet you that he would have told you the story about the crickets. What do you think watermelontjie? I promise you when I go and fetch you at the hospital in Hermanus I will take you to Paardenberg. I am sure that the Boer Pappa worked for will remember me. He will give us a place to stay. I know it. I will not allow Oom Mannie to knyp you like he did me. We are going to be really happy. I promise.'

Senna sings while she grabs the big dress the neighbour gave her.

Jy's my lemoentjie

Kom hall jou soentjie

In die more dou

Jy's my lemoentjie

Want ek is lief vir jou

Senna walks to her room. She has been waiting for Antie Liedja to leave. Antie Liedja did not manage to lay her hand on her little tin where she keeps her memories. When Antie Liedja found out that she was going to have a watermelontjie she took all her clothes and shoes and burnt them.

'Now you can't run girlie.' She said.

She was angry at me because I did not want to tell her who the father was. I couldn't tell the secret. I didn't want to end up like those people in her father's story. But since watermelontjie Uncle Manie doesn't knyp her anymore. Oom Mannie says Antie Liedja is just jealous because of the watermelon I'm carrying. She is all dried up inside, she is not much of a woman anymore he told her.

Senna goes on her knees carefully and reaches for tin under the bed. The little tin is a bit rusted but she likes it that way. It is like they are growing up together. Inside the tin is a pink ribbon and her father's funeral hymn booklet with his ID picture on it. She doesn't know how long it is going to take her to go home home, but she is thinking on the way there she must pick some Kompakter flowers and some Gonna bossies to put on Pappa's grave. When she looks up it is Uncle Mannie standing at the door. He had been drinking. His eyes were glassy and just looking at her. She knows what she must do, give him what he wants, it is going to be over soon.

The Fisherman

Andrea gets up with a sense of purpose. It is early, so early that the moon is the only thing that reflects on the calm waves. But Andrea's mind is already active with thoughts of the harbor, the concrete bareness of it. The harbor with the dollops that look like giant hammers stacked on top of each other to barricade the sea from pushing forward. Those bloody seagulls that shit everywhere. The revolting smell of sea guts that she loves. How here in Gansbaai the sea is not blue as in the pictures. It is grey and when the sea is moody with cramps she builds up foam that looks like someone threw a box of *OMO* washing powder in the sea, so that it might push the soap suds forwards to the shore.

Andrea has to get ready for work. She puts on her three pairs of socks first, followed by sweatpants. Then she puts on a T-shirt and a Polo-neck jersey over it and finally her green oil-skin dungaree and the black balaklava she knitted for today's occasion. When she is finished she goes to the kitchen and takes her lunch box which used to be an ice cream tub that read *Country Fresh Vanilla Ice Cream* on it. But the sticky label is now withered. Four slices of bread with margarine is all she needs. That is what her Pappa use to have in his lunch box.

When Andrea gets to the harbor she knows she is two hours early. The boats usually come in the harbor round about eight, but she doesn't want to miss the Skipper. She is only here for one reason. She has come to ask for her father's work and she won't leave until he says yes. Although the smell of fish maize stings in your nose it is a blessed smell for the men and women working at the factory and for her. Every day they wait for the early morning hoeter to sing through the streets of Blompark to wake them up to catch the can-bus so that they can go work at the fish factory. But Andrea has never wanted to work at the can factory or by the label store. Since she was very young she wanted to be a fisherman, like Papa.

Every day when Papa came from the sea she waited for him on the stoep to help pull off his tobboots and oil skin. He would always let her check his pockets for loose change or if he was in a good mood, he would bring home bokkoms to be enjoyed with dry bread and a cup of coffee.

Andrea notices a boat coming into to the harbor. She notices how the seagulls are becoming restless, swarming like fleas towards the boat. She gets up quickly. She thinks she needs to get to the Skipper before those bleddie seagulls. She hurries along the pier careful not to

slip as a member of the crew jumps off the boat to tie the boat to fast. It must have been a bad day at sea she thinks. She can see the Skipper is particularly moody today. He and his manne are busy offloading equipment and some of their personal belongings, not fish like other days. But she walks over and taps him on his shoulder.

‘Ja meisiekind, what do you want? I don’t want to buy fish.’

‘Oh no Skipper, I am not here to sell fish. I am here to ask for my father’s job.’

‘Look, here I don’t think there is place for you here.’

Andrea wants to tell the skipper that she wants to be a fisherman just like her Pappa. How she has dreamt of all the sea stories Pappa told her and the people he met when they went to Mosselbaai to catch pilchards for the fish factory. When she dreamt Pappa’s stories she was one of the men at sea. She was all grown up with a beard just like Pappa’s and she had on a balaklava for the cold and to boots to match with her green oil skin just like she is looking today. She can be like Pappa pulling in the nets through the wind and storm. She knows what a boat feels like when it is grinding through the waves. She can smoke her BB tobacco pipe and she has a strong stomach, she is used to the smell of the salt air and fish guts.

Her Pappa took her with him every Saturday to the harbor, when the fishing boats lay on their sides anchored in the harbor. She and Pappa sat on the jetty with the tires around it and listened to the seagulls’ terrible singing. They sat there with their fishing string and their rooi aas and hoped for a *harder* to bite or if they were lucky a red roman fish. Pappa taught her everything about fish and water. He gave her, her first *Okapi* knife and fisher’s needle to sew up the holes in the fishing nets. She was only twelve but by then she was just as good as Pappa. She can do this job better than any of these manne still wet behind the ears calling themselves fisher men. I know the sea, Skipper. She wants to say. I know the sea, even though you are not even looking at me and acting restless to leave the harbor as soon as possible.

‘Look,’ says Andrea, ‘Don’t tell me that the sea is no place for me. I was born here. I am made from this salt I taste on my chapped lips and hands that has caught fish for as long as I can remember. You won’t be sorry. Pappa said I must get my sea legs that you will understand our situation. Skipper mos know about Pappa? The sugar took him pretty bad and

ate his leg. The sugar took him from us last year. We are eight children. I have to wear the pants in the house now. I wouldn't ask you for a job if my grasmajien didn't die on me last week. I can work for myself, no problem but I am running out of options.'

The Skipper looks at Andrea. She can see she has his attention now. He waves away one of his men and looks uncomfortable. He begins to scratch his beard like he wants to say something but he doesn't know how. He is going to tell me to go away. Even after everything I have told him, Andrea thinks. Better pull up your pants, girlie. This may be your last chance.

'I know it is not your business. But I cannot catch enough fish to make it till the end of the week. You know with the permits and laws. Five fishes a day is not going to pay for everything.' Andrea says, cool and calm. She is looking the Skipper right in the eye now. Man to man. She will not let him ignore her or dismiss her, the way he would chase away a thieving seagull.

'Yes but... child but...' the Skipper stutters.

'Yes I understand that you have never appointed someone like me. Is it my hair? I will cut if necessary. I wouldn't ask you if I wasn't in the red. I know about trying to hit blood out of a rock. I have been a dekman for Oubaas Tollie when Pappa worked for him. Pappa said you and your father are good people.'

'Why don't you work by the fish factory? This is no place for someone like you.'

'Skipper I can't work at the fish factory. I wasn't born to be a fish packer. You should know what it is like being called to catch fish.'

'Yes but...'

'I know you think that I am crazy, but just give me a chance you will see. Didn't you buy fish from me last week? You yourself told me that you haven't seen such good gevlekte fish since Oom Day last vlekke fish. Well skipper I am his daughter and fishing is the oldest story I know. So can I start tomorrow?'

‘Look if you interrupt me one more time I swear your ears will burn. I don’t mind you working for me,’ The Skipper dropped his voice now so that only Andrea could hear, ‘ but you have come at the wrong time. When last have you seen my boat on the water?’

Skipper was looking at the direction of his men busy talking to each other. To the Skipper they seemed cheerful, but he knows that once he has spoken to this girl he is going to tell them the same thing he is about to tell her.

‘*Runtu*, my boat, is broken like your father’s leg. There is nothing I can do anymore. I am selling the boat to the owner of the fish factory and then I’m going to live with my children in Cape Town. I can’t help you kuinkie. We are both in the same boat here. It is by God’s grace that I was out at sea today. I hoped we would be able to catch something so that I could give the men a little something as pay. But the motor cut out and we barely made it back to port. She needs a new engine, a new rudder. Wood in the stern is rotten. Her GPS doesn’t work anymore. Truth is I can’t afford to keep her. Not with the government quotas on how much we can catch and when and what. This is *Runtu*’s last day at sea. I’m sorry.’

Andrea has nothing to say. She feels like a giant wave has smashed all the oxygen from her body and now all she can do is sink sink. Will she drown? She watches the skipper walk over to his bakkiewhere his men are all inside waiting for him. They drive off and Andrea still can’t move. Those men, she thinks as the bakkie full of men disappears past the boom and car park, like her will have to scavenge like the seagulls tomorrow. These seagulls at this harbor have no shame, shitting everywhere like they do. They never do an honest day’s work or know what it is to have to hope taken from you when there is so little hope left.

Will I drown? Andrea thinks again, looking at the Skipper’s boat. Soon to be firewood maybe. Or used to take tourists out. Andrea puts down her ruck sack and unzips it. She takes out some fishing line and a hook and some rooi aas that was left from yesterday and walks over to the jetty. No, she will not drown. Not today. She sits herself down and throws her line into the water.

The Big Box

Between Kolgans Street and Strandloper Street, stood a hill. A person could almost see the entire scheme from the hill. If only old Patrys did not decide to go and build his house there and on top of that build a high and mighty wall around it. After that, that hill seemed to belong to him alone.

People stopped going to visit after he made that hill his and also because of that heavy-tongue wife of his. She gossips about every living being in the scheme, or so the sisters at church tell me. Then there was the outside leventree. Everyone in Galjoen Scheme reckons that Patrys should have ma rather have built himself a toilet inside because everyone in those days pissed outside or in a bucket that you had to Dettol and Jik to fix the smell. I mean, if he was going to show off his money he might as well show off with an inside leventree. No one else had toilets in the scheme those days, so either he liked to piss outside or he built it for the queen.

But that is Patrys' trick. He worries about no one. He is very to himself. He thinks he is better than everyone. His high and mighty tricks actually started when he bought that red Toyota bakkie in 1986 and started smousing. He that is Patrys, made lekker money and all of a sudden the children wore new clothes and shiny shoes. But no one will forget that December when he came driving down the road with a big box on his bakkie. Because Patrys was a smouser we all expected to see his bakkie with fruits and vegetables but that day he had a big box on his bakkie. He pulled into his yard. I saw him ordering his two sons around, ordering them to help, even his wife helped. They knew the neighbours were watching but they paid no attention to the curiosity. After they loaded the big box into the house we barely saw Patrys and his family outside. Patrys made a lekker profit because people wanted to find out what was in the box so they would take more things on the book than necessary. He wouldn't even tell the pastor's wife. When she asked him what contraption was on his bakkie, he replied, 'husse met lang ore.'

Daleen, Patrys' wife and I wasn't really friends, so I couldn't just go to her house for a cup of tea without her knowing that I was there to fish out about what was in that box. Apparently after the big box commotion, neighbours heard voices from their house every evening at eight o' clock when every one's candles dimmed because in those days we mos didn't have electricity and municipality toilets like we have today. Neighbours heard laughter and the new friends Patrys

had in his house sounded like white people. The curiosity brought the entire scheme on its thorns because of the box and Patrys' new friends that he entertains so in his house.

Until one evening Magdeleen the pastor's wife couldn't take it anymore and decided to call the Boere. She called me first of course and tells me to come over, because she thinks that Patrys has finally done it, and clips put down the phone. When I get to her house she is all shakes and nerves. She tells me that she heard a big bang sound from Patrys' house and then she saw Patrys reverse from the house, tyres screeching out his yard. Magdeleen says she saw it with her own eyes, from her window.

'My nerves can't deal with this sin. I have to call the Boere,' Magdeleen continues.

'I'm sure it is nothing, maybe he went to get help,' I try and assure her.

'No, I think he, you know,' using her thumb to draw a line around her neck to indicate what Patrys might have done.

It is just then when Felisa Whistlebeak comes barging in to the house to throw in her ten cents worth about the big bang she heard.

'Now what do you suggest we do?' She interrupts. 'It was that big revolver he bought. I'm telling you the sisters at church told me this. He kidnapped his family and then you know...' Like Magdeleen just showed, running making a line with her finger on her neck from left to right.

Felisa Whistlebeak is making everything worse and I don't like her very much. Ever since she started working for Pastor she thinks the sun shines out of her.

'You ladies, I'm telling you, you are chasing ghosts,' I say again.

But Magdeleen and Felisa Whistlebeak want to hear of nothing. They are convinced Patrys committed a murder. Ai.

'You ladies know g'n no one in this town has electricity, except for the Pastor and my husband of course, so maybe because of the silence, you maybe misheard the sound coming from there. Maybe Eileen let fall a pot or a baking tray.' I continue.

A thing you must know about the people here in the scheme is that we go to sleep early. If the day goes to sleeps, we all sleep and if something interrupts it, people lose their chickens, you know, like in they go bedinges. Why would Patrys go and kill off his family? He is a suurknol but not murderer. Nee uh-uh, I think to myself.

Meanwhile Felisa Whistlebeak brings Magdeleen some sugar water to calm herself, now sitting in an armchair.

‘When Pastor comes home from the meeting in Stanford he will have to pray for that family and why haven’t you called yet? Don’t just stand there with the phone?’ Magdeleen says looking at me like *I* am the person who mos maybe killed someone. I thought to myself what the hell. Just call the damn Boere just to prove a point to these crazy women. We waited for quite a while for the Boere to come and later on the whole town was awake. The Boere can take their own time when it comes to scheme business.

When the Boere eventually came there us, three ladies were already standing with an oil lamp by Magdeleen’s gate while the rest of the street stood scattered in little groups anxiously waiting for the police to bring out a dead body. Because Magdeleen was so curious she followed the young constabletjie to Patrys’ house. He didn’t seem to mind us walking behind him.

He knocks and hears steps towards the door which then opens. He takes the oil lamp I was carrying and lifts it up. We see it is Eileen.

‘Excuse me ma’am but there was reports of a crime taking place at this address.’

Eileen gasps with her hands over her mouth.

‘What crimes?’ she asks confused. ‘My husband has a licence for his smousing.’

‘Oh so you’re the wife?’ He looks at me and then at Eileen. I was so embarrassed.

The constable looks at her again very seriously.

Patrys’ wife with her big owl eyes looks at the constabletjie nervously and begins telling him everything about the bang and the people and so on.

‘There was again a cowboy program on the TV and the cowboy was just about to shoot, when the TV vrek. So Patrys ran out the house to go get a new car battery for the TV. You see Mr Constable-Police sir, it is his favourite show.’ Eileen tells the constable

She looks at the ground and looks like she is about to cry.

‘Please don’t arrest us. I promise we will put the sound softer. We didn’t know it was illegal.’

‘Your TV is not illegal,’ He assures her coldly.

The neighbours and I was shocked ash grey with what had happened. The Boere and the ambulance that came when all the commotion was done was probably dik bedonnerd too. But it happened. Nothing we can do about it now.

I remember the Constable saying to Magdeleen, ‘I should be arresting you for wasting our time.’

Surprisingly Patrys’ wife came up for us saying that it was all a misunderstanding. We could have been in the tjoekie that night, God forbid. Now every evening at six, half the scheme gathers at Patrys’ house on the hill. We laugh and drink coffee and watch cowboy shows and love stories on the big box.

I nogal feel bad for thinking such bad things of Patrys and his wife. He is actually really kind and giving. Always gives me half price on the potatoes. And Magdeleen and Felisa Whistlebeak are bosom buddies with Eileen. It’s just Eileen this and Eileen that.

‘She is nogal really kind and boy can she bake doughnuts,’ Felisa Whistlebeak tells me at the Sunday church service. ‘You should come with us next time.’ She winks at me.

‘Ag I don’t know Felisa. I mean I don’t want to be a nuisance.’

‘Ai no Dorie, we are all human, you must have a heart like the good Lord. They are very nice people and besides you are missing out on a lot.’

I watch Felisa walk up the hill to Patrys’ house, very eagerly too, to go and watch TV. I wonder for how long that is going to last.

The Legend of Tjieng Tjang Tjerries

It is one o'clock in the afternoon and Katriena can-meisie and Derek are sitting on the harbour wall with their backs against the dollops looking like a bunch of hammers on top of each other. The afternoon is like every afternoon they have had since they have been friends. The echo of one of skippers swearing at his crew and the sea gulls swearing are similar if you sit from a distance. But they like it for the smell of fish guts and how open and blue it is here. It is a good place to dream.

'Skerul now why do they call you Tjieng Tjang Tjerries? Where did you get your name from?' Katriena can-meisie asks him while he sips on his 750 ml beer.

He looks at her while he wipes his mouth with his arm and smiles.

'7 up tjieng tjang tjerries' he replies.

For a blik kop Katriena can-meisie knows he is not so stupid. She has always known how to wrap him around her pinky, but today Skerul is full of draad so she knows that, that is all she will get out of him today. But she likes that he is so strange. He has been like this for years.

He would like to tell Katriena can-meisie Tjieng Tjang Tjerries was his first three words he said after his first visit to the hospital. But he can never remember how he got there in the first place. All Skerul really remembers is waking up from a dream in the hospital in standard 5 and then he could speak Japanese.

Uncle Bos his Godfather told him that sometimes he can see dreams with his eyes wide open, that he sees differently than other people. But he knows that it has been Mr. Wong teaching him Japanese all these years.

It was Mr. Wong who came and taught him everything. The first time he met Mr. Wong he wore black linen pajamas and he had a long beard touching his toes. His eyes always made two thin lines when he smiles at Skerul. Skerul wasn't always sure whether he was in a good mood or a bad mood. That has always been his face.

He never understood why he would always wake up in the hospital after Mr. Wong visited, and he hates the smell of clean in the hospital. Everything tasted like pills and his tongue felt

heavy, sore like a stiff muscle. And every time when the sister in the hospital would ask him

‘And how are you Mr. Swanepoel?’

He wouldn’t know what to say.

The more Mr. Wong comes to teach this strange language he loses bits of his own language. It is like he can’t understand the people in Gansbaai anymore or the can-meisie who just spoke to him. He wanted to say Mr. Wong teaches him everything he knows, but Mr. Wong said that if he won’t learn the language he is trying to teach him he is keeping his own language in his jail until he passes Mr. Wong’s test.

He remembers his first lesson Mr. Wong gave him in Standard Five class. They didn’t have a real school then. The standard fours and fives shared a class. That morning it felt like there was a brommer in his ear. Then his head started to buzz and made those cracking sounds when the radio breaks up. Like there was a million brommers in his head. And he started to bang his head against the desk and the laughter of the rest of the class made everything worse. That is when he saw Mr. Wong for the first time. The noise in his head was so loud. He had to speak up so that Mr. Wong could hear him.

The teacher made him come to the front of the class and she asked him to say all the books of The Holy Bible.

I’m not asking you again Skerul?

‘Miester there is bees in my head I can’t hear you!’

The class laughs and she can’t keep them calm.

‘Miester Swanepoel. I won’t have you sin the bible like that! What are the blooming names of the Bible’

‘Genesis, Leviticus, Excodus, Tjieng, Tjang, Tjerries.’

He searched for the answer in his head. Until he saw someone walking up to him in his head. He looks exactly like the Kung-Fu movies he watches on his Uncle Bos’ TV.

Tjieng tjang tjerries he heard Mr Wong whisper to him in his ear.

Miester Swanepoel took him by the collar toward the Black board to stand in the vrot apple corner. He could hear everyone laughing and his was really loud and he shouted tjieng tjang tjerries, Genesis over and over until he woke up in the hospital.

He wants to tell her all of this but these words only exists as thoughts. All he sounds with his voice is seven up tjieng tjang tjerries because Mr. Wong is keeping his words in jail. Those are the only Japanese words he has been able to learn. The others he has forgotten because he cannot remember the dreams.

Mr. Wong only allows these words because seven up is Mr. Wong's favorite chocolate made from biscuit, peanuts and chocolate and tjieng tjang tjerries means 'My name is'. Uncle Bos told Mama Kebous to take him out of school after Mr Wong visited him in classroom. He heard them. They think he didn't hear them but he did hear them.

‘Maybe it is a bad spirit making him talk like that Bos. He thinks he can speak karate’

‘No Mama Kebous he was born like that the doctor said. You know his mother did it to him, all those pills she drank to...you know...when she was pregnant. The Poor Boy. Don't worry Mama I'll look after your grandson.’

‘God bless you Bos.’

After that Skerul followed Uncle Bos everywhere. And when he was old enough he went to harbour wall to catch *harders* and *red romans* with his uncle. Uncle Bos taught him how to catch fish but he couldn't handle the fishing rod properly so uncle showed him how to dig for worms to catch fish. He likes to dig worms and sell it to the skippers at the harbour and there everyone likes him and he knows when it is the perfect time to dig worms. When it is full, it is a perfect moon and he knows the sea sand starts glimmering in the moonlight and the worms start itching under the sand blanket. All the skippers ask him how he gets hold of the worms but he doesn't show them. They come to him. He can talk to worms and they come to him when the water becomes a dark blue. It is his secret. That is how he makes his money and how he can buy bottles and bottles of beer. He likes the yeast- like bitter taste in his mouth.

Meanwhile the can- girl is tugging at his shirt. She is impatient now. She knows he is not going to give in so easily today.

‘Are you listening to me? Can I have a beer? Come on you have three beers left. Don’t be so suinig men? Can I?’

‘He shakes his head.’

‘Ok fine. Be ma uitgevreet’, she says. ‘You can forget getting a taste of this pie again, whilst patting on the front of the jeans and walks off with her behind dancing behind her.’

He knows that can -meisie. He and Katriena have been friends since she worked at the fish factory as a tomato sauce maker for the pilchard’s boss. He likes her, but he cannot like women when he is trying to learn Japanese Mr. Wong said. He likes Katriena can- meisie for her dancing boude. She told him that it is so big because Mamma sends her for flu injections at the clinic every three months because she was always a sick child and it makes her not become dirty by having babies. That Katriena, she is the woman for him, she can’t stay angry at him for long. He knows she will be back tomorrow. She likes him even though he just nods at her. She does all the talking for him anyway.

‘And another thing’, she calls after him. ‘I am lekke telling your Uncle Bos what you are doing. I am telling. You should be home. You know you just came out of the hospital.’

Skerul is not bothered with her threats, it is going to be full moon tonight and the skipper promised him biltong and cigarettes. He is waiting for the water to become dark blue sipping on his beer. He has been dronk since seven from yesterday’s worm money and there is still three left in his rucksack. To hell with Uncle Bos he is not scared of uncle Bos. He is not a child anymore. He grabs his green oil skin ruck sack and check one last time if he has everything. He has old newspapers and some fishing string to catch some *harders* for Uncle Bos after he is done sounding to the worms. He uses the newspaper to place the soil and the worms in there to keep them safe for the skippers. The fresher the worms the better the pay. But only the worms that wants to go with him he takes from the sea soil. He would never take them from the itching earth under his feet without them giving the okay.

Later when it becomes cooler he walks from the old harbor where the fish factory is situated

to where the new harbor now lies, where the itchy sand is. Mr. Wong doesn't like the new harbor so Mr. Wong waits for him by the fish factory in his black pajamas. But not today.

Mr. Wong wants to tag along. He says the moon is a bad omen today. Maybe he should go with him.

Skedul rubs the side of his palm against head. The inside of his head begins. He gets up and leaves Mr. Wong at the dock smiling at him. Mr. Wong follows him without feet and the faster he walks the faster Mr Wong moves without feet, with his eyes making lines and his hands holding onto the bowl of tea. When Skedul finally makes it to the shore he feels like there is a thousand little bee wings buzzing in his brain and no matter how he rubs. The itch and the buzz continue to bother him.

‘Mr. Wong please make it stop,’ Skedul pleads.

Mr. Wong is standing a great distance away from the shore. The sound of the seagulls and the fish factory on the left echoes louder and Mr. Wong just stands there. Not saying a word.

Skedul doesn't like it when Mr. Wong makes his visits. When Mr. Wong comes, he makes him dream. But it is an empty dream with him at the old harbor not completely there but alone and it hurts him. Every time when Mr. Wong comes his head feels like it is going to crack open. The last time Mr. Wong made him swallow and swallow from his tea bowl and his tongue felt thick and later on it felt like he was swallowing his tongue and then Mr. Wong left him and then he woke up in the hospital. Mr. Wong has been with him since he was ten. But when the hair started growing in his face his uncle gave him his first beer and he has liked it ever since. Beer is better than Mr. Wong visits. The Beer's dream is better than Mr. Wong's beer.

The water swims around his ankles very calmly so he knows it is going to be a calm moon. Maybe he will get some nice worms and more beer tomorrow.

‘Tjieng tjang tjerries seven up Skedul’, he hears and looks around. When he turns around he is in the dream again. The harbor is empty, not even the little fishing boat floating next to the jetty. When he turns around he sees Mr. Wong standing there with his black pajamas in the water. Calling him to the water, but today he doesn't want to move where he stands because he cannot swim that deep.

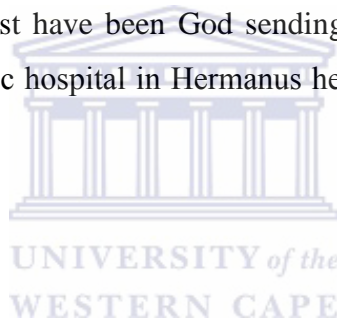
Mr. Wong shouts from where he is standing in the bay,

‘tjieng tjang tjerries?’

‘Skerul shouts back 'Tjieng Tjang Tjerries skerul seven up.’

Mr. Wong is impressed with Skerul and smiles and walks towards him with a bowl in his hand. When he gets to Skerul he hands him the bowl to drink. At first Skerul didn't know how to say I'm full in Japanese so he just shook his head, but Mr. Wong kept handing him the bowl and he starts drinking. It tasted a bit salty but it wasn't tea this Mr. Wong gave him beer and he drank and he drank and he drank.

When Uncle Bos came to the harbor to get his drunken nephew. He saw Skerul being pulled in by the weak waves. He splashed in the water with his worker boots and koofia and pulled his nephew out. Uncle Bos says it must have been God sending him to check on Skerul that day. When Skerul woke up in the public hospital in Hermanus he knew that Mr. Wong's visits were far from over.



Porlock and Abacus

Porlock and Abacus were arguing about Gansbaai's name while vlekking the fish in the new harbour.

'Gansbaai is a stupid name for a fisher's village. I mean there is no geese here except for Oom Hannes the sewage trucker's geese that think they're dogs,' says Porlock and he runs his knife over a juicy, fat snoek's scales.

'No man Porlock. You don't know nothing about this place. Abacus knows about everything,' Abacus says.

Porlock looks at him skew-eyed. He can never understand why Abacus can't just talk about himself as I or me. Why he must always use his own name when speaking about himself? Yessus. Just like a malletjie. But Porlock decides to listen to him. He has been waiting to hear the story from the horse's mouth. 'It's no use looking at Abacus like that. Do you know who Abacus is? I am the first learner of Gansbaai Primary when the school was still in the V.G.K church hall. My grandpeople came here when Gansbaai was still called Gansegat men. Good days, good days, yes, good days.'

'Look Abacus,' Porlock says, 'I know all of this already. Get to the point.'

'Watse point?'

'Ag dammit, you know, where does the name come from?' Porlock repeats.

'Everyone thinks it comes from that year when it rained so, and then all of a sudden it didn't rain anymore and a bunch of geese came running down the mountain where the name Gansbaai is now it written among the Proteas, but my granpeople knows otherwise,' Abacus goes on ignoring his friend. Then Abacus takes a snoek and grabs it by the tail, slaps it on the table, presses on it, and cuts the fish on the side while looking at Porlock. He can vlek fish with his eyes closed and perfectly too. He takes out the guts and puts the vis kuite aside, then he cuts off the head. Pepper seasoned viskop with onions and potatoes, lekker. He and Porlock have about twenty fishes to vlek, but he doesn't care he has other matters on the heart.

‘Nou ja, now tell your granpeople’s story.’ Porlock says.

‘When the Chainoukwa still lived in the valleys, before there were streets, harbours and so on. My granpeople lived on the white sand by the beach.’

‘But Abacus, you are talking about a hundred years of history. I was not asking for that long ago,’ Porlock laughs.

‘Will you keep your word, so that I can tell the blooming story?’

‘No go on Abacus, *men*. I am just pulling your leg.’

‘Right where was Abacus? Yes my grand people’s history. We have been fishing for hundreds of years here. But the thing about the geese has to do with my great Uncle Doelie. People have told many stories about him. All lies I tell you. All lies.’

‘Didn’t Doelie kill all those geese? They said so. He was a mad man who lived up in De Kelders caves and he waited for the geese and just like that killed all of them.’

‘Keep your word I say! He only killed one goose. Just one. He never even ate it.’

Porlock looks at Abacus funny. He is usually to himself, wrapped up in his grey beard that is turning slightly red from all the tobacco he smokes through his pipe. Right now he reckons Abacus has also gone mad and he understands that Abacus would want to defend his people.

‘Ja, ja old mate’ Porlock says, ‘Oubaas Maties will be here in a while let us finish vlekking the snoeke.’

The next day Porlock waits for Abacus at The Blue Whale Kantien where they usually buy a plastic. The blue whale is still the cheapest here, R10 for half a litre of wine. They would come to town every day and sit there at the blue whale kantien. Porlock hopes he will score some odd jobs like the fishing vlekking yesterday. He is sure that Oubaas Maties will ask them again. But where is that Abacus then today, Porlock wonders?

It’s only later on that he sees Abacus walking up the street. He looks slightly different when he comes up to Porlock.

‘Ma my liewe Lord! Man? Old Abacus but you mos combed your hair. What in the hell for?’

‘I could see yesterday, you didn’t want to believe Abacus. So today, here I am again to tell my story and no chiming in or I’ll give you my backhand, do you hear me?’

Porlock already a bit drunk, pushes his lips forward, holds his hands upright, shaking his hands as if to say. ‘Fine I won’t look for shit with you today.’

Abacus lifts up his shirt and from under it, he takes out a leather book.

‘In here. In this book is the history of this place so written by Abacus and I will now read it to you, Porlock my friend.’

Abacus takes a sip of Porlock’s wine and begins. He starts reciting:

In the caves of old Dekelders did doelie live

In harmony with our grand people written on the walls

But one day old Doelie, dreamt a dream

The most frightening image of a goose

Half him , half goosed

So he prayed and prayed for the geese to return

So that he could set his spirit free

So old doelie prayers came true

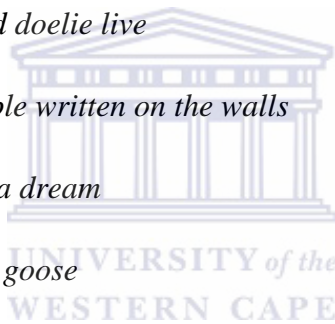
And he stabbed the goose on the left

Where parts of him was

And threw the goose in the fountain

So angry was the geese that they came running down the mountain

And headed for the fountain



And sat there

Then they left

Then never came again

‘Jissie Abacus. That was better said than the Dominee, shoe!’ says Porlock clapping his hands.

Inside the book are only the poem and a picture of old Doelie. The rest of the pages had a R100 rand note pasted on each of the remaining pages.

‘Abacus’ savings. Every year Abacus pastes a R100 rand note in this book for the day when Abacus dies. Abacus wants to be buried at the De Kelders caves. You see my friend on the second page it is written what Abacus wishes. Short and sweet. The day when Abacus dies Abacus wants to join his great people and wishes to do so by being buried in the De kelders Cave.’

Abacus closes the book and tucks it under his shirt. He and Porlock sit there and watch the people walk pass them in the main road. Some of them don’t even care about him and his friend sitting here, day after day. They are not bergies. Abacus and Porlock knows Gansbaai, better than any of these people walking here. Abacus knows about waiting. Any day now their ship will come in. Yes any day now, he thinks to himself and tieps next to his friend.

Later that afternoon Abacus wakes up. His friend is still tieping. He plants his elbow in Porlock’s side and Porlock wakes up.

‘What time is it in the afternoon,’ Porlock asks?

‘Time to give your heart to Jesus,’ he jokes and gets up with the help of the wall that he presses against.

‘Where are you going now,’ Porlock asks?

‘I’m going to see my lawyer?’

‘Your lawyer? That you get where?’

‘None of your beeswax. Guthrie and Theron is where I am headed. Are you coming then?’

‘No says Porlock. Oubaas might be coming to look for us and then who is going to tell him where we are Huh?’

Abacus scurries down the road.

‘Hey Abacus?’

‘What is it? I am going to be late for my appointment.’

‘So what is the story now actually?’

‘What story?’

‘You were supposed to tell me where the name Gansbaai comes from.’

‘I did, you just didn’t listen properly.’

‘Ok will you tell it to me again?’

‘Yes, tomorrow.’



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

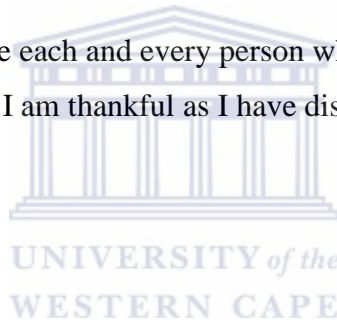
Thank you Meg Vandermerwe for teaching me to spot the ‘lies’, for teaching me the beauty of words and showing me that humanity and truth lies in the words that we create. Because of words we are family.

Thank you Professor Wendy Woodward for teaching me that poetry is everywhere. I see differently because of your careful eye and mentorship.

Thank you Professor Antjie Krog for teaching me the music of words, I remember fondly how during workshops how beautifully words can sing and dance.

Thank you to the English Department’s UWC Creates Program for molding writers and for molding me to be a voice for others through writing.

I would also like to acknowledge each and every person who took the time to read my work and gave constructive criticism. I am thankful as I have discovered readers are a rare gemstone.





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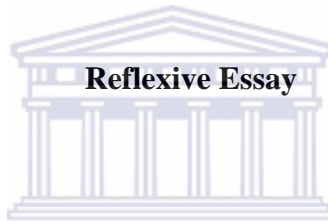
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FACULTY OF ARTS

MASTERS OF CREATIVE WRITING

(Mini-thesis)



Reflexive Essay

Supervisor: Ms Meg Vandermerwe

Jolyn Phillips

2870322

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, Creative Writing.



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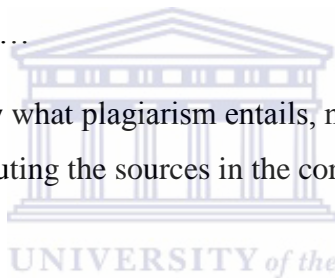
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GENERAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

Name:

Student number:

1. I hereby declare that I know what plagiarism entails, namely to use another's work and to present it as my own without attributing the sources in the correct way. (Refer to University Calendar part 1 for definition)



2. I know that plagiarism is a punishable offence because it constitutes theft.

3. I understand the plagiarism policy of the Faculty of Natural Science of the University of the Western Cape.

4. I know what the consequences will be if I plagiarise in any of the assignments for my course.

5. I declare therefore that all work presented by me for every aspect of my course, will be my own, and where I have made use of another's work, I will attribute the source in the correct way.

Signature

Date

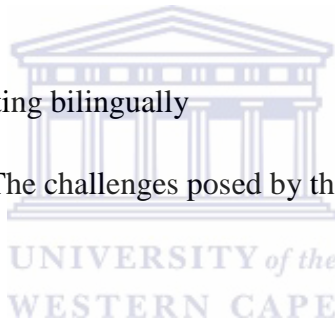
Ethics Statement

In order to ensure that there is no breach of confidentiality, I will ensure that no names or compromising, private details are used in my stories. I do not for see this as being a great challenge since the stories in Let's Go Home are almost entirely works of fiction and products of my imagination.



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Abstract:

Let's Go Home encompasses thirteen short stories inspired by the Coloured fishing community of Blompark in Gansbaai. These stories embody a range of voices and perspectives, some contemporary, some set in the past thirty to forty years, each of which attempts to represent the lives, loves and losses of a rural community that too often has found itself at the margins of society and ignored by literary representations. Themes explored include trauma-physical, psychological and spiritual. Some of these traumas are linked to the legacies of Apartheid: For example, my story titled 'Fraans' is about a man who struggles with alcohol addiction and represents one of countless individuals within rural Coloured communities still haunted by the inheritance of the dop system .

Other traumas in Let's Go Home represent more personal and private traumas. In 'Secrets', for instance, a young woman who finds out that the man she wishes to marry is in fact her illegitimate brother. Such stories in rural communities are not uncommon because children born out of wedlock are seen as sinful and thus many women keep quiet about illegitimate offspring. Voice, (whether that of a narrator or in the form of the characters' dialogue) is also a central concern, for as I have explained above, one of my chief preoccupations and inspirations for writing this collection, has been the lack of texts giving voice to Coloured fishing communities.

A) Background/Rationale

As an undergraduate, I was encouraged to explore my origins and write a short piece about that. I found myself unable to write anything because I did not know the history of the people of Gansbaai and how my family came to be a part of that community.

In my attempt to find out more information about the Coloured fishing community, I made use of the special collection in the University of the Western Cape library as it supposedly contained books on the Overberg region. However, these I discovered, were mostly studies on the Fauna and Flora of the region. Other sources (such as the tourist office at Gansbaai) proved no more helpful. Rather they provided only the standard historical narrative, namely that Gansbaai was first settled by nomadic fishermen, one of whom was a gentleman with the name of Cornelis Wessels. Wessels settled on this coastal stretch of the farm "Strandfontein" (Fountain on the beach). The central point was the freshwater fountain next to the present harbor that

provided the small but successful community with drinking water. This fountain was home to wild geese and soon the place was known as ‘Gansgat’ (goose-hole), later changed into the more respectable Gansbaai (Goose bay).

The above historical details above may capture the origins of Gansbaai the town. But they do not give voice to the personal histories of its people. In particular I am concerned by the absence of documentation or oral histories of the Coloured fishing community – my ancestors. The history books and pamphlets on Gansbaai do not talk about Blompark, the labourers working at the fish factory, the fishermen, the women working at the nettebaan (women sowing nets), the women who worked in other people’s kitchens, the community’s problems with alcoholism . My father told me that he came to Gansbaai to escape his circumstances having grown up on a farm near Stanford that provided no future for him and his family as they were paid with alcohol and supplies provided by the farm owner, but mainly people came to Gansbaai to seek work as ‘can meisies’ (the women that packs pilchards onto the machines in the fish factory). It was more sensible to work at the factory because people could not afford to put their children through school. As a child I eavesdropped on my mother and her neighbors, gossiping about people long gone, people who had died, about tragic events, celebrations and other people’s secrets and shames. Even though these stories were based on hearsay they offered me an alternative history of Blompark. It is this same history that I would like to examine with my stories.

B) Creative Questions

Capturing rural Coloured life

South Africa has a long tradition of narratives that engage with rural life. Many significant writers writing in Afrikaans and English have explored this. These range from Olive Schreiner to Marlene Van Niekerk; Andre. P Brink to Marlene Matthee; Herman Charles Bosman to Ettiene Van Heerden and Nadine Gordimer, and many more besides. However, in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* Njabulo Ndebele argues that there is a “lack of compelling imaginative recreation of rural life in our literature. All we know about are dejected peasants, suffering pathetically under the tyrannical Boer farmer” (1991: 70). In this argument Njabulo Ndebele stresses the need for a fresh approach to South African literary

representations of rural life. One that moves away from the sorts of limited literary representations so often found during the period pre-Apartheid and post-Apartheid years.

My short stories perhaps follow on from Ndebele's argument. I can see how the literary scholar might become dejected with the stereotypical rural types and tropes found in some literature. However, I would go further, asking where the representations of South Africa are Coloured fishing communities? In the case of those communities, perhaps one cannot condemn South African literature for reductive representations so much as for no representations at all. Indeed, apart from one short story in Peter Merrington's *Zebra Crossings* (2008), I have yet to find a single text that engages with this topic. Film has been slightly more forthcoming offering us the fictional Afrikaans narrative, *Die Storie Van Klara Viljee* (1992) and the TRC documentary, *Forgiveness* (1996). Both begin the journey that I seek to continue with *Let's Go Home*, namely the creation of a narrative that places its emphasis upon the ordinary everyday experiences of the Coloured fishing communities of South Africa (in my case Gansbaai and Blompark).

C) Trauma as theme

One of the objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Trials was to help ordinary South Africans speak about and possibly their own trauma by giving them the forum to describe their traumatic Apartheid experiences. According to some of the Trials' supporters and exponents, only if South Africans faced their traumatic Apartheid past head on, could we begin to heal as a nation and move forwards. However, as Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull* (1998) demonstrated (and others have since affirmed), so pervasive are those traumas, so deep do they run in our collective bloodstream and consciousness as a nation, that they may never be fully healed. What's more, post- Apartheid South Africa, with its high violent crime rates, devastating problems with alcoholism and drug addiction, widespread poverty and complex identity politics, continues to be a nation where trauma pervades. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, the theme of trauma (in its various forms – physical, psychological and spiritual) appears in many South African works of fiction and poetry, both pre- and post- 1994. The examples are far too numerous to list here, but more contemporary examples might include, Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998), Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999); Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and the *Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) and Mda's, *Ways of Dying* (1995).

In researching my collection, I have found that trauma is a dominant and recurring theme. Some of these traumas are linked to the heritage of Apartheid. For example my story titled, ‘Senna’s Cricket Song’, is the story of a sixteen year old girl who is being molested by her aunt’s husband. She has to remain with her aunt and uncle to pay off her father’s debt as they, her aunt and uncle, paid for her father’s funeral. Senna deals with her trauma through memories she has shared with her father growing up in Paardenberg. Senna’s story represents many of the stories I have come to hear growing up in my own community. Senna’s story represents like so many others like her was kept quiet, not to be addressed, as people in small villages often do not want to get involved, with the result makes stories like Senna’s remain untold.

Other traumas highlighted are that of the socio-economic circumstances in Gansbaai. Many people suffer poverty because of the strict regulations placed on permits. Gansbaai’s people rely on the fishing industry for their income. ‘The Fisherman’, tells the story of a young woman who has to be the breadwinner of the family once her father dies and she has to seek work as a fisherman. The character Andrea also depends on a line fishing permit but the regulation on how many fish she is allowed to catch a day cause strain on her income. Unfortunately this is a stark reality shared by people currently living in Blompark and Gansbaai. Another story in the collection ‘The Fire’, is based on an actual fire that took place in Blompark about ten years ago. I use Mollie (the protagonist) to act as a ghost whisperer. Through her and her interactions with the dead, past pains and losses within the community are captured and laid bare.

D) Representing Voice and Writing bilingually

Voice, (whether that of a narrator or in the form of the characters’ dialogue) plays a central role in my writing. In fact, I see voice as a central concern, for as I have explained above, one of my chief preoccupations and inspirations for writing this collection, has been the paucity of texts giving voice to Coloured fishing communities.

And yet I find myself faced with a dilemma. The people of Blompark speak Afrikaans but I did not want to limit the stories to an Afrikaans readership. It would defy the purpose of introducing Blompark to a diverse reading audience. That is why I have chosen to write my stories both in Afrikaans and English. Furthermore, South Africa is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country therefore it makes sense that my stories try to personify these values of hybridity

and diversity. Indeed, a number of South Africa's most distinguished authors, including Uys Krige, Elisabeth Eybers, Athol Fugard, Andre P Brink and Herman Charles Bosman have explored the possibility of bilingual texts.

The task of writing a bilingual text is complex, but I feel it can be achieved if one maintains a balance between the languages or if what is referred to as 'code sharing' and 'code mixing'. These are modes of linguistic representation by which one retains certain foreign language words (in this case Afrikaans) within a narrative dominated by another language (in this case English) whose meaning can be inferred from the context around them. In order to achieve this process I write first in Afrikaans and then translate the narrative into English, retaining those Afrikaans phrases or snippets of dialogue, which I feel are essential for capturing the unique Afrikaans timbre (in Gansbaai we brei) and lexicon of the community I am representing. In so doing I am attempting to legitimately and authentically retain the voice of Coloured Blompark.

Yet, I am well aware that there are those who would argue that in spite of my efforts, any attempt to honour or truly represent such voices, is compromised by the act of translation itself. Andre. P Brink writes in his book *Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege* that "there is very little evidence of 'translation' in the ordinary sense of the word: in every instance the 'translation' become a rethinking, a recasting of the original in terms of the medium of the new language" (1983:100).

Some might argue that this "recasting of the original" represents a loss, or silencing of the original. However, I prefer to adopt Brink's view that if done sensitively, such translations can come to embody, "the stirrings of an altogether new poetic language" (1986:101) one which is perhaps better suited to our multi-lingual and diverse nation.

E) Reflective essay questions

The challenges posed by the short story genre

I have decided on a collection of short stories because this would allow me to explore a range of voices and scenarios. The benefits of such a genre are clear – breadth of theme and an opportunity for diverse creative, literary and linguistic exploration. However, short story collections also offer their challenges. One is forced to be versatile and flexible as a writer. Each

story is a unique entity in its own right. With each new tale the author must begin again with plot, voice and setting. Needless to say this often results in a great deal of rewriting and creative discovery by trial and error. For example, the story ‘The Fire’ started from the point of view of the character Jonathan but after several drafts, I realized that it was Mollie who was supposed to be the focalizer of the story. The danger is, of course, that some stories seem more complete or successfully rendered than others.

F) Translation and bilingualism

I have already explored this topic in detail above; however, in terms of my reflective essay, as I have mentioned previously, I am thus far from satisfied with my process of translation. Yet, I have become aware of some of the difficulties with the process, difficulties which I have explored in the essay. For example, some words cannot be translated because of their cultural specificity. As Newmark argues: “translation problems caused by culture-specific words arise due to the fact that they are intrinsically and uniquely bound to the culture concerned and, therefore, are related to the context of a cultural tradition” ((Newmark P. , 1992;Newmark 1988, 78).I have grappled with this dilemma in many of my stories, including the first contribution to the collection, ‘Fraans.’

“Auntie Loesie borrowed her wedding dress and Ragel made her a wyl of one of her finest curtains and needled some pink sewejaartjies to it to make it nice. The Ingelse called the sewejaartjie flowers Everlastings. She is still my everlasting. I remember the church stoep it looked so beautiful that year” ((Phillips, 2013,8);

In the above quotation the word “Ingelse” remained in Afrikaans because it is unique to how Fraans, the character, pronounces the word in English. I only succeeded in finding a culture-specific word for sewejaartjies, a Fynbos flower; because I have a fair knowledge of Fynbos flowers and what people call them.

Another challenge has been discovering just how much Afrikaans can be used (or codes shared/mixed) before a reader who speaks only English or very poor Afrikaans might be alienated. In earlier drafts of my story ‘Hanna’, there was too much Afrikaans, making it at times confusing for the non-Afrikaans speaker:

‘Gom, lekkie lekkers en bawie dans’. She would laugh until her watery eyes sparkles. Hanna likes sweets, that toffee sort that makes her hands sticky. She would chew them although she never had teeth. She had melktandjies when she was a child but when they fell out her grootmens teeth never came. But today Hanna can’t stop crying. Ma was hoekal saying “.Lort who has to die that Hanna must cry so’ ((Phillips 2013,38)

‘Mamma in die kisse. Mamma weg.Mamma is gone, Mamma in the coffin’ ((Phillips 2013,40).

‘Hanna’ is the story of a woman who was born with a mental disability. She acts, talks and thinks like an infant. It is difficult to translate this because it is unique to who the character is. Two choices are apparent in the writing of Hanna’s perspective. Either I include the voice of a narrator to tell Hanna’s story or I remove her utterances completely. My difficulty is trying to write Hanna’s voice without her characteristics and individuality vanishing from the text. This, however, seems like an impossible task at the moment.

G) Publishing

I have received much advice on the subject of publishing, and I have come to the conclusion that if I decide to publish my work it will either has to be through the method of self-publishing or in the form of an e-book. I was fortunate enough to be published in an e-book titled Ghost Eater and Other Stories, compiled by Dianne Awerbuck and Louis Greenberg and published by Umuzi Publishers. However I was very discouraged with what I have been told about publishing at the book fairs held in Cape Town. It was explained that even though good craftsmanship is revered by publishing houses, publishers generally do not publish debutante short prose collections unless it is rare piece of writing. This made led me to the question of whether my collection of short prose possessed the quality that main stream publishing houses require. This is a disappointing realization, because it seems to me as if the quality of writing no longer constitutes good writing but sellable writing. On the other hand I wrote this collection of short prose because I felt that there was a need for Gansbaai, the place where I was born, to be introduced to other reading audiences because I have realized that the histories shared by the Gansbaai community are forgotten. It is as if Blompark do not consider stories as important. One could argue that this is in fact the issue that initiated my writing endeavours to re-imagine my

experience of growing up in Gansbaai and finding myself in a position where I am ready to write home. In terms of the above-mentioned that I would like my collection to be published, if not then I will work toward self-publishing. I was fortunate enough to be part the University of the Western Cape's UWC Creates Creative Writing Program. The orientation for the program is not based on whether one's creative project is publishable but rather harnesses South African writing in any form, language. Here I have learnt skills that show of the integrity of ones work and to be a reflective writer. Having experience this from the above mentioned I did not feel the pressure of publishing. Although I do not intend to disregard politics with my stories, I intend to place the emphasis rather upon ordinary everyday experience of the people living in rural communities especially the coloured communities of Gansbaai and Blompark. These are communities whose narratives have yet to be depicted in fiction.

Conclusion

To conclude, by putting strong emphasis on the importance of translation and bilingualism in South African prose. As previously mentioned by Brink there is "very little evidence of translation" ((Brink, 1983, 101) in South African writing. He further argues that when one translates the source text into target text, you not only renew the text but perhaps through the process, the writer is able to 'recast' and 'rethink the text. I have found this connectivity by Andre Brink to be true. Translation has been a great asset in developing my writer's voice and discovering different avenues in writing. On the other hand, writing fiction poses many challenges. Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize lecture evokes the understanding that oppressive language in the following, 'Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek - it must be rejected, altered and exposed'(Morrison T,1993) I have come to a realization which agrees with Morrison's statement because I have grappled a lot with the challenge of depicting themes of violence, trauma and memory. I have discovered that the depiction of the abovementioned themes are captured in the language, the way a character expresses a moment through language and as Toni Morrison mentioned,

oppressive language becomes the thing itself, it is therefore necessary for writing to ‘alter’ and ‘expose’ such writing because she further mentions that, “ Language can never "pin down" slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable” (Morrison T, 1993). In my own writing I strive towards cultivating writing that does not want to “pin down” or appears to be arrogant in doing so. Let’s Go Home stemmed from a desire to attain knowledge of my heritage and finding my voice. The characters are a collection of people and memories. They do not represent a single person or moment. In writing these stories I not only have a better understanding of Gansbaai and Blompark but I have also discovered the power writing has towards reconciliation with regards to understanding my author odyssey. Writing fiction creates opportunities for people to have a better understanding of each other because it is through writing about each other we discover each other. The stories celebrate the people of Gansbaai and I would like to see this collection of short prose as a contribution to the place where I was born and raised.



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