

MASTER OF ARTS (ENGLISH)

Full Thesis: Creative Writing (Novel)

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The Girl with the Red Flower

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Student: A.W. Misbach (3765178)

Supervisor: Dr F.F. Moolla

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WESTERN CAPE

Plagiarism Declaration

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'A. Smith'.

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Recommended word count: 40 500. Actual: 42 305

ONE

For a woman of her age, thirty-seven, freshly divorced, she has, to her mind, not solved the problem of her sex very well. So now her work in the escort business all those years ago will be used against her. This warning is in a note from her lawyers. She is sitting cross-legged, trying to warm up, in a book-sized patch of morning sunlight on her bunk, in a fetid cell meant for five but with thirty crammed in. She has earphones in, with twelve bass-heavy tunes on a continuous loop. It is hard for her sometimes to drum out the hum of the lovemaking, man-hating, baby-yearning and fatal stabbings of the women around her - all day long. It is just like being free in the real world outside. The letter is typewritten, but has a handwritten salutation, "Dear Soraya," as if to convince her of its authenticity; and her existence.

The letter warns that the State prosecutors will use the words of her ex-husband to reduce her to "an ignorant and greedy schemer" during her trial: "We have learnt that Professor David Lurie's papers, diaries, and his most well-known work will be entered as evidence for the prosecution at a future date. No official documentation has yet been received, but we are assured this is the case." It closes, "All the best, sincerely ..." with a signature she cannot identify. An unfortunate word, "assured". It is the prosecution who can now assuredly strengthen their case, alongside all the other blood-splattered evidence they have gathered. She is incensed and does not care if people think she is a ranting shrew: *I just want to rid myself forever of this fucking naaier.*

David wanted to get back at her, she thinks. *That wretched book was your idea of revenge porn because I ended our business relationship at Discreet Escorts.* She had thought the story was buried forever, forgotten, but now everyone will know that David's description is unmistakably her: tall, slim, long black hair, dark liquid eyes and honey-brown body. She was eighteen years

old then, but she does not find the description flattering now at this age. David also labelled her a vixen and a loose woman. Only he, she believes, the pedant that he was, could come up with such an outmoded description.

She is convinced this is how a rejected lover would have wanted to present her: as half a person, with no real name and her two boys, her living, breathing children, also unnamed. In this he was much like his settler forefathers who, unable to possess the land they so desired, made the people invisible – a land without people. So, like those who came before her, she became an ephemeral woman, with no history, no past, no future, and not even an existential crisis. A figure from the margins of history, as David ironically described his own condition. But she was beyond a further border – a figure from the margins of the margins of history. It is a crime he committed. Not only did he shackle her with his words, he murdered her. Here she is waiting, hawking silence in the wings of a stage, for condolences or just an apology that no one is going to give.

When the story breaks, as it inevitably will, she imagines the posters on the city's lampposts, in her favourite gutter-press rag, *The Southeaster*, with its tagline: "One Waai Woes in die Kaap", shouting out: "Seedy Soraya's Sordid Sex Secrets!" How did David describe their paid-for trysts? He thought of himself somehow in the mould of Madame Bovary, arriving home sated and glazen-eyed from an afternoon of "reckless fucking". Except, David said, that if ghostly Emma ever arrived in Cape Town, she would witness him have a "moderate, moderated bliss". She laughs at this description. *No, David, with you it was like copulating with a cold corpse, you pompous poes.*

She also expects lashing and stoning, from some of her own people, men and women. *All their sense straitjacketed with skullcaps and scarves.* She will welcome all their cries of hate; it is an

energy that sparks a fire in her. The prosecution would likely spring this evidence of her whoring, as a “surprise”, so her lawyers believe they must prepare a defence in advance. She will tell them she has one. She has heard that the prosecution would support David's story with a man who has turned State witness, to verify the facts.

What are those facts? She sometimes does not know herself. She has read that book so many times that the facts are all mashed up in her head. She knows that he tried to hide himself in it, particularly his hatred of her. He could not have his way with grown women, so he slobbered over girl children, which was really just another way of wanting to dominate all women.

What she wants everyone to know is that David had scripted everything so cleverly that no one, who is not fully awake, notices how he, the perpetrator, becomes the victim. He had this obsession to steal the pain of other people, even of animals. She knows that he appeared to sympathize but was slyly mocking everyone.

His story, to gain sympathy, she believes, is complete with a conversion experience to vegetarianism, several spells of self-pitying, breast-heaving weeping, and a King Solomon-like communion with sacrificial Persian black-faced sheep, billy goats with diseased testicles, homeless ducks and abandoned bulldog bitches. And then, at the end, he carries a dog to his death in his arms, "like a lamb". He also threw in a few scenes where he suggests that a darkie farmhand is a Nazi or fascist and describes his bandages on his own head, caused by an alleged attack, as a "skullcap". *Whose struggle were you trying to appropriate David, you fuck.* She is mildly amused at all this melodrama.

And did anyone notice, she thinks, how David tried to become a leading figure among the most miserable and threatened in the land of his birth, and perhaps the world? He ran helter skelter to

the conclusion that an apocalyptic mass extermination, or at the very least, work-camp subjugation, of all settlers was at hand. In this chimerical scenario was a sly attempt to absolve himself, she has concluded. *Look at what they're doing to us after all we've done for them*, he was saying. So an angry darkie farm boy, whom he assaults for peeping at his daughter, Lucy, in the shower, he quotes as shouting out, "We will kill you all!" while trampling some potatoes. These vegetables were growing on the land he, David, had helped Lucy to so lovingly transform from its previous barrenness.

And when Lucy was raped, what did David say about those who violated his daughter? With his penchant for pantomime, and driven by his ruthless brainpower and considerable book-learning, she believes, he transformed those criminals into the henchmen of some new reverse-colonizing, evil empire, so their "Vengeance is like a fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets." On and on he went, saying the darkies had been involved in "massacres", had a "satisfying afternoon's work, heady, like all revenge."

And then telling Lucy, that she was embarking on some "private salvation ... Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?" Then further saying to her, "You want to make up for the wrongs of the past but this is not the way to do it." David tells Lucy that those boys had "history speaking through them", they were making up for a "history of wrong" and their guidance "came down from the ancestors." And they "see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors", David had quoted Lucy as saying. They ran off with all Lucy's household goods, with "their penises, their weapons, tucked warm and satisfied between their legs". *All this distorted economic history and political science that I had scoffed at when I read it in some obscure book during my first semester at university.*

These are the ideas of a person unaccustomed to fear, she believes. *And having your head stuck up the arses of dead poets all your life so that you don't know what the real world is like. It stinks, but at least it's slightly warm, hey David?* Struck dumb, she thinks, he goes about making these wild claims that all people are like him. Did David really know how long she lived with fear, how she could even taste it going to Discreet Escorts every day to deal with men like him? He wants to appear harmless, and make as though he has never done any wrong. She supposes he believes that if he says it often enough, out loud repeatedly in empty and echoing lecture halls, it would all become less ridiculous.

She plans to fight, with her own voice, to faithfully present herself in court as a pure woman, both as a wife and a whore. She wants to appropriate his words like "booty" and "war reparations" out on the "great campaign of redistribution", as he once described people, or the "raiding party", who burgled his house. But she admits to herself that she cannot hope to emulate his words, they are like cut diamonds, so geometrically precise, such perfect lies, that followers swoon and drop to their knees at his feet, gazing lovingly upwards, mouths agape to receive inspiration. In contrast, she believes she is presented as the poor non-literate, whom God created to be frozen in time at age eighteen, forever coupling on a bed, at No. 113 Windsor Mansions in Green Point. *All this fucking takes place in a pleasant-smelling and softly lit room, which is how all history is rewritten these days by people like him.*

One Thursday, during the year he bought her sex "function" once a week, spent from his mild exertions, he lectured her, coolly, on her profession. This particular quote scholars will not find in that book, but she has memorized it: "You are not unlike Sisyphus, going through the same range of futile motions and emotions, perpetually into perpetuity. To put it simply, or simplistically, you are Jill going up the hill and falling down over and over again, onto your

back, knees, or on all fours, accompanied on each occasion by one of your infinitely many jumping, jutting Jacks." She was stupid then, a mere child, with a pygmy intellect, as someone once wrote. "You're so funny," was all she could say.

So David, the victim, became somewhat well known, their hero and *kaalgat* emperor, in a minor tragicomedy. This is how he took even her suffering away from her. They can laugh, but she feels she will be vindicated when she tells her story. She thinks her tale has uncanny, eerie even, parallels with a poor unnamed Arab man, a fellow African from Algeria, who was murdered in 1942, also in a book, by a *pied noir* perpetrator. This stranger in his own land committed the murder because he had nothing to do and had the sun in his eyes on a beach at two p.m.

David also copulated with her at two p.m., every Thursday, in the "desert" of his week, in a flat, a stone's throw from Mouille Point beach, when he was idle and carried the whole country's and the universe's burdens on his back. She is trying to wrap her head around these two bizarre incidents over seven decades apart: beaches, deserts, dazzling sunlight, murder, and two colonists fallen into philosophical absurdity and laziness at two in the afternoon.

So what had she done to deserve this representation? Was it because she had sold herself at Discreet Escorts to support her two boys, Musa and Harun? David said in his story that it was "unusual for a Muslim" to be doing what she was doing. This was strange for a man who was no expert on hardship. She often wondered how socially awkward men like him, who were failures at marriage, fatherhood and light-hearted conversation, could talk like experts about people, let alone about women like her.

What did he really learn about life closeted for years in rooms with books? she thinks. He was like a rat gnawing on whitened skeletons, thinking he could somehow ingest the secrets of life –

and spew them out Casaubon-like in a key to all mysteries that reflected on their own construction. It was all done, she believes, to build enough confidence: *So you could foist your own half-baked thoughts on unsuspecting fools like yourself in the world.* In her few years on this earth, she has witnessed more than he could ever imagine. *Yes, on my back, knees, all fours, and upside fucking down, if anyone wants to fucking know.*

And she has read all her faith's scriptures and beyond, particularly about crime and punishment. She believes she knows quite a bit about repentance, remorse and crying for mercy to the deaf heavens. In the Qur'anic chapter "The Bees" she is taught that she can reject God Himself if her life, or those of her boys, is at stake. That God often places her life in danger is another question. Perhaps God is only a question. And the only answer too, she thinks. She does not want to be told what to do, but wants to meet this invisible God, that so many cling to, alone, at her death, just as she did before her birth. For now, she is free of this Divine yoke, but believes people, her own people, hate her, because they believe she provokes them deliberately with her freedom. *Why waste the time I have left here on God, when I have the whole of eternity to seek redemption,* she wants to tell them.

She tells herself that she is not seeking any sympathy, expects no one to shed any crocodile tears, *Fuck them!* Or pat her on the back with soothing words, *Now, now sweetie, calm down,* but wants her accusers and everyone else to know these facts and make up their own minds about who the real victim is. She went to Discreet Escorts the first time at sixteen, with engorged breasts leaking milk because she had, barely three months before, given birth to her twins. She was beautiful, she knew it, and so did others. With her father, Sohail, having suffered a stroke, he become silent and bedridden, and for her mother, Fayruz, a housewife with no education, there

was no recourse. There was little choice for a girl like her. She sought out the agency herself. It was safer than standing on a street corner; and brought in money immediately.

She had to strip and was photographed dressed in vermilion panties and a bra. David did not mention the red lollipop poised delicately on her lips, a *fille fatale*, a *pupilla*. She had a red passion-flower, a little flower of evil, David later told her, in her long black hair. She was labelled an "Exotic" Asian for their catalogue, along with the Malaysian, Thai and Chinese hostesses. David did not like African women, or consider them exotic.

She wants everyone to know that she often had up to ten men a day stuffing themselves into her, six days a week, going home aching, and black and blue. This was the price to pay for a purse of gold. Sometimes there were no men and no money. So in those times of drought, she would allow no condoms for an extra R200. Double if he wanted to stay inside as long as he wanted, which often was not very long.

She wants people to find out what *sandblasting* is. She will tell them it is when your body is powdered with cocaine by some sick client looking for kicks he will never get, and you have to wash it off carefully afterwards, so that it does not contaminate you or your children. *Do they know what self-discipline it takes never to drink a drop of alcohol, or snort a line if you are on the job in this business? And do they know what it is like to scrutinize every little pimple or sore throat after being heaved upon by scores of stinking bodies?*

All of this David did not talk about. His sympathies did not lie with her, or any other woman in his stories. *For a supposed sensitive Wordsworth scholar, he was such a dreadful old ass.* She read somewhere that that was how Dickens described Wordsworth, after the journalist and novelist was insulted as clever but vulgar by the old poet. She believes this is how the young and

clever always describe the old and decrepit. It is a fate she is not keen to face herself. She can only shake her head in wonder when she sees that David's words are still acclaimed for their revelatory vision. To whom was the revelation being made and what conversion experience did these disciples undergo? She wonders also who were those *awful pretender women*, calling her a bitch and witch every day with their placards outside the High Court in Keerom Street, righteous members of the Friends of David Campaign, clinging with a death grip to his ersatz prophecy, believing this false prophet?

She recalls meeting David for the first time, when she had been at the agency for two years. In those years she had become indifferent, hard, because it had become just business. So, yes, she was the fickle, movable woman, as he described her: *la donna è mobile*. She was like a feather in the wind in that play he was always quoting, *the literary name-dropping shit!* changing her voice, her body posture, down to the colour of her lipstick and eye shadow, for whatever the man, or sometimes the woman, wanted. What did he want? She knew he really believed he could gain luxury, calm and peace like in the Matisse painting, that he liked so much, once every Thursday. He really thought he could replace a wife, a family, with R400 for ninety minutes.

The sex then, as it was later, was unsatisfactory, but that is the nature of the enterprise young women have with elderly males. *With her he found a country for old men. Ha, ha!* She has been raised not to talk out of the bedroom, but has to set the record straight. *He had particularly noticeable mannerisms at the height of passion: his leathery hips would buck ever so slightly, his lizard eyes roll back in his head, and his spindly legs thrash about in slow motion like those of a dying cockroach lying on its back. Sometimes he put his sour-smelling mouth on me. Ha! The cunning linguist! I was the poes who had to contend with the ecstasies of this unlovely creature.*

When she was still at Discreet Escorts, she told him nothing about herself, while he would disburden himself. She never felt any of it was real. Sometimes he spoke in Afrikaans, the *mongrel* language of his and her tribe, but with a clipped English accent he had perfected during a gap year in London. How do they say in the Cape? *Hy was vol gekke verbeelings*. She knew then of his two failed marriages, and his opinions on several subjects, all of which she pretended to care about deeply. He took her in his confidence and told her about his handyman father, Johannes, who, when his typist mother, Felicia, was away, would feel him up, bugger him, or beat him if he did not comply.

One day, David spoke to her about Johannes in a strange monotone, referring to himself in the third person. Recalling this, she sometimes thinks it was just the excessive grandiosity and deep sense of inferiority from which all adult children of abusers suffer: "My father is still living, alive so to speak, but David has made peace with him. He is old, and now at David's mercy, mercifully, so how can David still be angry? What would the point be of being angry? Anger only masks, unmask fear. And David is no longer frayed or afraid." She found this stilted wordplay all rather quaint. A kind of performance art that had seen better days.

But she knew he was fearful he would become just like his father. This is why he had abandoned those two old people, as if they had some contagious disease. David blamed his narcissistic mother too; perhaps she was the reason for his detesting women. The mother, it appears, deprived him of the healthy joys of youth, the awakening of the senses, and the clandestine eroticism of adolescence, as someone once wrote, she cannot remember who.

She has often thought that maybe his parents were to blame for his wanting her pliant and pliable, like a child. And everyone else too. He could not bear being dominated in any of his

relationships. And if he was confronted and had no way out, he would play that effective old trick of his: *cast your eye, dear reader, upon this emotionally crippled boy, crushed underfoot by a tyrannical father, who never even taught him how to swim, fish or catch a rugby ball.* Or he would just try to avoid confrontation at all costs, run away, do a geographical like an addict seeking to escape from himself by moving to a new house or town. Of course, he would often lie outright, that it was because he was raised by a family of women that he became a womanizer. This was also the reason, he would say, or suggest, for his desiring and pursuing prepubescent girl children. Boys with slim brown legs too, she believes, but could never prove it.

She suspects that he had been up to his tricks with Lucy when she was very young. He had written in his book, in a limp attempt at copying that other famous academic, Professor Humbert, about Lucy's rounded milky breasts that had been demure rosebuds when she was six years old. And how he liked to fondle her ankles, and stare at the "least beautiful" and expressionless "milky, blue-veined" backs of her knees. If people think she is talking rubbish about all this, they can just look it up in that book. She wants everyone to know that she has memorized all the page numbers if anyone runs into trouble searching.

Lucy's body was an overriding preoccupation. There was a scene with her in her panties and showing her breasts, for what artistic purpose she does not know. Lucy, she had learnt, was an exceptionally beautiful child, whom he often had on his lap. She was much like her mother, Evie, whom David, unsurprisingly, drove away to Holland, and another marriage. When Lucy could not get on with her stepfather, she went to live with him. Did he use the child as a substitute for her mother? She believes it is no coincidence that Lucy became a lesbian, although she knows many will disagree. These facts she plans to reveal to the public.

It was not unexpected that their relationship changed when David saw her that one Saturday morning in St George's Street with Musa and Harun. He had met her eyes when they were sitting down in Captain Dorego's Fish Inn. *But the false vark couldn't bring himself to face me!* The centre of their relationship could not hold after his snub. He blamed her for the change, but that was not true. *He's a fucking liegbek hond.* She knew what role to play. It was clear that she could not be his fantasy any longer. Later, he had stalked her, phoned her at home, by getting a detective to track her down. He did not realize that she had saved him a beating, or worse, by not telling anyone at Discreet Escorts about that call.

This was just like the way he tried to stalk that other girl, Melanie, one of his students whom, she believes, he had raped. She wants to remind everyone how David visited Melanie's family home, trying supposedly to assuage his guilt, and then asked forgiveness by falling to his knees and putting his forehead to the ground in front of Melanie's mother and sister, a child whom he also desired. *What a fucking manipulating wanker.*

In any case, she had ended it with him because she met Gunther, from whom she made much more money. Hefty, red-nosed Gunther, a typical ugly man who loved a beautiful, perfumed, woman on his arm. He tipped, where David did not. He would also take her for all-nighters, and along on trips to Germany and all across Europe and Asia. She was nineteen when she met Gunther, who was sixty-five years old at the time, twelve years older than David was, independently wealthy and seeking, more than anything else, companionship.

Where David was measly with his time and money, Gunther appeared to revel in life itself, would want to be out constantly. Gunther financed her studies for a commerce degree. That it took her a full six years did not matter to him. This is how she received an education in money

and business for which sex work was a fitting prelude. To gain experience, she had even worked part-time as an assistant bookkeeper for Acme Auto Parts in the city centre. To keep the men away, such as the leers of *that poes* John Coetzee, the son of the gentle bookkeeper, (both now dead), she had purposely pretended to be married at the firm; even wearing a headscarf, feigning docility, and wanting to be referred to as Mrs Nuruddeen (they spelt it Noerdien). When Gunther died, he had set her up in the real estate game, currency dealing, diamonds, among other businesses he had on the go, and he left her his house in Walmer Estate.

And then, years later, she met David again. She had not immediately realized he had not changed, that he was as selfish as he had been before. She did not think it through completely, of what it would mean to have such a man as her partner. Perhaps she was looking for the love of a doting older man again, perhaps seeking Gunther again. She did not expect such radical changes in David once they were married. Perhaps it was senility, perhaps jealousy, perhaps that underlying meanness that he had kept hidden for so long that resurfaced without any of the filters that people often discard when they age.

She did not mind him his foibles, but he should not have messed with her purse. Perhaps he is content now, she thinks, like in the last chorus of *Oedipus*: Call no man happy until he is dead. David liked that quote; it was prophetic because barely two years into their marriage, she slit his throat.

TWO

She has had two visitors in her dreams lately, Heaven's unerring reporters, recording all she says, thinks and does. Raqeeb and Ateed are diaphanous, glowing, pearly butterflies, sitting with no perceivable weight on her shoulders day and night. All her rights and wrongs categorised and catalogued into large leather-bound books. Their writing is an effortless, soundless scribble with large snowy quills, mostly on her left shoulder, to indicate her many sins.

The pages of their books are lined and formatted just like examination notepads, which is similar to those David used to compose his undiscovered masterpieces. Sometimes she gets a glimpse of their identical faces: large foreheads, slightly slanted expressionless eyes, narrow cheeks, silvery receding hair and neatly trimmed beards. There are no questions asked; so she does not know why, when she wakes, that it feels like she has been slapped around in an interrogation room or brothel, forced to shout out a name, make some declaration of faith, or utter a tearful confession.

Now there is a question being asked of her in the court by Judge Uthmaan Pandey: "Was I informed correctly ma'am, that you do not want to be addressed as Mrs Lurie?"

She is not on the witness stand, not yet, so she only nods and says, "Yes, My Lord." She had been unsure of this decision but made it nevertheless. After all, death had parted her from David, the man and his name.

"It is decided then. The record will show that Accused Number One will be hereafter referred to in all court documents as Soraya Nuruddeen, using her maiden surname," Judge Pandey says.

There is an irony now in the court that does not escape her. She is seated in Court One alongside the three other defendants, accomplices, on the oak benches behind the court officials, members

of the prosecution and her defence. On A-4 sheets of white photocopy paper, stuck to the wood in front of where they are sitting, they are identified in large bold, black font, filling each paper's entire length, as accused numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4. Only a number now in the eyes of the law.

The charge sheet, which she has again read this morning, lists murder as the first offence. It is being alleged that she, one Soraya Nuruddeen, had in Walmer Estate, Cape Town, unlawfully and intentionally either killed the deceased with a butcher's knife, or facilitated the plan to do so. The alternative to this charge, was namely a conspiracy to commit the aforementioned offence. The second and third charges arise from the firearm used in the incident, and the unlawful possession of the firearm and ammunition. Counts four and five are charges of robbery with aggravating circumstances. *An innate love of violence, is what they want to say.*

Her fellow accused, the charge sheet states, whom she allegedly solicited to assist in causing her husband's brutal death, are Goolam Parker, forty-two, a mechanic; Armien George, thirty-three, unemployed taxi driver; and Jeffrey van der Schyff, thirty-seven, unemployed taxi driver. She is concerned about these three because she does not know them. Of greater concern is Faadiel Galant, a friend of over twenty years standing, who has just turned State witness.

Faadiel had hired the other three, had vouched for them, just as he had done several times previously when undertaking other business transactions for her. She, stupidly, had allowed him to do so, without a thorough check. She thinks she had been in too much of a hurry. But to her he is yet another cowardly, disloyal man. *With a pretzel for a penis and little hazelnuts for balls. If he had chosen to shut-the-fuck-up, nothing would have happened. Do I have to do every fucking thing myself?*

Soraya Nur Al-Adeen. Soraya meaning Star, and Light of the Faith, her surname. This is her full name given by her father, who made the call to prayer in her ears when she was a baby, and, with a finger, placed a bit of sugar in her mouth, in the manner laid down by his scriptures.

Does anyone want to know how many times that doos David mentioned me in his overrated story but never even gave my full name? Thirty times. Even Byron's dead Teresa is mentioned more than me at forty-six, and gets a surname and whole family history. Melanie, that student girl he raped, is at seventy-three. Bev Shaw, his married girlfriend, is at ninety-three. And how many times did he mention animals? Also more than me at thirty-seven. And dogs? Wanna take a wild guess? One-hundred-and-forty-one-fucking-times. I've counted, gone through every godforsaken page, that's how I know.

She does not envy Lucy the three-hundred-and-fifty-nine times she is mentioned. She is after all his daughter. *But what can one expect from a so-called artist who writes like a mathematician.*

She can also go on and on, belabour the point, just like David, she thinks. While she was counting, she decided to do a little chart, for the fun of it. A pie chart, to see what share other minor characters have in his fantasy world. Because this is how David was always calculating life, in the simple-minded way of his, she believes. When Lucy was robbed, he said it was "a risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things."

On her count, she calculated references to Petrus, the farmhand, at two-hundred-and-thirty-two but not once having his family name revealed, his history, nor the name of his wife, who is referred to four times. Neither does the boy Pollux, at ten mentions, get any family name at all.

I cannot count one real, living and breathing darkie, myself included. This is how David prefers all his darkies, and women! as ghostly apparitions blending unseen and unheard into the background of his important life story.

Maybe, she thinks, when she testifies about all this during her trial, people will understand why she had instructed her lawyer Abubakr Ali Omar, and senior instructing counsel Jonathan Kantor, to inform the court of her decision to revert to her maiden surname. Abubakr had not liked the idea.

"It would look insensitive, seeing your husband is dead not yet seven months. And you should continue wearing your wedding ring," Abubakr had said.

But he did not insist on opposing her. She likes Abubakr because he knows his place. She needs someone just to take instructions because she feels this is the only way she is going to free herself from prison. He is her fourth counsel, the most inexperienced, but the most attractive. A *light-skinned darkie*. He would not be out of place in a Bollywood musical, perhaps playing a man saving a woman, whose destiny it would have been to be a widow and a whore if he had not made her his wife.

She smiles at Abubakr, who cannot hold her gaze, and then turns to the gallery upstairs and waves at Musa and Harun. Her boys are austere as ever in matching charcoal jackets and white shirts. *The Beards*, she calls them, which they had grown after hanging around with friends fresh from some battle somewhere between the forces of Heaven and Hell.

They believe their friends have spoken to God, but she believes He has been playing hide and seek with them, and everyone else for that matter. They smile and wave but she can see they are not happy. Perhaps they are asking themselves how she, an intelligent woman, could get herself

into this position. Khadija, friend, confidante, lawyer and business advisor, is sitting with them, uncharacteristically in unflamboyant black slacks, white blouse, black jacket and dark pink scarf over her shoulders. They are dressed as if they are attending her funeral.

On the other side in the gallery are David's parents, Johannes and Felicia, who are in thick black coats and scarves. The old people appear anxious, and Johannes looks like he has a cold. He is dabbing his nose with a handkerchief. She is glad her own mother and father are not in the court. Lucy is fatter than she remembers, and airy as obese people often are in bitterly cold weather, in a loose yellow sundress with short sleeves. She does not wave to her former parents-in-law and stepdaughter. Their accusatory eyes leave her cold.

She rubs her wrists; they are sore and raw. She feels it is unnecessary for the court's police officers, whether it is procedure or not, to lead her up the stairs from the holding cells with her hands still shackled and then proceed to remove them in the court. She feels it is a show for the cameras. She is a flight risk, according to the prosecution, because she holds bank accounts in the Gulf and Far East.

She thinks that if she wanted to flee, she would certainly not try to make a break for it from the holding cells and courthouse. Too messy and too many people to pay off. Bail would have been the best, but that is why they had refused to grant it to her. Now, according to the various expert writers weighing in on her case, her other options include getting seriously injured requiring specialist treatment at a government or private hospital. Perhaps contracting a terminal illness and being pardoned. Or, being freed somewhere between the Tokai prison and the courthouse during court appearances. Or falling pregnant and making a bid for it from a maternity ward. All ridiculous notions, she thinks. *I've never run, and I'm not about to do so now.*

There was a mob of reporters waiting for her as she came up the steps into the court. One woman photographer had stuck a small camera on a selfie stick down into the narrow stairway, before being pulled away roughly by a policeman, and given an elbow in the gut for good measure.

Fortunately, she can cover her wrists with a long-sleeved loose top, shapeless, with black and white polka dots. She does not normally wear a headscarf, but has decided she would do so for the duration of the trial. She thinks she does not want her hair loose and dancing around seductively.

The other reason for the loose-fitting top is that she is still healing from a minor breast augmentation of three hundred cubic centimetres – she was told silicone was better than saline. She has not touched her face yet; not yet. She feels the inexorable creep of slack handsomeness upon her. This is the fate, she has seen, of many beautiful women like her. They turn handsome.

She has been taking careful note of everyone in court, in a little black book, which has amused many. She knows this is because everyone thinks it is a futile exercise. She is as good as guilty. *Yes, she wants to tell them, I may have committed the murder, but it is no crime.*

Judge Pandey, she has noted, is flanked by two assessors. There is retired magistrate Dawie Du Toit, who appears as if he is dozing off all the time, and attorney Denise Joan Theunissen, whom she marks down as a neat brunette with officious movements and diamond earrings that she has worn for three consecutive days. Pandey is bald, with a Poirot-like moustache, round tortoise-shell spectacles, and a thin, reedy voice.

Pandey now clears his voice and says that the questioning of chief investigating officer, Captain Denver Cloete, a giant of a man with hands the size of shovels, would continue where the court had left off late yesterday because of time constraints.

The State's chief prosecutor is Advocate Shahieda Samodien. To her, she looks harmless but is dangerously innocuous, as some have said. Pretty, large eyes, small mouth, sharp angular cheekbones, no makeup, dark hair in a bun, a slightly too-large chest for her small build, with a habit of tugging on her cloak as it pulls up. She wears flat black shoes. Looks like a sports shoe disguised as smart casual. Sensible for standing on your feet all day, she thinks.

She has already read a few articles about Samodien, describing her as forty-nine, a married mother with two children at university, and "one of the State's toughest prosecutors". The articles say she has sent serial killers, rapists and armed robbers to jail. *So a retired whore is easy meat.* Samodien, one article states, loves her garden with vegetables and herbs, television shows on anything legal, and has no desire to be a judge.

Samodien has started taking Captain Cloete through the events of the night of the murder, when he arrived at the scene of the crime with his partner, Superintendent Zubeida Badenhorst, whom she notes as tall, athletic, muscular even, with *dead eyes. A hard case, real bitch, who would shoot you in a flash.* She thinks that perhaps she should have hired her for the job.

"When you arrived at the house of Accused Number One ... Miss Nuruddeen ... what did you encounter Captain Cloete?" asks Samodien, standing. She speaks so softly that Judge Pandy raises his eyes and asks her to please speak up. He has had to do this several times.

Cloete thinks for a few seconds and says: "I found the deceased upstairs on the landing. He was on his stomach and his hands were tied behind his back, as well as tape around his knees and feet. There was a pool of blood near his head. When I lifted the towel covering his head, I saw the knife wound around his neck."

"And where was Miss Nuruddeen?"

"I found Miss Nuruddeen upstairs in her bedroom with Miss Khadija Bennett, whom I later determined was her friend ... is her friend and legal advisor. Miss Nuruddeen was crying. When I approached her, and asked if I could get a statement, a preliminary one, she said it was okay," says Cloete.

Samodien pauses, consults her papers, and says, "According to your statements submitted to the court, Accused Number One offered certain information about herself without you asking. Can you explain to the court what she said?"

"Mrs Lurie ... Miss Nuruddeen ... told me that she was confused because of the medication she had been taking for her psychiatric condition. She also said that her relationship with her husband ... the deceased ... was excellent and that the stabbing incident had not affected their relationship in any way."

"What was this stabbing incident referred to by Accused Number One?" asks Samodien.

"This refers to an incident that took place five months before the murder, when Miss Nuruddeen had stabbed the deceased in the thigh with a fork in their kitchen. The injury was confirmed by a report from the doctor who attended to the deceased on the day of the incident. It was a braai fork, one of those with long prongs. It was stuck at least five centimetres into his right thigh," says Cloete.

"Did you ask Miss Nuruddeen what happened?" asks Samodien.

"Yes I did. I was intrigued by her offering this information. She said that they had a minor disagreement over their financial affairs," says Cloete.

"A minor disagreement resulting in an assault with a braai fork? That sounds rather excessive, doesn't it?" says Samodien.

Cloete shifts his gigantic frame, seems to find a comfortable position, and says, "Yes. But that's what she said. Miss Nuruddeen then said that it was probably the medication she was taking at the time that had made her confused and irrational."

"Yes ... yes ... I want to come to that part," says Samodien. "So she said that it was the medication she was taking? What was this medication and for what purpose?"

Pandy now intervenes and says that Samodien should hold this part of the questioning for later, because there would be experts to provide testimony. "Those testifying include Accused Number One's personal doctors. We will also have reports from her prison psychiatrist," says Pandy.

"Thank you My Lord ... yes ... so where were we? Let us continue, Captain Cloete, with the rest of your testimony regarding the night of the murder. Let's see ... and then you proceeded to take her statement, is that correct, Captain?"

"Yes, that's correct. I proceeded to ask her what had happened. She said that she had been surprised by a man, with his face covered by a balaclava while she was in her room--"

"In her room ... their room ... with the deceased?"

"No, in her own room. She said that they had separate rooms."

"What did she mean by separate rooms?" asks Samodien. "Like in separate studies or workrooms?"

"No, when I asked her about it, she said they had separate sleeping arrangements--"

"Separate sleeping arrangements?"

"Yes, because of the stabbing incident. After the stabbing incident, the deceased decided to move into the spare or guest bedroom, while Miss Nuruddeen slept in their main bedroom. He also locked the door at night. This is the information we received from the maid, who slept over on occasion, and from statements taken from Miss Nuruddeen's two sons."

Samodien now says that she has enough information for the time being on this part of Cloete's testimony, and wants to move on to what happened when she was surprised by the man with the balaclava. "So what did Miss Nuruddeen say about the man, or the men, in the balaclavas?"

"She said one man threatened her with a gun. The deceased ... who was lying on the floor tied up, was still alive at that point because Miss Nuruddeen said she could see him from the bedroom. The deceased was being watched by Accused Number Two and Accused Number Three, also in balaclavas. The man holding the gun, who has allegedly been identified as Accused Number Two, then told her to open the safe, which contained jewellery, uncut diamonds, local currency and American dollars, said Miss Nuruddeen. Then, she told me, Accused Number Two locked her up in the bedroom," says Cloete.

"Were all the items taken out of the safe?" asks Samodien.

"Yes," says Cloete, "all the items. Except for the American dollars and diamonds."

"Why were the dollars and diamonds not taken?"

"I don't know. Miss Nuruddeen said she took out the local currency and some jewellery out of the safe and placed it into a plastic grocery bag for the intruder."

"So Accused Number Two did not check the safe himself to see whether it had other items? He took it for granted that Miss Nuruddeen was being honest, so to speak, about the contents of the safe?"

"This is what appears to be the case, My Lord," says Cloete.

"Okay Captain, that's all on that topic for the time being, we may come back to it later. Let's move on to what Accused Number One said about how she contacted the police. How did she do this?"

"There was a landline she called from. She said she called her friend Khadija first, who then told her she would call the police."

"Accused Number One called from a landline? You mean that the robbers did not check to see whether there was a landline in the room?"

"It appears so," says Cloete.

"Where is the landline? Is it hidden away somewhere, out of sight?"

"No, the landline is on the pedestal next to the bed. It can be seen from the door of the bedroom."

When Samodien ends the questioning it is the lunch break, she can see the prosecutor's confidence growing. She knows it is not looking good, not at all. She feels tired as they are led down to the holding cells. She speculates that the afternoon session would be no better. When the session continues, there is a lot of questioning around minor details: where was the body, position, angle of the head, blood splatter. Facts, lots of facts about his body.

The talk of corpses reminds her of the wait for David's body from the morgue and post-mortem. The cops were also waiting around. She had seen the car parked outside her house, down Beresford Road, with a clear sight to her driveway. David would be buried by Muslim rites, she had decided. It was a big and noisy affair. Large pots of breyani, a crowd of people from the neighbourhood. Johannes, Felicia and Lucy were sitting together in the living room, as they were in the courtroom today, quietly, patiently ... judging her. Lucy's daughter, Anna Magdalena, had been too sick, flu she had heard, to travel from the Eastern Cape. There had been recitation from the Qur'an by a few boys from the memorization school at the mosque. An imam made the prayers, asking for Allah to grant David ... Dawood ... the imam corrected himself, His Garden of Paradise. She remembers thinking that she would rather see Dawood burn in Hell.

It is late afternoon when she is sitting in a Nyala Armoured Personnel Carrier, all white with yellow and blue stripes, ready to leave for the prison. She does not know why she is being transported in a vehicle more ideal for ballistic and mine protection. It is also useful for carrying bullion safely out of the country, like she believes the colonists did in long convoys when the darkies took over parliament.

As the truck lumbers out of the court's yard, and turns up Keerom Street, photographers run alongside sticking their lenses against the metal grille covering the windows. She peers through and sees members of the Friends of David Campaign. There is a small group, led by a red-haired woman shouting slogans, with a placard, "Bring back the death penalty", accompanied by a crudely drawn stick figure hanging from a gallows. *Fuck you all*, she wants to shout out, but instead slumps back into her seat.

XXX

It is two years earlier, she is sitting in her living room when David contacts her again. She is having late afternoon tea and sandwiches, with the sun starting to dip towards the horizon. Always a pleasurable time of day for her. It is by telephone, on her landline. It is just like the last time when he tried to contact her after she broke off their arrangement at Discreet Escorts. How many years has it been? Fourteen years?

"Hello, may I speak with Soraya?"

"Soraya speaking."

"This is David, I hope you remember me. How are you?"

There is a moment when she feels like saying nothing, or telling him *Fuck off!* because she is eighteen years old again and reduced to a minor scene on a Thursday afternoon in a pleasant-smelling and softly lit room. But instead she says, "Of course David, how can I forget. It's been a while. How are you?"

His voice is no longer as smooth and confident. *It sounds ... faded.* He does not have what she believes is a criminal attitude people like him find so easy to adopt, that nonchalant *baaskap* he had whenever he walked into Windsor Mansions. He has been to South Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, teaching English, and is now back home again, he says. Back for good. She wonders how he must have felt milling around in countries that wanted nothing to do with him. Just like he felt being at home, she thinks.

He says he saw her picture in the papers launching a housing project in Langa. When they exchange cellphone numbers, he sends her a picture: He is standing on a beach in tight red lycra shorts and white t-shirt. There appears to be a tattoo of a snake, like a totem, curling around his

forearm. It appears as if he has put on some weight. She smiles at this, because she cannot reconcile this photograph with the image she had held of him for so long in her head, in a tweed jacket with leather at the elbows. *And slight and withered, as if in dire need of a large plate of breyani.* His arm is around what appears to be a tiny longhaired young boy or girl. She cannot be sure. He is staying in his old house on Torrance Road, in the shadow of the university where he once worked. He says it is a good thing he did not sell when he left the country.

"Yes, it's a very good thing you didn't sell your house. Let's meet for coffee," she says. It must be a nice house, she thinks.

This is how it starts, all over again.



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WESTERN CAPE

THREE

In *The Southeaster* this morning there is a colour cartoon by the artist Zapped! in Derek Bauer *Gonzo* style. It is her wearing an ebony abaya and maniacal grin, from which a bare leg emerges with a scarlet stiletto heel trapping a terrified, gagged and tied David, who is lying on the ground. A scarf demurely covers her hair and is knotted at the throat, with thick ram-like horns emerging from her temples, curving like a crescent moon and pointing skywards like minarets. A long tail slinks out from under the abaya and tapers into a phallic-shaped head; and she grips, in a talon-nailed fist, a three-pronged pitchfork that she is twisting into the side of David's bleeding body. "The Devil Wears Purdah" is the caption. Predictable, but effective, she thinks.

She likes the cartoon so much that she cuts it out carefully and places it in her black notebook. Of course, Zapped! knows exactly what he is talking about. He was once her client who paid good money to have her hurl abuse at him in public spaces, particularly letters to the editor and tweets accusing him of freedom of speech fundamentalism, and a lack of real talent. He loved it. She expects him to look forward to the media blowback in the coming days over his visceral depiction of an insolent woman and innocent man.

This is the picture the State is trying to reinforce with the testimony of Captain Cloete's partner, Zubeida Badenhorst. Badenhorst, she has read, is forty-two, five years older than her, no husband, no children. Sociology and criminology majors, and a crack shot. Under questioning, Badenhorst confirms all the facts her partner has outlined over the previous five days.

It is again prosecutor Samodien questioning Badenhorst: "Did you check the security system at the home of Accused Number One when you arrived there on the night of the murder Superintendent?"

"Yes, this is one of the first things we did. We found that the electric fencing and closed-circuit cameras had all been switched off," says Badenhorst, looking directly at her in the box with all her fellow accused.

She holds Badenhorst's gaze. *Don't think I'm afraid of you, cunt. When you were sucking on your mummy's titties I was already out facing the world.*

"The system was off or not working?"

"It was off, we tested everything as soon as we were told it was a burglary."

"If the system was off, how did the accused gain access to the house? Surely the buzzers to open the front gate and house door are linked to the system?" says Samodien.

"The buzzers can run independently."

"And where are the buzzers in the house?"

"There's one in the kitchen on the first floor and another in the main bedroom upstairs where Accused Number One slept," says Badenhorst.

"And this is the only way one could gain entry into the house without having a key?"

"Yes, those are the only ways. There is a buzzer in the ground floor flat, where her parents live but this did not work. Her two sons, who were in the flat on the night of the murder, while their grandparents were away, have indicated that they did not open the gate and door. They had checked and were sure the entrances were locked."

"So, Superintendent Badenhorst, it appears that only two people upstairs could have opened the gate and the door. This is the deceased or Accused Number One. You must have read Accused

Number One's statements, where she claims that the deceased could have opened the gate and door. What do you make of this allegation?"

"From our investigations it appears unlikely that the deceased opened the entrances because he did not know any of the accused. He was also not close to the state witness, Mister Faadiel Galant, even though Mister Galant is an old friend of Accused Number One, and his two children spent time with her. It seems the deceased and Mister Galant were not on speaking terms, from the evidence we have gathered."

"So Accused Number One ... Miss Nuruddeen ... opened the gate," Samodien says.

Now Abubakr raises an objection and stands up. Samodien sits down. "My Lord, the learned counsel has just made a statement of fact. There is no evidence led to prove that this was the case. We do not know at this stage who opened the gate and door. My learned colleague should rather say that this is a theory, a contention, rather than a fact."

"My Lord, circumstantial evidence is evidence," says Samodien, standing. "It seems unlikely that the deceased could have opened the gate and door, which means that only Accused Number One could have done so. I cannot say every time that I am making an inference." She sits down.

Pandy will have none of it. "But it is proper that you do so Advocate Samodien."

"Yes My Lord," says Samodien, standing again. " ... so Superintendent Badenhorst, it is your contention that it could only have been Accused Number One who opened the gate and door?"

"Yes, that is our inescapable conclusion," says Badenhorst.

Two days later, when the defence has the opportunity to cross-examine, Abubakr Ali Omar is on the offensive.

"Miss Badenhorst, is it possible that the deceased could have opened the gate and door if he had been fooled, tricked into doing so? For instance, is it possible the robbers could have pretended to be family members of Miss Nuruddeen? Say a cousin, or an uncle? Is that not possible? This is especially so if the cameras were not operational?"

"Well ... I don't think so. It's unlikely that someone such as the deceased, who was so security conscious would have done such a thing," says Badenhorst.

"How do you know the deceased was security conscious? This sounds very much like an assumption. A wild assumption, Superintendent."

"I am taking into account the deceased's history. The rape of his daughter and his assault and burning of his head with methylated spirits, in 1999 in Salem, in the Eastern Cape," says Badenhorst.

"And where does this information come from, Superintendent? I hope you are here not referring to what the deceased has written about what had supposedly happened there. This certainly cannot be submitted as evidence. That was fiction. Was there a police report of the rape, for example? How do we know he was burned, and the extent of his injuries? Where are the medical reports?"

"There are no police and medical reports, but the deceased has written extensively about it. There seems to be no reason to lie," says Badenhorst who appears as if, given permission, could jump up and strangle Abubakr.

"This court cannot go on assumptions, Superintendent. We cannot say that because he has no reason to lie, therefore he did not lie. Again, we can only deal with hard facts. There is no

evidence to show that, indeed, the deceased, or his daughter, was attacked, and the extent or intensity of that so-called attack. Could it be that he created this as a story for sensationalist purposes, to sell his book? He was, after all, a writer. Which means that we do not know whether he was security conscious or not."

"I don't know anything about the marketing plan for his book. But everyone knows it is an autobiography even though it's supposed to be a novel, so one can draw conclusions from it," says Badenhorst.

"Superintendent, I think you're flogging a dead horse here. You cannot prove definitively the deceased's state of mind either way on the night of the murder. So now I am asking again, do you think it is possible that the deceased may have been tricked into opening the gate and door? Especially since the cameras had not been switched on? A yes or no would suffice."

"Well--"

"A yes or no, please Superintendent."

"Well ... yes, possibly."

Watching Badenhorst squirm, she is mildly jubilant at the outcome of Abubakr's questioning, which continues until adjournment at three p.m. When they head back to the Tokai Forest Maximum Security Correctional Facility for Women, the world is slate grey, and her hands and feet are icy cold. She is exhausted but this means sleep will come easier.

Thankfully, she is on the top of a triple-bunk, and will not be disturbed if someone wants to go to the toilet and has to climb over sleeping bodies to get there. She has her own arrangements for emergency ablutions during the night, using two five-litre plastic paint cans with watertight lids.

The stench some say is unbearable; she has become quickly accustomed to it. She has resolved not to be broken by her conditions. She has never been broken by her circumstances in the past.

In the cell, there are signs of a fight, this time between Thobeka and Ruby. Thobeka is tiny, no more than one-and-a-half metres tall, but who has taken on Ruby, who is almost double her size. Thobeka has come off worse and is now lying on her bunk, nursing bruises to her head and body. But Ruby has not emerged unscathed. She has lost two handfuls of hair as little Thobeka hung on for dear life.

It is a sore point. Ruby, from a wealthy family, and incarcerated for shooting her husband and his girlfriend, had called Thobeka a poor street whore. A Road Warrior. Who slept with filthy drunks and other degenerates for R20 a pop, so she could buy crack or methamphetamine. It is true, of course, but Ruby should not have said so. She should also not have underestimated Thobeka, who is in jail for drugging her abusive husband, wrapping his head in cellophane and then robbing him. He died peacefully, Thobeka often says, as a form of mitigation. Everyone in the cell now seems subdued. There has been some excitement for the day. It has been the oil on troubled waters. It is meeting David again, over a decade since she last saw him, that is on her mind as she lies down on her bunk. *Grim*, the girls nicknamed him at Discreet Escorts.

XXX

After David's phone call, they had agreed to meet - for the first time after fourteen years. It is at The Kitchen in Bo-Kaap at seven p.m. on a warm Wednesday late-summer evening. The time and place is neutral territory, with no memories attached for either of them. Where they sit, they can see Green Point and Salt River by the yellow globes of streetlights and moving cars on the roads leading from the seafront into the city and the suburbs beyond.

He is dressed well, dark slacks and jacket, white shirt, no tie. He has the thin person's elegance in a suit. She thinks he probably imagines himself as a dashing Jeremy Irons. For a sixty-eight-year-old he appears in good health, but there is a brittleness to him. There is no charge of emotion in her. She was not expecting any. He still has that whining quality in his demeanour, just like in that song: as if he was born under a bad sign, and been down since he began to crawl. And that if it were not for bad luck, he would not have had any luck at all.

"Sorry about that last time," he says eventually, after a supper of lightly spiced mutton curry and rice, and while they are waiting for a dessert of strawberries and ice cream. She notices he is eating meat. She remembers he had converted to vegetarianism and had found a new way of life. Another lie probably.

Their talk up to this point has been about her business. And his travels, teaching and attempts to write something useful. He says it is as if he is writing from the grave; what he says he has already said. It feels as if everything he produces now is iteration, manufactured, contrived and emotionless. Perhaps he has run out of material, he says. She does not contradict him.

"You're referring to that telephone call you made to my house all those years ago?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Accepted. I was worried that there would be repercussions, you know, from the management at Discreet Escorts. Negative repercussions for you. Glad there weren't."

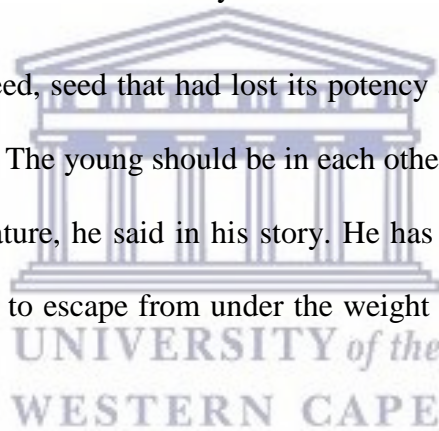
"Yes, glad too. I was reckless. It was unlike me. I blame it on old age."

"You were not old then ... not that you're old now ... sorry," she laughs. "What were you then, fifty-two? That's hardly old. Maybe it was then to an eighteen year old. Not now, of course."

"I am old now, there is no getting away from it," he says and smiles. "It may sound strange for a man of my age, but I want to settle down. I think I have done enough exploring of the world. The Far East was good for me, no doubt. But it is not home. You start hating the road when you are missing home. And you also realize that you have been chasing a dream, a fantasy maybe of a person that you want to love, and to love you. If love is the word for it."

Of course, she knows all about his former student Melanie, how he pursued her, but she does not bring it up. Not yet. She has many questions she wants answered. He had been infatuated, or so he wrote. And playing the victim, his default position, as the dunce for hitting on Melanie and being stubborn and losing his job at the university.

He called it his old and tired seed, seed that had lost its potency and mobility. It is a lost cause, the old chasing after the young. The young should be in each other's arms. Not have old men hog young women - it is against nature, he said in his story. He has said that half of literature was about young women struggling to escape from under the weight of old men, for the sake of the survival of the species.



After all this, she thinks that he has not learned his lesson. The proof is that he is here with her now, even though she is thirty-five. Not so young anymore. But she may be wrong. Perhaps his motivation is different. She cannot say for certain what it is like to live in his skin.

Since he is speaking so openly, she says: "So what is the truth about relationships then? Are they all just arrangements of convenience, of warding off the fear of being alone? Because once you remove sex, the whole reproduction thing, what's left? I like being alone ... well ... most of the time. But we have our animal needs, so there is pleasure involved too," she says.

"I suppose that if you are asking these questions of me, what it is that I want, what I want to do from this point ... this age onwards, then I can say it is convenience that I want. This is the truth."

When they end their supper, it is almost ten-thirty p.m. She feels as if she understands him better, but there is no desire for sex. He does not interest her in that way. She has other outlets for this part of her. She thinks that perhaps later an affection could grow between the two of them. He seems uninterested too. She resolves not to spend any time thinking about it. Instead, she would focus on what seems to be a clear proposal from him. An arrangement that could be mutually beneficial. She has a predilection for deals, bilateral, trilateral, and beyond. As long as she is left in a better position than before.



XXX

Almost everyone is asleep now in the cell. On her cellphone, the reimbursement from one of the Mothers, the guards who will do favours for payment of a monthly grocery bill and other goods, she sends a message to Musa and Harun. After thinking about it, she sends Khadija the same message. There is business to attend to, some paperwork on pending matters. More important than everything, is what is being done to get her out of this hellhole. Her case has gone public in a way she had not foreseen, which has scared off even some of her closest contacts. *The fuckers are going to let me rot. I'm not going to let them get away with it.*

Now, without warning, she feels a surge of energy and cannot sleep. Silence envelops her in its noisy blackness. It is if she is all alone and, out of the darkness, echoes the raspy breathing of the ghosts coming to taunt her with their freedom.

FOUR

She read that book for the first time nine years after it came out and it overwhelmed her. *What hypnotic trickery!* A masterpiece, except for the fact that its creator did not have the time to name a whore and her spawn, much like that other famous writer, that Existentialist Frenchman in Algeria, who also, absurdly, failed to identify a dead Arab in his famous book, way back in 1942.

It seemed, on the face of it, that the major characters in both tales were seeking the same thing: refuge from the burden of history, which, for colonists and their offspring, is really the only story that matters. *This is what David wanted to achieve if one reads between the lines of his sublime lies.* She knows that some people, if they ever read her words, if she ever published the contents of her little black book, would be convinced she is a rambling maniac.

David is no different from the people around her - people seeking to escape from the weight of their past. This is exactly what is happening now in Court One of the Cape High Court. She cannot blame these three men, her fellow accused, for lying to save their necks and at the same time trying to scour their consciences clean. Prison is no place for the weak and feeble, as all of them have turned out to be.

They may have rehearsed their answers because there is a sing-song unanimity among them that they were hired by Faadiel Galant to help kill the husband of a wealthy, unnamed woman. They even have the same figure for the cash payment: R200 000. It would have been divided four ways if Faadiel had stuck around and not turned State witness. It seems a trifle sum for a life. But how much is the life worth of a man who is coming to the end of it? She rejects the idea of all life being priceless. *This is the manifesto of greedy politicians punting a human rights ticket, and other motherfuckers.*

They are all taxi drivers and mechanics, her three fellow accused: Goolam Parker, Armien George and Jeffrey van der Schyff. None have any lengthy formal education to talk about, having dropped out at high school to pursue skirts, cars and drugs. They lack any semblance of class, and perhaps intelligence, she thinks.

Parker, she notes in her little black book: Spiky silvery hair, with a hint of soft-hold hair gel. *Real slime-ball*. The oldest at forty-two, he seemed the least likely to crack, so she was surprised to see him confess so quickly and with such enthusiasm. Van der Schyff, thirty-seven, bespectacled, is *similarly afflicted with no backbone*; while George, shaven-headed and the youngest at thirty-three, was, surprisingly, the most resilient. But he too, eventually, *has his balls handed to him*, she notes, and succumbed to the questioning of both the prosecution and defence. It is partly their fault, and partly that of their lawyers, who have clearly been underpaid and shown it with a distinct lack of energy in the court. So justice probes the depth of one's purse.

Goolam Parker, who has a nervous tic of the right eye, has enthusiastically informed the court that he was contacted by Faadiel Galant to seek a person or persons to carry out a crime at her house in Beresford Road, Walmer Estate.

"I was contacted several times, I can't now say how many, by Mister Galant, to find someone to rob the house, and assist the woman in murdering her husband. This is what Mister Galant said to me. He said it would be an easy night's work. There'd be jewellery, dollars, our currency and diamonds. The whole thing would be made to look like a robbery so that she could also claim from her insurance. This is what he said," Parker replies to a question from Samodien.

"Who was the woman?" asks Samodien.

"Mister Galant said it was the owner of the house ... the wife," says Parker, placing a finger at his eye, in what seems an attempt to control the tic.

"Did Mister Galant name the woman? Or describe her to you in any way?"

"All he said was that she was the wife, and that I couldn't miss her because she was tall and very good looking. He said the wife and the husband would be at home on the night and that it wasn't necessary to know their names. I thought it would be good to know their names, but I didn't want to argue with him about this. He later told me the woman's two sons would also be home, but this would be no problem."

"And what did Mister Galant say about entry to the house? Would you have to break in, force your way in?" asks Samodien.

"He said it was all arranged, that the front gate and front door would be locked. We would then have to force the door open, and then move quickly upstairs. He said the lock on the door was faulty so it would not make much noise when we opened it."

"And so you then proceeded to seek a team, a crew, so to speak, to carry out the robbery, is that correct Mister Parker? Can you please tell the court how you went about it?"

"Yes, that's correct My Lord. I found three boys from Lavender Hill, but they did not have transport to get through to the city, so I had to forget about them. So I decided I would rather ask taxi drivers who worked with me," says Parker.

That eye jumping about again.

"And you then approached Accused Number Three and Number Four sitting here in the court, is that correct?" asks Samodien.

"Yes, that's correct," says Parker.

"And they agreed?"

"Yes, they agreed."

Samodien pulls her robe forward, consults her file and then asks: "So Mister Parker, did you at any stage tell Mister Galant that you had hired two men, your fellow accused, Mister George and Mister Van der Schyff?"

"Yes, I told him that I had hired two men. He didn't want to know their names. He said it was better that he didn't. As long as they could do the job."

"So Mister Galant trusted your judgment on this matter? He could rely on you to come through for him, in other words?" presses Samodien.

"Yes, he did," says Parker.

This is how it goes for the entire day. It takes a rapid four weeks to get through the testimony of Parker, George and Van der Schyff, by Samodien, Abukakr Ali Omar and the men's lawyers. This is the appetizer for what has still to come: the testimony of Faadiel, or the *stool pigeon* as he is labelled in the tabloid press. An intrepid reporter has discovered that Faadiel is well known in Salt River and Woodstock for his love of women, or more correctly, their love of him for the size of his manhood. "Piele Pimps on Soraya?" is the one headline in *The Southeaster*.

In preparation for his testimony on that Monday, *The Sunday Southeaster* has a feature headlined: "Will This Man Sink Soraya?" with him standing proudly, arms folded, smiling and looking directly into the camera lens, outside his restaurant, The Diner. The declaration on the window is: "The Best Foot-Long Gatsby in Town". She, by contrast, is described as: "A leading member of the Muslim community, a self-made businesswoman, known for her expensive tailored and colourful outfits and equally lively public persona."

Someone has found a photograph of her and Faadiel, at a school function at Chapel Street Primary. In the photograph, they are standing shoulder-to-shoulder, holding a large, joint cheque made out to the school, and smiling broadly, while their children sit in front of them. His little ones, the two girls, and her twins, then teenagers who had once attended the school. It was her money, but she graciously also put his name on the cheque to provide him with some free advertising because his business was in a trough. She had seen his books. He had been careless with his money, but she had helped him for old time's sake.

She notes down carefully on a new page of her black book about Faadiel as he takes the witness stand. *Looks too fucking cocksure for my liking.* He looks different to her. He does not have his usual army crew cut. His hair is longer, softening his hard, angular cheekbones and a prominent jaw. He is wearing a suit and tie. So unlike his normal t-shirts and jeans. And he now wears spectacles. *Probably to hide your fucking stupidity.*

She can see that Samodien is relishing this and has even, *the little poes*, put on a bit of black eyeliner and lipstick. Television cameras have been allowed in the court for this testimony and for hers. Judge Pandy has agreed to a submission made by a group of media houses. "It is in the

public interest that justice is being seen to be done," Judge Pandy was quoted as saying. *Everyone's a fucking media whore these days*, she wants to say.

"Can you confirm Mister Galant that during the week leading to the morning of the murder, that there were forty-five phone calls between you and Miss Nuruddeen?" asks Samodien, who has decided to skim over their relationship, for the time being, and go instead to the heart of the matter.

"I can't say for sure, but that sounds about right," says Faadiel, gives a slight smile, and adjusts his spectacles for effect with a long middle finger.

It is that slight upward curve of his lips as he says it that infuriates her. *Poes!*

"And what was the nature of these calls, Mister Galant?" Samodien asks.

"Miss Nuruddeen had phoned me, I would say pestered me, about whether I had everyone in place, that I would do as she had asked, to stage everything for the night that we were supposed to carry out the deed. This was to ensure that the three accused would enter the premises and help kill the deceased, Mister ... Professor Lurie, and to make it appear as if it was a robbery."

At this answer, there is an uproar in the gallery upstairs. Someone is shouting out, *Murdering bitch! Murdering bitch!* There is a scuffle. She sees the red-haired woman again from the Friends of David Campaign, who has unfolded a banner: it is again someone hanging from a gallows, with "Bring Back the Death Penalty" emblazoned on it in black. It is an improvement on the stick figure: this one has a woman in a black dress, with long black hair, all in silhouette.

She sees Musa and Harun sitting still, quite calm. Khadija is also unperturbed. So are Johannes, Felicia and Lucy. It takes a few minutes before police officers arrive, and the woman and her banner are removed. She wonders what all the fuss is about, this heightened emotion at the death of this elderly man. Pandy issues a warning that he will clear the court if there is a recurrence of such an incident.

"Can you repeat what you just said Mister Galant, before you were so unceremoniously interrupted?" says Samodien.

"I was saying that Miss Nuruddeen had phoned me repeatedly to organize the killing of her husband. She told me that she wanted to make it appear as a robbery, for me to take whatever was in their safe and return it afterwards. She would be present to organize everything," says Faadiel.

"And what would you get out of it?"

"She said that there was money to be made. She said she would be free."

"Are you saying, Mister Galant, that she thought you might have the expectation of marriage?"

"Yes, we'd had a relationship, on and off, for about twenty years," says Faadiel.

As she had expected, the next day, the headline in *The Southeaster* is crude: "Piele Pomp Soraya."

XXX

After their meeting at The Kitchen, she has spent three months seeing David once a week. She does not know yet whether she has an advantage over the family of that dead Arab in Algeria.

This is because his tormentors are all dead and have fled the country, but at least left behind houses to occupy. She knows that she will not be as lucky. Everything she wants will have to be earned the hard way.

She feels sometimes with David that she has her tormentor courting her. Soon, she can feel it, he will be living in her house, eating her food, sleeping in her bed. *His pillow talk would be about reconciliation, whispers of forgive and forget. Or, if that is too hard, just forget.* She believes it is possible for her to do both, but she does have some questions she would like answered before true *toenadering* can take place.

She has not yet asked him those questions uppermost in her mind. She has, instead, enjoyed the tail end of summer and is tanned and fit. David has been to the beach with her, to her favourite spot below what used to be called The White House. It was once a hangout of hippies and other outcasts, of sorts, and now a hotel, in the shadow of The Twelve Apostles. But he has been content, because he cannot swim despite living in coastal cities for so many years, to dangle his bleached feet in the clear water from the safety of a rock. Or to wade in at low tide.

She has visited his house on Torrance Road below the university and had a glass of his Meerlust, and laughed merrily at this weak vinous joke. She finds him totally without humour but gives him credit for trying hard. To the strains of Mozart's clarinet quintet from his collection, there are fumbling attempts at intimacy, but ultimately to no one's satisfaction.

She thinks that soon there should really be no need to seek any answers from him. He has a lovely house, four bedrooms, and off-street parking for three cars if the garden in the front is removed and paved. Of course the big oak would have to be taken down, and she would have to get more lighting for the exterior. David liked his house gloomy. Created character, he said. She

was not of such saturnine disposition. The house has a somewhat dated kitchen and bathroom, but nothing that cannot be refreshed and renewed with some new tiles, cupboards, paint and elbow grease, not hers, of course. There may also be policies of which she is currently unaware, that would perhaps mature not too far into the future. *On the solidity of your estate, David, an agreement can be reached to our mutual satisfaction*, she wants to say.



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FIVE

She has been talking to Khadija over the phone and being careful what she says. There is no privacy anywhere in this prison, but she is confident her cryptic messages would not be understood. She has made up her mind about Faadiel Galant. After a twenty-minute soliloquy on disloyal people, she sends a carefully crafted text message: "Only fear of the consequences of God's wrath will make some people change their ways."

She has some experience in dealing with people who oppose her; some of which she has learnt from David. At Discreet Escorts there were several Sorayas, which David knew was a popular *nom de commerce*, with whom she competed for the affections of those men hunting women in brothels like canned animals. *Or perhaps it was the other way around.* A prized customer was a certain executive type from North America and any Scandinavian country, although there was word desperate Arab women were creating an industry of their own in those countries. She thought there were too many exotics around both at home and abroad.

She remembers all the Sorayas and how she dealt with them. Dark-skinned Hindu Soraya from Rylands had on several occasions, while at work, suffered severe blackouts from coffee spiked with sleeping pills, but would on occasion get a grateful client who liked sleeping beauties, much like David preferred his girl children. This somnolent Soraya eventually quit, thinking the industry was causing her sleeping sickness.

Blonde Soraya from Paarl, billed as an exotic via Syria because she spoke some Arabic, having worked in Dubai, was not as farfetched a fantasy proposition as Discreet Escort's management originally thought. It turned out to be a popular storyline. Blonde Soraya's husband, informed via a phone call from an unnamed woman of his wife's part-time loving, soon recalled her back to

the marital bed with some strong-arm persuasion. Lithe, athletic Soraya, from Ukraine, who was prettier, chattier than her, and able to degrade herself more readily than anyone else in Cape Town, simply had to go. Police officers, acting on an anonymous tip-off, found some cocaine in this Soraya's apartment and she was deported back to her country.

To force a court delay and allow her time to think and plan, she falls ill with abdominal pains and severe diarrhoea. There is a rumour doing the rounds that she may be pregnant, which she does nothing to deny. A week later, on the morning of their scheduled resumption, there is a commotion in the court. Judge Pandy is late and a little flustered. He announces that State witness, Faadiel Galant, will not make it to testify this morning. He has also fallen ill, the cause of which is unknown at this stage. It takes another week before the story emerges that an attempt has been made on Faadiel's life.

The acting police commissioner is on television and in the papers promising an investigation to determine how a man in their witness protection programme was almost killed. A resourceful reporter has managed to get a picture of Faadiel with his head bandaged like a skullcap, and his left arm in a sling, sitting in a wheelchair in an unnamed hospital. Details about what happened to him are sketchy, says the report below the photograph.

The acting police commissioner - no one seems able to hold onto the job for long - does not take to the airwaves this time. He only issues a statement from his desk that he is shocked at the all-round lax security measures but cannot comment any further because a probe by the police's new, revamped internal affairs unit has commenced. Heads will roll, he promises.

For the entire week, the attempted killing, *Assassination, the papers say, as if the poes was a fucking politician!* leads on news bulletins and front-pages. By Saturday, it is usurped by shack

fires, futile gangland raids by the police on the Cape Flats, and previews of rugby and soccer matches. For the time being, she is fortunately out of the spotlight.

Despite her circumstances, she often thinks as a way to console herself in prison that she has been luckier than most. It is now over seven years ago, when barely thirty, she had made the move from London Road, Salt River, from the home placed on her name by her father, to her house on the hill. It is now the case that her former home, which she despised so much, has become valuable. Once an area known for rats, drug dealers and *morning-special* prostitutes for those men rushing to work from the railway station, changes have been taking place. Gentrification was pushing out people born there. She was surprised when a young professional couple seemingly fleeing Johannesburg's encroaching natives had made a seven-figure offer for her old terraced house. She cannot believe it. She has decided not to sell because it remains a cushion against inclement days. Those darks days have now arrived.

They raid the cell, as she expected, early in the morning. She has time to adjust her eyes and glance at her plastic alarm clock clipped to her bunk. It is three a.m. The fluorescent lights flicker on and batons are rattled against metal bars in that age-old signal of imminent beatings and confessions. Brown-shirted warders are accompanied by what appears to be police, maybe army, in black riot gear, helmets with visors, body armour and cradling R-4s.

They are coming through the cell; those not quick enough get a boot in the face or breasts, or trampled toes and fingers. Mattresses are overturned and washing is pulled down from the lines spanning the cell. One of the officers who appears to be in charge shouts for everyone to get down from the bunks, and lie on the ground. Face down, hands behind your heads, he says. Farcical scenes follow because there is not enough space on the ground, and the women lie on

top of each other like sardines flailing around in a net. Now they are being pulled out into the corridor and ordered to squat, heads facing the wall, with hands up against the wall.

She is pulled down from her bunk and searched with rough hands. She smiles as two male police officers feel her up, around her breasts and crotch. They have her cellphone, which is placed with others on a large pile, along with chargers, spoons fashioned into weapons and receptacles for cooking heroin, and thick "arms" of marijuana wrapped in newspaper and plastic insulation tape.

Out of the corner of her eye, she can see the warders, with hands in blue surgical gloves, going through the cell. They are checking the one television set bolted to the wall, and unscrewing the fittings holding the fluorescent lights to the ceiling. Everyone's belongings are scattered about, even toothpaste tubes are squeezed out. She hears it is a random search to root out corruption in the correctional services department, gang violence, attempts to escape, and those orchestrating crime from behind bars. She thinks it is a ruse to get hold of her cellphone and other incriminating evidence. It appears that an attempt at murdering a high profile witness has infuriated someone trying to look after his job. And she is the main suspect.

She is not returned to the communal cell and finds herself alone in a single cell. Later, on the same day, she is taken out to an office where she finds seated, on one side of a table, Captain Cloete and Superintendent Badenhorst. Just a few questions, says Cloete, sitting her down on the other side.

"You must have heard that an attempt has been made on the life of Faadiel Galant. We're trying to work out what happened. And we've asked you here for this interview to see if you know anything about it," says Cloete.

She now recalls how Cloete came to her house six weeks before her arrest for David's murder, also in the early hours of the morning, and took her down to the city central police station for what he called an interview. It was four a.m. that time, and she was interviewed for six hours straight by ten detectives. She remembers thinking how many resources they were allocating to catch her out for only murdering a man. So she is somewhat surprised to see only him and Badenhorst in this room with her.

"I don't know why you're asking me," she says. "What can I have to do with the attack on that man? Can you see where I am? I'm not exactly walking free to arrange attempted murders."

Badenhorst glares at her but remains silent. This is clearly going to be Cloete's show.

Cloete sighs, heaves his heavy hands onto the table, and says: "Yes ... yes ... we know. Look, let's cut through the bulldust. There is more than a coincidence here. The man is testifying against you and this happens. Let's make it clear, we are closing in on some suspects. If you cooperate, we'll go easy on you. Just give us some names and we won't add this to the charge sheet."

"Thanks a lot Captain, but I have to decline ... only because I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. And even if I did, I don't know why you'd think I'd say anything to you of all people," she says, and proceeds to take a toothpick from her pants pocket and pick her nails.

Badenhorst cannot restrain herself, leans forward and says: "You fucking cunt. We're going to make sure you go down for many years and grow old in jail."

"Ah Superintendent Badenhorst, I hear that pussy of yours is growing old without even being in jail. By the time you get married you'll be all dried out. Or are you still waiting on Captain over here to leave his wife for you. Is all that dick-sucking not working out for you?"

"You fucking whore," says Badenhorst, pushes her chair back and reaches across the table to grab her, but Cloete calmly grabs her arm and pulls her back.

"Sit down, sit down," he says. He looks tired.

She smiles at Badenhorst, and then turns to Cloete. "Look, I don't know what games you two lovebirds are playing. I don't care. I'm going to say again that I don't know anything about this. But okay, let me help you out ... a little. I have a theory: Faadiel has lots of enemies, lots of debt. Maybe his creditors have come to collect because he is in witness protection and getting away from them. In other words, follow the money."

Cloete is quiet for a few seconds, then says: "Listen, I'm serious. If we have a solid lead it will be good for you. You know there's a strong case against you--"

"*You* listen captain, I have nothing to say. I'm in prison, where you put me, remember? Why don't you and your girlfriend just fuck off and leave me alone. Please. I have grounds here for undue harassment. You want to charge me with something, then go ahead. If not, let me just get some sleep. The place has been in an uproar lately and I haven't had good rest. But you know all about that, I'm sure."

Cloete sighs again, shifts around in his seat as if he is uncomfortable and wants to go home, but she is not fooled. He had appeared exactly like this during the seven-month investigation into David's murder - half-asleep, disinterested. She knows now that he is an *uitgeslaape hotnot*, a

devious mongrel bastard who would sell his mother to win a case. She had made the mistake of playing him like a dumb dog the last time. She is not about to do it again.

"Captain Cloete, if that's all, can I please go back to my cell. I have to save myself for my court case. This is a pointless meeting. When you have something more than this, please get back to my lawyer."

Three weeks later, when the court resumes, Faadiel returns with his white bandage skullcap and arm in a sling, all still in place. A cushion has been brought in for him to sit on. There is a mob of photographers allowed to stick their lenses in his face before Judge Pandy arrives. *He doesn't look so fucking cocksure now.* The reports she has read in the media, is that two assailants, armed with automatic weapons, identified as AK-47s, had attacked a house in Milnerton, close to the lagoon, where he had been staying. Two brave police officers, one report says, had fended them off, and they fled, but a bullet fired by one assailant grazed Faadiel's head, another hit him in the arm, and a third took a chunk out of his buttocks. He is lucky to be alive.

Other reports she has received privately, from her own reliable sources via a new cellphone provided by a Mother, is that one man, riding pillion on a motorcycle had thrown a Molotov cocktail at the house where he was staying, while he and the two policemen were having lunch in the back garden. It bounced off the burglar bars and fizzled out in the garden's khoi pond. She hears that Faadiel had taken fright, had jumped up from the table, slipped and bashed his head on the patio tiles, and that the cops, in a panic, had fired the shots that hit him. Friendly fire, as they say, which also scared off the would-be assailants. *Now he's trying to look like another fucking pious martyr with his skullcap.* What is more worrying to her is that it is another failure. She cannot depend on anyone anymore.

Answering Samodien's questions, Faadiel says, yes he was hired by her, Miss Nuruddeen, to kill Professor Lurie. And yes, he did have a physical relationship with her. They even had sex on the night before David was buried.

"How could you have had sex on that night? Weren't there many people in the house, the Qur'an reciters, the washers of the body, family members? And she was under *iddah*, wasn't she? For the benefit of the court, *iddah* is the isolation from unrelated males, for just over four months, I believe, if a woman's husband dies, as required by Islamic law. Wasn't that the case?" asks Samodien.

"She didn't care," says Faadiel, eyes downcast, for effect, she thinks, as he answers Samodien's questions. "She locked the door to the dining room where the body was lying because she said she wanted a private moment with David before he was buried. And then she opened the other door leading into the dining room from the garage, where she told me I should enter. And she forced herself on me. She made me do it right there, almost on top of the body."

"You did what?" asks Samodien.

"We had sex right there in the room where David was lying. I couldn't believe it, but I had no choice."

"What do you mean you had no choice?"

"She said that it would be over between the two of us if I didn't have sex with her. She said that I would lose all the money. I was still holding back, when she said she'd shout out that I was trying to rape her if I refused. That's when I gave in."

"Miss Nuruddeen sounded like she was hysterical. Did you try to calm her down?"

"She wasn't hysterical. She placed her back to me, leant against the bier onto the body, spread her legs and lifted her skirt. I had no choice," says Faadiel.

The Southeaster has a headline the following day: "Getuie Galant (en Soraya) in die Gat Geskiet". Two of the straps below declare: "Piele's Poor Poephol" and "Soraya's Sodomy Send-off".

XXX

While David is still alive, he takes her one late March day down to the Sea Point promenade. The sun is a large gold coin dropping slowly into a wishing well, David says, if she recalls correctly. It feels as if the light itself is illuminating our hearts, urging us to speak the truth, he adds. She finds the emotion somewhat overly dramatic.

David says, as they stand against the grey railing still warm from the day, looking out to sea, that he has completely given up his plans for a play on Byron and his young mistress Teresa; of the preoccupations of the devilish old man lusting after innocent flesh. It has been worked out of his system. That is what the Far East will do to you if you are there long enough, he says. She understands it to be some kind of confession.

She thinks now about her own rites of passage. She wants to add to his moment of magic and considers saying, *You know I wonder when I, as a sweet child, passed the point after which I became wily and deceitful? When did I tell my first lie?* Of course, she says nothing. These words are not for him, not for anyone. She prefers to get ice-cream cones and chat about his assets.

SIX

The only man to whom she never lied was Īsa, the father of Musa and Harun. Everyone else was subjected to a litany of untruths, omissions and embellishments, much like David's contrived story about her. Why Īsa? She thinks it is because he was the only man she ever truly loved. JC, Jesus Christ, they called him because he carried the Arabic name of the prophet who brought the Gospel, but also his long hair, narrow face, pointy beard and wiry martyr's body. *Yes, he looked a little like David.*

Someone mistook Īsa for a drug dealer and shot him down in London Road two months before she gave birth to their twins. He bled to death in her arms on the street, long before an ambulance arrived. It was almost at the same time that her father, Sohail, had a stroke and was bedridden; and her mother, Fayruz, always nervous and soft-spoken, looked desperately to her, an only child, for help.

This is not what Faadiel Galant is now telling the court. The picture he is painting is one of a precocious child who used her sexuality to entrap men and gain wealth and status. Yes, he has been telling the court, he had a relationship with her when she was fifteen, while she was still seeing Īsa. *Which is a fucking lie!* He says that she had sought him out, wanted money every time they had sex, had asked him for ways to get into the escort business so she could meet her Prince Charming, have a fairytale romance and get her Cinderella castle.

Faadiel tells Samodien that she was the ultimate Cool Girl, she could be whatever any man or woman wanted. She knows that what Faadiel is really saying, in a polite manner, because court proceedings, like David's story, are superficially civilized, above all else, is that she could take it from behind and in front simultaneously. She thought nothing of two-way golden showers,

rimming and Greek. She was capable, in her Coolness, of selling her soul for a few coins. All this Faadiel is saying in front of her two boys. She knows he is not going to be questioned too harshly because he is acting for the State. Much like David was never interrogated about his motives in that story of his.

She hates what she considers the disgraceful brevity with which her entire life is being presented. She asks herself why so little importance, or goodness, can be attached to the life of a woman like her. She believes that this is what people like David always do. With his talent for telling tall tales, David could have given her a favourite colour, and names and smiles for her children. *All I have is a pathetic confession of a scholar who fucks a whore because he is idle, contrives to lose his job for the sake of narrative drive, and plays the pity card with his busty, boeremeisie daughter and others who care to listen. Maybe if I explain people will understand why I can't stop laughing whenever I recall passages from their hero's book.*

Abubakr has been cross-questioning Faadiel, who no longer has the bandages around his head and seems to have regained some composure. He still has not made eye contact with her.

"Mister Galant, from what you're telling the court, it appears that you had a motive to ... how shall I put it ... to get Professor Lurie out of the way. In your testimony over the past few weeks, and in your statement to the police, you've described a long-standing relationship with Miss Nuruddeen, and of having money problems which you sought to resolve by borrowing money from her. Is this correct?" asks Abubakr.

"No, I did not want Professor Lurie out of the way," says Faadiel.

"But from your evidence you were clearly besotted with Miss Nuruddeen. Surely you can't deny this? I want to put it to you that you were jealous of Professor Lurie, of the place he had in Miss

Nuruddeen's heart, so to speak. And that you, more than anyone else, had a motive to have him out of the way."

"No, that's not true. Our relationship was over. She didn't want anything to do with me apart from sex sometimes. She made it perfectly clear to me. I had moved on."

"Come now, Mister Galant, you're expecting the court to believe that you did not harbour any such thoughts, that you would not have wanted to live in Miss Nuruddeen's house, share her life as an upstanding member of the community? Or to travel the world as she was doing as a successful businesswoman? Are you saying that you did not want all that?"

"No," says Faadiel, who appears uncomfortable and unsure of himself again.

Abubakr glances at Soraya, to the gallery and journalists, back at Faadiel, smiles and shakes his head. Someone laughs up in the gallery but she cannot make out who it is. She does not want to turn around and look. She feels she has to keep her eyes on Faadiel.

"That's really hard to believe Mister Galant. Okay, we'll get back to that question. Now, if you will, could you tell the court what you do for a living."

"I'm a mechanic."

"Do you have your own business?"

"Yes."

"I notice here that you have a restaurant business. It's called The Diner. Is this the business you're talking about?"

"No, if you're referring to that picture in the papers ... that's an old picture. I no longer run that business."

"You no longer run it, so it's closed down. It was not successful, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct," says Faadiel.

"So what is your current business then?"

"I went back to fixing cars."

"Where are your business premises?"

"At my home."

"So you have a special yard or building attached to your house where you conduct your business?"

"No, I conduct it from my garage."

"Do you have a large garage where you can park many cars?"

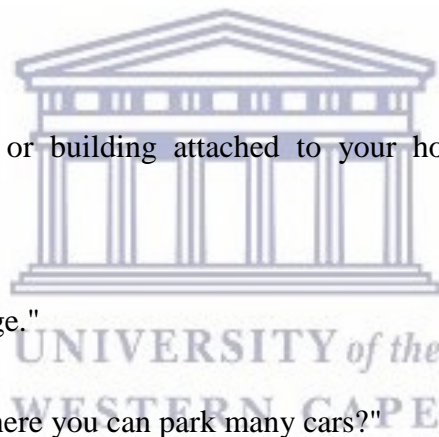
"No, it can only fit one car."

"So you can only fix one car at a time then?"

"No, I can fix many at a time."

"How many at a time?" asks Abubakr.

"Six, seven maybe."



Now she sees Samodien stand up and say: "Objection My Lord, I really don't see the relevance of all this questioning by Advocate Omar. It is just taking up the court's time."

Judge Pandey also seems irritated. He has been sniffing in court all day. He appears to have a bad cold. "I will allow the questioning but please Advocate Omar, would you get to the point quickly."

"This line of questioning will be made clear soon My Lord," says Abubakar.

"So Mister Galant ... where were we? Oh yes, so where do you park the other cars then, the other five or six?"

"Out in the road."

"That must be an inconvenience, particularly to the neighbours. Not to mention security issues."

"No one's complained. And I have two dogs on long leashes around the cars."

"Where do you live again, Mister Galant?"

"Strandfontein, the old part."

"So this is a good business then, Mister Galant?"

"I have ups and down, like any other business. I make enough to keep a roof over my head and place food on the table."

"I'm sure you do Mister Galant ... I'm sure you do. By the way, do you own the house you're living in?"

"No."

"You're renting then?"

"Yes, I'm renting."

"And I see that you are divorced and have two daughters from your marriage. How old are they now?"

"Nine and ten."

Abubakr pauses and consults a document. "Ah, I see. It's expensive educating children these days isn't it, Mister Galant?"

"Yes, it is."

"So this is the point I'm trying to get at Mister Galant, that your circumstances, sometimes precarious as you have admitted, make it reasonable to conclude that you would have had some thoughts about the love of your youth ... I'm referring here to Miss Nuruddeen ... about how things could have turned out. In particular, the thought must have crossed your mind sometimes about why Miss Nuruddeen, at thirty-five years of age, married Professor Lurie, who was sixty-eight at the time, an elderly man. Would you say you did think of it sometimes, about her and Professor Lurie and her other marriage to the late Mister Gunther Grass, who was seventy-five when he passed away so tragically? As you know of course, she was not married to the father of her two sons. So I ask you again Mister Galant, did these thoughts about Miss Nuruddeen not preoccupy your mind at some point?"

"I wouldn't say preoccupy, My Lord," says Galant, who now appears to her as if he believes he will emerge better from the exchange. "Yes, I thought about it. Like any normal person would

think about a woman that a person has had a relationship with. I can only say that I don't know why she did what she did. Only she knows that."

"You sound as if you find it strange that she did what she did, as you put it. Of course this is a reasonable thought to have," says Abubakr, who drops his pen, and some papers to the floor. As he gathers the papers together, looking a little flustered, he says, "Sorry ... sorry ... where were we ... you were saying Mister Galant?"

"Yes, to be honest, I did find it strange--"

"Strange that she would marry these men and not you, Mister Galant?" asks Abubakr, now looking directly at him.

"No, no ... This is not what I mean."

"What do you mean then, Mister Galant?"

She has been watching Faadiel carefully, and now sees the realization on his face that he had been led into a trap, a simple one. *Serves you right, you stupid shit.* Abubakr will give him no mercy.

"Oh so you were thinking ... Sorry I don't want to put words into your mouth ... Did you possibly think that it could only have been for their money or whatever assets they had acquired? Did you possibly think that with Professor Lurie out of the way, it would finally be your chance to live in the big house on the hill? I'm referring here to Miss Nuruddeen's home in Walmer Estate."

"No, no that's not what I thought. It just seemed to me that it was not out of love. She didn't marry out of love."

"How do you know she didn't marry out of love, Mister Galant? Come now, you just told me earlier that you did not know what was going on in her mind, but now you're making a judgement about her state of mind. Let me tell you what I think, Mister Galant. I think that you wanted Professor Lurie out of the way so that you could ... how do they say ... become Lord of the Manor, or the bear with the honey pot. Isn't that so? And let me put it to you, that you had more motive than anyone else here to do so."

"No, no that's not true. I was just following her orders. She wanted it done."

"I must say Mister Galant, that from everything you've just told the court, it appears that you did more than just meekly follow orders. It seems that you participated more actively than you'd care to admit, and that you're now trying to play the innocent victim and place the blame on everyone else but yourself."

Judge Pandey, now visibly drooping, although the sniffing has stopped, calls a halt for the day.

"Advocate Omar, let's proceed in the morning. I'm sure your line of questioning can wait till then."

She is mildly jubilant. She has more admiration for Abubakr than before. She even admits to herself that she feels a greater affection towards him. Or more correctly, a stirring. She welcomes the feeling. She has not had much of these emotions since being imprisoned. When Abubakr turns to smile at her, she feels that he probably has similar feelings. There is not a large age difference, after all, she thinks, that would prevent her from exploring some form of relationship with him. She thinks it would be good business.

XXX

In the six months since they have been seeing each other, the age difference between her and David does not bother her once. She welcomes it. She feels more beautiful than ever being with an elderly man. He is not Gunther, she thinks, but Gunther was slightly older, by five years. Does a few years' difference mellow a person out more? She cannot say.

David appears tense sometimes. She feels it may be the age difference, maybe the fear of his encroaching age and mortality. She does not let him sleep over at her house. It is Musa and Harun who concern her. It would not look good to her two boys. There is no need, she says to David, to complicate matters with her boys. They are not too happy with their affair, she admits.

On a Friday night, when she decides to sleep over at his place, she understands why David has been so tense over the previous weeks. They have had a supper of grilled salmon, asparagus, and brown rice. She eats clean, no fried foods or too many carbohydrates, which he likes. She is lying down on the couch close to the fire, when David says he needs to talk.

"Talk what about?"

"I've got to ask you something. It can't wait any longer."

"What is it?" she asks, sitting up.

"I didn't think I would ever have the courage to do this again." He slowly, carefully, drops to one knee. He takes a small black box from his pocket and opens it to reveal a diamond ring. He takes a deep breath. "Here goes ... Soraya, will you marry me please?"

SEVEN

Are we alike, David and I? This is the question that often rises out of nowhere in her mind, sometimes while at the bank or just settling down to bed at night in her house. She feels people watching her all the time to confirm whether this is so: they are like mute spectators staring as if at a dead tree or words on a page. This is a reversal of sorts because once she was like a ghost in her own country, at the time when the settlers were still filling the emptiness, they claim they found, with their church bells and tulips. She believes this is the lie that David wanted everyone to believe, that she was the same as him. But the only thing that he ever wanted to do was to make her stop and scratch her head in confusion while continuing to fiddle around under her skirt.

She believes that she has not hurt anyone to get where she is now; her land and property have been earned fair and square, with sacrifices. She does not want to serve up the old story of the settler raping the land, only set the record straight about the truth.

And who does it concern if David left me the house? I was his wife, wasn't I? This poes Samodien is making out that somehow I took advantage of a vulnerable old man. No one really talks about how David, the shit, took advantage of small jailbait girls with tight little poesies. I'm not like him.

Khadija Bennett is on the witness stand and does not appear at all distressed under Samodien's cross-examination. It is nearing the end of the day and she can see that Khadija remains alert. If she were to make an objective assessment of her friend, it would be that she is beautiful and talented and has a quick and sharp mind that many people cannot reconcile with her appearance. Today Khadija has her long, sheer brown hair loose, which hangs onto a black blazer over a

white blouse. Her high cheekbones have been muted with some makeup; the sharp nose now flares at the nostrils. Her liquid brown, slanted oriental eyes, flashes at Samodien.

Sister, you're so hard, so tough. They can't get you, never get us. Not today, like we are now. Let them burn themselves out on us. Let them come with whatever the fuck they think will make us bend to them. It will never happen again.

"Advocate Bennett, as Miss Nuruddeen's business partner and financial advisor, how much would you say she is worth?" Samodien asks.

Khadija flicks her hair from her eyes, says nothing for a moment, as if thinking, then says: "I would estimate in the region of fifteen million rand."

"And how much debt does Miss Nuruddeen have?"

"About ten million rand," says Khadija.

"More than ten million rand?"

"Between ten million and eleven million, I would say - I haven't looked at the latest figures."

"Okay, is this without the assets she is now inheriting from Professor Lurie?" asks Samodien.

"Yes."

"So what are those assets Advocate Bennett? Can you please tell the court what Miss Nuruddeen will inherit from her murdered husband?"

"It's the house in Rondebosch and his life insurance policy."

"And what are those assets worth, would you say?"

"About four-and-a-half million for the house, and ten-and-a-half million for the insurance policy. So fifteen million total," says Khadija.

Samodien pauses. She puts on her spectacles, which hang off the edge of her nose, reads, takes it off and places the tip of the earpiece of one arm in her mouth.

This poes has been watching too many fucking American courthouse dramas. Playing to the gallery again. Always the same mannerism when she thinks she has someone in a trap. I wish I could smack that smug smile off her fucking face.

"And Miss Nuruddeen is the sole beneficiary of Professor Lurie's estate?"

"Yes, she is."

"So there is nothing bequeathed to Professor Lurie's parents or to his daughter and granddaughter?"

"Quite right."

"Nothing?" asks Samodien.

"Yes, nothing," says Khadija.

A chattering breaks out in the court. Someone is saying something but she cannot hear what it is. Judge Pandey merely glares at the gallery until there is silence again. He has been quiet in the court for a long time. Half asleep sometimes, she thinks. But his reputation precedes him. He has handled some of the most complicated cases, mostly of family murders, she has read.



"Advocate Bennett," Samodien continues, "can you perhaps offer the court an explanation for this? Why would Professor Lurie do something like this, leave all his worldly assets to a wife that he had been married to for barely two years, and exclude his only heirs?"

"I don't think I can offer an explanation, My Lord," says Khadija. Samodien drops her head to look at some papers, as if not hearing the answer.

"So you did not discuss this issue with Miss Nuruddeen at all? Surely you must have done this, Advocate Bennett? Come now, you must surely have been told something by Miss Nuruddeen about the conditions of the inheritance?"

"No, My Lord, she told me nothing. It is not unusual for clients not to offer explanations to their legal advisors about their decisions," says Khadija.

Samodien smiles, reads again, and then shakes her head. "Okay Advocate Bennett. Let's leave that questioning for a while, we're not getting anywhere. Let's just go back a little bit in history, for the benefit of the court. How long have you been Miss Nuruddeen's business advisor?"

"Over eleven years."

"But you know Miss Nuruddeen for much longer, don't you? Am I correct in saying that you grew up together in Salt River? That you went to Saint Luke's Primary School, attached to the church ... that her house in London Road was about one hundred metres from your home? You lived in Cecil Road, opposite the primary school, am I correct? And that you then went to Harold Cressy High School together?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Would it be correct to say that you two are best friends?"

"Yes, that would be correct."

"And you two remained friends even when you went to university to become a lawyer and she dropped out of school?"

"Yes, we lost touch for a while, but made contact again after I qualified."

"When did your business relationship first start with Miss Nuruddeen? What I mean is, can you tell the court how you first came to represent or advise Miss Nuruddeen on legal matters?"

"I believe it was when she wanted advice on housing issues. The firm I work for is also involved in conveyancing and she wanted to know the process involved in inheriting a house, or to have a house placed on her name."

"Is that around the time she was in a relationship with the late Mister Gunther Grass, a German national who was living in South Africa at the time?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"So you advised Miss Nuruddeen about how she could have a house placed on her name. This would be a house owned by Mister Grass, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Which house is it? Is it the house Miss Nuruddeen now owns in Walmer Estate, the Beresford Road property? The reason I ask is that Miss Nuruddeen appears to own several properties in Salt River, Paarl and Worcester, smallish ones."

"Yes, that's correct, it is the house she owns in Walmer Estate."



"Could you tell the court about your involvement with Miss Nuruddeen on this legal matter? It was, as I understand it from the papers before the court, when she was about to marry Mister Grass, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's correct. It was an important matter for her and she came to me for advice."

"So you assisted her, or more correctly, assisted Mister Grass in drawing up a will that entitled her to the house which Mister Grass owned?"

"Yes."

"Does Mister Grass have any family?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did you ask Mister Grass about this ... about him having family elsewhere, in Germany or in this country?"

"No."



"Were you aware at the time of Miss Nuruddeen's employment at Discreet Escorts?"

"Yes."

"So you knew she was struggling to make a ... how shall I put it ... a decent living?"

"She *was* making a decent living," says Khadija.

"You know, of course, that prostitution is illegal in this country Advocate?"

Before Abubakr can rise to protest, Khadija says, "I am familiar with the law, My Lord. Miss Nuruddeen was not a prostitute ... she was an escort. There is a big difference. She was doing nothing illegal. She was putting food on the table, caring for her children and parents."

"If you say so Advocate Bennett. Would you say then that Miss Nuruddeen wanted to use the opportunity of her marriage to gain property?"

Khadija sits up straighter. There is a measure of defiance, even outrage in her tone. "Yes, that's correct. She had been through a tough time in her life. She wanted to secure her future. She didn't want to end up like her mother and father. I do not think that there is anything wrong in trying to better oneself through one's marriage, if I may say so, My Lord. Many of the best women have done it, according to the novels Professor Lurie used to read, analyze and teach."

"Yes ... yes," says Samodien. "So she took the opportunity, grabbed it with both hands, so to speak?"

"I don't know what you mean about grabbing it with both hands, My Lord, what I can say is that she wanted to make sure that the future was secure for her children, and her future grandchildren."

"Yes," says Samodien, "and that opportunity came about when Mister Grass passed away suddenly, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"You are, of course, aware of how Mister Grass died?"

"Yes, it was in all the papers."

Samodien has her spectacles hanging on her nose again, reading from a document, and peers at Khadija over the top bar of the metal frames. "He died of smoke inhalation, from a cigarette that burnt out on his mattress, isn't that correct?"

"Yes, that's what the papers said."

"And did Miss Nuruddeen tell you about what had happened?"

"Yes, she did. Which is exactly what was reported in the media. There was an investigation."

"Yes, I see there was an investigation, and the police concluded no foul play was suspected," says Samodien. "... so this is when Miss Nuruddeen inherited Mister Grass' house?"

"Yes it is. He left her the house in his will."

"The will that you helped draw up?"

"Yes, the will I helped draw up according to the wishes of Mister Grass, who was a kind and gentle man."

"Mister Grass was seventy-five years old when he died and Miss Nuruddeen twenty-eight, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And Professor Lurie was seventy when he was murdered and Miss Nuruddeen thirty-six?"

"Yes."

"Now, I just want you to clear up a few other details. Is it correct that you then continued to advise Miss Nuruddeen on other matters?"

"Yes."

"Would these matters include the recent dispute over a housing development in Khayelitsha that ... how can I put it ... went sour?" asks Samodien, who quickly adds she will rephrase because Abubakr is rising to register an objection again. "Or should I say that the whole dispute over the development, run by a subsequently liquidated company registered in Miss Nuruddeen's name, is now before the courts and concerns accusations of missing funds? The missing money amounts to about five million rand from persons who signed up, off-plan, for houses, but have yet to see the houses?"

Khadija shifts in her seat, purses her lips and brushes a strand of hair from her forehead. "This matter is before the courts. It would not be fair for me to make comment on an ongoing matter such as this."

"Okay, that's quite understandable," says Samodien. "You are, of course, also an accused in the case, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Can you then inform the court what charges have been laid against you, obviously without divulging any details of the court case?"

"The charge is of misusing funds from my trust account," says Khadija.

Samodien reads from a document again. "Would it be correct to say Advocate that you have been charged with twenty-two counts of money laundering, twelve counts of violating the Attorney's Act and ten of fraud?"

"Yes, those are the charges," says Khadija without any hesitation.

"Thank you for clearing that up Advocate Bennett. Let's see ... there is also the other matter before the courts involving Miss Nuruddeen, regarding charges of submitting false value-added tax refund applications, in the region of six million. This was regarding alleged bogus services provided to a real estate development in another township ... yes ... Langa is it?"

"Yes, those are the charges, but it is also a matter that I cannot comment on," says Khadija.

"You are, of course, assisting Miss Nuruddeen with her legal defence, is that correct?"

"Yes, I am."

Samodien pauses, consults some papers, looks up at Khadija and says, "Let's go back to the issue of Professor Lurie's will. So you told me earlier that you had nothing to do with the drawing up of the will?"

One thing you can admire about this poes is that she is so fucking persistent. She's like a dog with a bone. Just can't let go. How many fucking times must Khadija tell her the same fucking thing. David gave the house to me. He owed me. All these old men who want young flesh, or cover for whatever shit they have going on, must pay. That's the fucking deal. Samodien should know this. She's a woman. Maybe she's forgotten what it's like to be young and have a powerful wet poes. Or rather, she hasn't had one that a man would like to lubricate, as David liked to put it, when he spoke of Melanie's sister Desiree.

"I did not say I had nothing to do with it. What I said was, or what was meant to be inferred from my answer, My Lord, was that I was not privy to the reasons for Professor Lurie making that decision," says Khadija.

"So you drew up the will?"

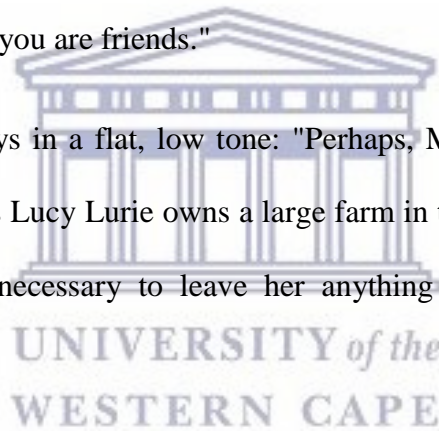
"Yes, I helped draw it up with the aid of my firm."

"And you didn't express any interest in why Professor Lurie would exclude his heirs?"

"No I didn't. I don't think it is hard for anyone to believe that one has to respect the personal wishes of one's clients. Even more so when it comes to assisting a friend who is as dear as Miss Nuruddeen is to me. I'm her friend, but I'm also paid to provide her with the best legal advice and services, My Lord, without bringing any emotion into it."

"No one is saying that you're emotional ... or unprofessional Advocate. I was merely saying that it seems hard to comprehend that you would not inquire at all about the reasons, or been told the reasons, especially considering you are friends."

Khadija leans forwards and says in a flat, low tone: "Perhaps, My Lord, and I am speculating here, perhaps it is because Miss Lucy Lurie owns a large farm in the Eastern Cape, that David ... Professor Lurie thought it unnecessary to leave her anything ... But as I said, I am only speculating here, My Lord."



Samodien now appears agitated and places her spectacles on the desk in front of her. "Yes ... yes, perhaps it is best you do not speculate, Advocate."

That night, lying on her bunk, she checks the news headlines on her phone. Nothing can surprise her anymore. *The Southeaster* has pictures of her house in Walmer Estate, and David's in Rondebosch, with the faces of her two dead spouses inserted: "Soraya Scores Hubbies' Houses." The strap below the headline reads: "Cashing in on corpses." There are also reports on her pending court cases, with pictures and quotes from "poor investors still waiting for their homes".

The gallery of photographs includes a mother nursing a newborn and an elderly couple sitting on a bed "in their one-room corrugated-iron shack".

Two days later, *The Southeaster*, which has a team of reporters on the case, has dug up all the details of Gunther Grass' death. In one report it marks as an "exclusive", the paper runs interviews with several of her Walmer Estate neighbours. All of them prefer to remain anonymous, "out of fear for repercussions". They all have suspicions about Gunther's death. "He was a lovely man," says one neighbour to the newspaper, "wouldn't harm a fly, but can't say the same about her. She was always complaining about something; someone parking too close to her gate, our dogs barking, the neighbours' children making a racket. Always threatening to call the cops. I'm not judging her, let the law take its course. All I'm saying is that she wasn't very neighbourly. She didn't grow up in this neighbourhood. She's not from here."



XXX

A week before they are to marry, she goes with David to Chapel Street Mosque, accompanied by Musa and Harun. David sits before Sheikh Yusuf, a spritely, elderly man, wearing a white thobe and matching turban, and agrees to bear witness, in the most important testimonial of the faith, that he believes in monotheism and the last prophet. It is not necessary for any other declaration, but parroting the sheikh, who recites in English and Arabic, he also agrees to pray five times a day, fast during the holy month, pay alms, and go on pilgrimage to God's house if by the means. In addition, he promises to believe in the angels, all the prophets, and the revealed books.

There is no need to change his name, says Sheikh Yusuf. He has a fine name, as it is, but if he chooses to, he can certainly announce himself as "Dawood", rather than David, to his new family. It is a reversion, she tells David, back to the faith he had been born with but did not

know. She can tell he does not know whether she is serious about what she is saying. After thirty minutes, as they leave, she places an envelope on the desk of the sheikh, containing a cash contribution for the upkeep of God's house. This is how the real world should work, she thinks, everyone should have a fair share, not say that there is not enough for everyone as David had said, too many people for the few cars, cigarettes and shoes. *There is only too little to go around when shits like you, David, want to hold onto everything with a death grip.*

There had been a minor skirmish before they had gone. David had, somewhat unsurprisingly, told her that he found the whole affair unnecessary. A "rigmarole", he had said. She had assured him that she also found it unnecessary. Gunther certainly did not change his religion for her, but that was a different time, she told David. Now that Musa and Harun were grown men, they would like some assurance that he was not taking advantage of their mother, that his love for her extended to respecting her beliefs. And it was not a rigmarole, she had told him. This was the simplicity of her faith, she said; the house was broad and roomy to accommodate all believers - or those who simply expressed a willingness to believe.

"Stop taking everything so seriously," she had said. "It's not such a big drama. You can live the way you've lived before. Just be mindful of where you are. Be respectful, is all I ask. We can all pretend, it's not a hard thing to do. We must take into account the concerns of our children ... my children. Sometimes you take life far too seriously. I thought the Far East had changed you." She had laughed to make him feel at ease and eventually he had started to relax.

Yes, what did Rosalind say about you, David? ... that you were a great deceiver and a great self-deceiver, never wanting to admit you're wrong, and trying to convince other people that you're not a man who simply got caught with his pants around his ankles. Instead of just coming clean,

admitting your faults, making that confession, over and over again. And I mean over and over again. This is what you have to do to live in the world with me. Respect, remorse for the past, is perhaps all people like me need to hear several times over.

The wedding ceremony, a simple one, is held on a Sunday afternoon. Sheikh Yusuf, who is eighty-five years old and still drives, has agreed to officiate in the big house, upstairs. The cars are all parked inside, on the grounds because she desires no unwanted attention. She wears a specially designed white dress, with red lace bodice, pearl necklace and earrings; and white stilettos with transparent heels. She could not resist the shoes. Perhaps a nod to the past, she thinks. Or marking a rite of passage, from a whore to a wife. David has dressed in a new dark navy blue suit and red tie. Johannes, Felicia, Lucy and Anna Magdalena, are in attendance. On her side, she has her parents, Sohail and Fayruz, her boys Musa and Harun, and Khadija. It is pleasant enough.

She is surprised to see how Anna Magdalena adores her grandfather, sitting by his side, holding his hand, and talking with some animation to him. It is the first time she has met this child. She is about fifteen now, almost as tall as David, with cat-like movements. From playing soccer and hockey, David had proudly said when he made the introductions. It is hard for her to believe this happy, confident child is the outcome of Lucy's rape on her farm all those years ago.

Anna Magdalena has curly blonde-brown hair plaited into a long pigtail falling down her back to the base of her spine. She has Lucy's blue eyes and the dark chocolate skin of the father she does not know. It is an unusual, striking combination. They have been sitting together on the balcony. David has been talking to Anna Magdalena about the harmonies of "The Prelude" and how it

echoes within him, stirs him. Wordsworth has been his master, his passion. Like all the Romantic poets.

Do you have passions? he asks Anna Magdalena. She is not shy to say that she does, many, including several boys at home and school. David laughs, places his hand on her bare knee, where her skirt has pulled up, and says she must take some photographs of the two of them together, with his cellphone, because he does not know when he will see her again. He takes a few of her sitting on his lap and others, across from him, where she perches on the balcony's plastic garden table, feet up on a chair, skirt shifting up to reveal her white underwear. He bemoans his travels over the years, which have kept them apart.

The ceremony is held in the corner of the living room, on a thick Persian carpet bought for her by Gunther on one of his visits abroad, covered with a white sheet. David says the words he has memorized in Arabic, and then pays the dowry he has promised. The dowry is his will, contained in an envelope, which Sheikh Yusuf does not open up to read, but announces that it is a house. There are hugs and congratulations. After two hours of eating and talking, it is over. Lucy and Anna Magdalena are staying over with David's parents because it is too late to travel back to the farm in Salem in the Eastern Cape.

"Can I stay with you tonight, Pa?" asks Anna Magdalena, sitting on the armrest of his chair, an arm over his shoulder.

Lucy laughs and says no. "It's your grandpa's wedding night Sweets, give him some space. Perhaps another night, before we head home. Is that okay with you David and Soraya?"

"Of course," says David, "she must stay with us before you go off home. It is not often I see my beautiful granddaughter. Is that alright, Soraya?"

She smiles at David and Anna Magdalena and says there is no objection. "Yes, we must get to know each other better," she says, looking at Anna Magdalena. "We haven't yet decided to go on honeymoon anywhere, so we'll still be around before you leave." She can see that the child is ecstatic. It must be because she does not have her close family in the Eastern Cape. The whole situation there has been complicated. Anna Magdalena has not been told who her father is, David had said, because there has been no attempt to find out. There were three men, young boys, David had said. Paternity testing was possible, but that would entail a great deal of disruption in the girl's life. Everyone thought it better that way. Perhaps when she is older she can be told the whole story, he had said.

That night, David tells her that his marriage to her was so unlike his first two nuptials, to Evelina and Rosalind. He was young, too reckless and self-absorbed to think beyond his own needs, he says. She says that it was just like the time she married Gunther, which was a simple affair with a marriage officer, her children and parents. She cared very much for Gunther, she tells David, but thinks that she would not like to continue this conversation now. It is not appropriate, she says.

Later, when they make love, she is surprised at his heightened energy and enthusiasm. It is unusual because he is mostly quite methodical; sometimes she is even unsure whether he has climaxed. He falls asleep and snores. She is awake for a little while thinking of him talking to his granddaughter, and smiles to herself. She has never seen him so besotted.

EIGHT

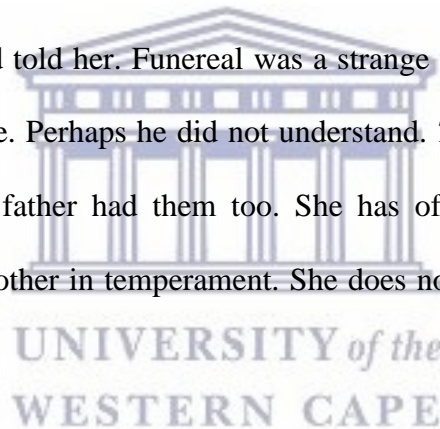
She has been expecting it, but it still comes as a shock when her boys are called to testify. For a moment, as Musa sits in the witness box, she has an overwhelming feeling of guilt for having placed him - them - in this position. Harun is in the gallery, unsmiling, waiting his turn. She wanted everyone to know the names of her two sons, but not like this. But the pain is fleeting and now she thinks that this is part of the sacrifice everyone, including her two children, have to make to gain a foothold in this life. Who will carry on the struggle if not them? It is so many years since that Saturday morning, their normal day of shopping and eating out, as two small boys of six, walking down St George's Street, when, she believes firmly, David saw and ignored them.

You have an alibi in a book for your shit behaviour but I don't believe a fucking word you said, especially about your so-called sympathies with me and my children. I don't have witnesses to your snub and indifference. If there were any, they are all gone, perhaps dead, docile, or too afraid to care. Maybe they didn't exist at all. Who will remember what happened, if not me, if not my children and my future grandchildren?

Twice you walked past the front of Captain Dorego's Fish Inn. I saw you the first time, but pretended I did not notice. The second time, I looked up deliberately, because I thought you would step in, say something, perhaps smile at my boys, pat them on their heads, say how big they are, give them a couple of rand for sweets. But there was nothing, just a flicker of recognition and then you turned away and walked off. What did you expect me to do, run out and call after you? Did you really expect me to do that?

You felt tenderness towards me and my boys, you wrote. You assured yourself that my secret, my double life, was safe with you. Just who the fuck did you think you were? You know what the truth is?... you wanted me always to be young tits, arse and poes, for your moderate bliss, or more correctly, moderated bliss. That's what you wanted me to be in your head. You didn't want me to have children, or a husband; or to piss, fart or puke. You're all the same. Fokken naaiers.

Musa and Harun are in their third year at university, with majors in economics and political science. She believes they are intelligent enough but there is a coldness about them that is unsettling. She recalls David saying to her once, he seemed to not mean it in a malicious way, that they had funereal eyes. He hears the funeral march music of Handel, Chopin and Beethoven when he speaks to them, David told her. Funereal was a strange word to use. Dead eyes, David meant. She did not take offence. Perhaps he did not understand. *They are eyes that can see into your soul.* Musa and Harun's father had them too. She has often heard people say her two children are not unlike their mother in temperament. She does not know whether to take it as a compliment.



She believes that Musa will now outline David's crimes against her: to make her story visible to everyone in the court. Sometimes, she feels a little too desperate to want a new version of the events written for the public record. But then a familiar anger rises within her.

They all look the same to me, these strangers, these foreigners, these writers of other people's minor lives, whether they have cigarettes dangling from their lips like that French outsider in Algeria, or sporting silver-grey beards like David. I'm comforted by my rage. I wouldn't give it up for the world. It makes me sleep at night and energizes me when I'm awake. Who knows what

would happen if it wasn't there any longer. Maybe I'll just blow away in the wind like the loose pages of a discarded book.

Musa, she can see, has combed his long black hair back, so it is glossy and sleek, just like David had described it all those years ago. His beard has been trimmed; it is no longer the length of a clenched fist, which he says is recommended in the scriptures. He is wearing a dark-grey jacket and black shirt without a tie, which gives him a sombre, classic air. She feels immensely proud of him for standing up for her, for doing the right thing, for making the little accommodations of appearance for the court.

Then she thinks that it is the least they can do for her. Her boys do not know, and never will, how hard it was to have them at sixteen. Sohail and Fayruz had treated her pregnancy out of wedlock as a tragedy, as a death in the family. They called it *'n skande* brought on the entire family. They were so religious that it was difficult to say the word pregnant in their presence. Fayruz had retreated to her bedroom, crying on her prayer mat for forgiveness for everyone, particularly her wayward daughter. Sohail, a regular at the Tennyson Street mosque in Salt River for every morning prayer, had retreated in humiliation. When she began to show an enlarged belly, he would only go on Fridays for midday prayers. She was a disgrace to the family and would bear bastards, he had told her.

Is it like your disgrace, David? Perhaps it is, at least in some ways. We had a choice, you and I. You need not have been the stubborn, unrepentant asshole you were. You could have apologized for your sexual abuse and fraud, taken the terms of a settlement, of making a public show of contrition, offered to you by your university, and then kept your job and your status, however degraded that may have seemed to you.

And I had a choice that time, when I was barely fifteen, and could have kept my legs closed so that I did not fall pregnant. How much of a choice did I have when I went to work for Discreet Escorts and fell out of grace with God by whoring with all comers? Except of course, that you were a privileged middle-aged man and I a mere child without much sense.

Is your disgrace like young Melanie's then? Or the disgrace you claimed when you could not save Lucy? How about like all the other women and children you so disgracefully violated? Or like you ageing and supposedly considering the ungraceful act of castration because you cannot bear living like an old man with no woman desiring you? Or the loss of grace of your beloved dogs that you had to put down because they were old or of no use to their owners? So many questions, David. I'm sure, if you were still around, if you could still talk, you would have found a way, as men like you often do, to make your so-called fall greater than everyone else's put together.

"Okay, so let us then start with the kind of relationship you observed your mother have with Professor Lurie. Would you say it was good, bad or indifferent?" Samodien asks.

"It was good," says Musa.

"Did they argue at all? Did you hear any of the arguments they had?"

"Minor disagreements, yes, I overheard some of them."

"And what were these arguments about?" asks Samodien.

"These minor disagreements," says Musa, insisting on his terminology, "were about normal things between men and women."

"Normal things between men and women," Samodien repeats, smiles, and looks down at her documents. "How old are you Mister Salie? Am I correct in using this surname, the surname of your deceased father?"

"Yes that's my surname. I'm twenty-one."

Samodien has a slight smile on her lips. "Are you married, Mister Salie?"

"No."

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"No."

Samodien peers over her spectacles at him, still with a faint smile. "So what are these arguments that you find normal between men and women?"

"The normal disagreements I heard and witnessed were about what to have for supper, which place to go for holiday ... and so on."

"So you never heard them argue about money?"

"No."

"Did they ever talk about property then? You know, about your mother's house or Professor Lurie's house?"

"No."

"And were you ever curious about the arrangement between them, of the house he offered as a dowry? In addition to this, surely, as an heir to your mother's property, you would have had some concern about a man marrying your mother and perhaps inheriting from her if she passed away?"

"I had no concerns."

"No concerns at all Mister Salie?"

"It was none of my business. My mother can look after herself where money is concerned. In any case, I will get what I will get. There is nothing to worry about. Everything is written."

"Everything is written? Are you speaking in a religious sense, Mister Salie, or are you saying that you know about Professor Lurie's will?"

"Yes, I'm speaking in a religious sense, if you want to put it that way. It's no use worrying, My Lord, when the outcome of everything that we will ever do has already been decided," Musa says turning to look at Judge Pandey, who is taking notes and does not raise his head. "This is part of our faith. And no, I do not know the details of Professor Lurie's will. That was a matter concluded between my mother and Professor Lurie. I have not read his will. I was only made aware of it on the day Professor Lurie married my mother. So I know about the house."

"You don't know anything else about the will? Come now, Mister Salie, surely you must have some knowledge of its contents?"

"I have no knowledge of it. As far as I was concerned, I assumed the will conformed to Islamic inheritance law, as I understand it as a layman."

"Don't you find it strange that Professor Lurie would exclude Miss Lucy Lurie in his will? Surely this should come as a surprise to you?" Samodien smiles at him.

"Yes, I do find it strange that he excluded Miss Lucy Lurie, but that was Professor Lurie's prerogative. Islamic law ... again I want to say that this is according to my limited understanding ... Islamic law states that everyone should have a share if a parent dies, with the sons getting a bigger portion and the girls less. If Professor Lurie decided to draw up a will to exclude his daughter, I think that would be wrong, most of the time. But there could be circumstances here that I am not aware of, which could provide some explanation."

"And if your mother passes away, God forbid, Mister Salie, you all would inherit her half of the joint estate? As I understand it, your mother has considerably more assets than Professor Lurie. So you would have accepted that everyone gets their share, which means Professor Lurie would get a substantial amount?"

"Yes, that is the consequence of Islamic law, as I understand it. But I am not aware of what my mother has written in her will, if she has one."

"And if Professor Lurie had divorced your mother, he would have walked away with half their estate, because they are married, legally speaking, in community of property? She has not made a will, I understand."

"Yes, I accept that also, in the case of divorce. On the matter of her will, I don't know, as I said before, if she has one," says Musa.

"Okay then Mister Salie. You are a remarkable young man, not being concerned at all about your mother marrying such an elderly gentleman as Professor Lurie, and his possibly inheriting half her estate."

"He would not have inherited half her estate, My Lord, as I have just explained to the court about what happens when a parent dies. My mother's half would have been shared amongst David ... Professor Lurie ... and us children. This would have been according to a set formula as prescribed by Islamic law ... if there is no will, as you have just indicated. But I am no real expert on all these matters. Perhaps, My Lord, it would be better to ask an expert on Islamic jurisprudence," says Musa, staring at Samodien, who still has a faint smile on her lips. He appears unruffled.

"Of course ... yes thank you for that explanation Mister Salie. One must also understand that Professor Lurie was substantially older than your mother, and was most likely to pass away before her."

"Nothing is certain in life My Lord."

"Okay then, Mister Salie, can I ask you then about the state of your mother's health. We have evidence before the court from various doctors, psychiatrists, testifying on your mother's behalf, that she was on anti-depression medication. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"How do you know this to be the case Mister Salie?"

"I've seen the medication. She sometimes asked me to remind her to take it."

"What happens then if your mother does not take her medication?"

"She's anxious and can't concentrate very well."

"And when she takes it?"

"She appears to be calmer, more rational. But it sometimes makes her a bit dizzy and confused."

"So what would you say happened on the night of the stabbing incident, then?"

"She didn't stab him."

Samodien, who has been looking down while asking questions, now peers over her spectacles at Musa. Her forehead furrows. "She didn't stab him? ... Is that what you just said Mister Salie?"

"Yes, that's what I said, My Lord."

Samodien shuffles some papers, chooses a document, reads from it, and looks up: "I don't know how you reached this conclusion Mister Salie, but the medical report before the court clearly states that Professor Lurie was stabbed in the right thigh with a braai fork. The wound was at least five centimetres deep. Stitches were required."

"It was an accident. She didn't stab him deliberately."

"Oh I see now what you mean Mister Salie ... your mother of stabbed Professor Lurie, but not on purpose. Is that what you're saying?"

"It was an accident."

"Can you then, Mister Salie, explain to the court how a three-pronged braai fork happened accidentally to find itself in the right thigh of Professor Lurie? You were there during the incident, weren't you?"

"Yes I was present. We had chosen to braai outside in the back yard, close to the neighbour's wall, where the lighting was poor--"

"So the incident did not take place in the kitchen, as Investigating Officer Captain Denver Cloete stated in his report ... the report that he compiled from his discussions with your mother on the morning of the murder?"

"No, it was in the yard. I was there."

"So why do you think then that your mother, according to Captain Cloete, would say such a thing?"

"As I stated before, the effect of her medication was dizziness and confusion, even though it calmed her, took away her anxiety."

"So she had taken her medication that night ... I mean the night of the braai?"

"Yes, I had reminded her, and brought it to her. I also brought her water to help her take the pills."

"Okay, Mister Salie, please go ahead and tell the court what happened."

"My mother was joking around with Professor Lurie. He was saying something about poking her and she responded by saying something to the effect of, 'not if I poke you first'. And she lunged at him, playfully, with the fork. He stepped forward at the same time. That's when the accident took place."

There is laughter in the gallery. Musa does not appear as if he is uncomfortable and stares ahead at Samodien.

"Mister Salie, your version of events, particularly its levity, does not tally with what Captain Cloete has stated in his report. He said that your mother offered information to him about her

medication and the stabbing incident on the night of the murder, when he arrived at the house. He had not asked her any questions at all."

"I don't know what my mother told Captain Cloete. As I've indicated to the court in my statement, I was not present when Captain Cloete questioned my mother. All I know is what I saw happen on the night of the braai. I can only think that she may have been confused at the time because of what happened in the house ... with the murder of Professor Lurie ... combined with the effects of the medication she had taken."

"So the stabbing incident had nothing to do with ... I quote here from Captain Cloete's report ... 'a minor disagreement over finances'?"

"I don't know anything about this minor disagreement. Perhaps my mother, in her confusion, was trying to say that she was not to blame for what had happened. Because aren't spouses the first people listed as suspects if such murders take place? Perhaps she felt afraid, panicky."

Samodien shuffles her papers. "Mister Salie, as you and your brother have outlined in your statements, the consequence of the stabbing incident was that Professor Lurie decided to move into the spare upstairs bedroom. Is that correct?"

"No, that's not correct, it was not linked to the accident, as far as I know. There were other issues between my mother and Professor Lurie. Personal issues."

"Do you have any idea what those issues were, Mister Salie? Did your mother confide in you?"

"I don't know. My mother chose to keep these marital issues confidential. I don't want to speculate about what went on between the two of them. The only thing she would say was that it was a temporary arrangement and that we, my brother and I, should not worry about anything."

She said it was normal for married people to go through ups and downs. Even David told us so. He also dismissed the so-called stabbing as a freak accident."

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Later, after the court has adjourned for the day, and alone in the back of the Nyala, heading for the prison, she feels a measure of satisfaction. The day has gone better than expected. It has been, in truth, a revelation. She does not know her son like this, for such articulateness, for such a calm demeanour under questioning, particularly facing what she views as the sly traps Samodien had set for him. He spoke so clearly and confidently, that it could not have just come from his university education, or the coaching he received from her lawyers.

There is something more in his entire behaviour that she has missed being a part of, or to which she has made little contribution. Perhaps she has influenced him and Harun, indirectly, just from the example of her work ethic, the way she dealt with employees and business partners, she now thinks. But perhaps it is also the influence of those University Islamic Society students whom he and Harun mix with at the weekends. They are hard-nosed boys and girls who will not take a step back from what they believe is the truth, some of them a bit too stubborn, she believes. This is what she sees in the younger generation. In her twins and Anna Magdalena. She cannot blame them, when they state what they feel and want, and their willingness to fight to get it. Perhaps not so unlike her, and some of her generation, she thinks. So she is not worried when, two weeks later, after Musa has completed his turn, the court calls on Harun to testify.

"Mister Salie ... can I call you Mister Harun, if it is okay with you, to distinguish you, in the court record, from your brother? I must say, you two are remarkably alike. Only a mother could tell you apart," says Samodien, who smiles and places her spectacles on her nose to read. "Can

you please take us back to the morning of the murder? Can you describe to us what happened at the house, from the time the accused entered the property?" Samodien says.

Harun is dressed like his brother, in an identical dark-grey jacket, and open-necked black shirt. His hair is also combed back. "Only a mother *and* father," says Harun, also smiling, but with the same expressionless eyes of his sibling. "We were in the flat below the house, our grandparents' place, when three men entered with balaclavas over their faces."

"Your grandparents were overseas, on Umrah, weren't they?" asks Samodien. "Umrah being, for the benefit of the court, a minor pilgrimage."

"Yes. One man was holding a gun, while the other one told us to lie down, face down, with our hands behind our heads. The third man stood in the doorway, like he was on watch."

"How did you think they managed to enter the house?"

"I don't know. There seems to have been something wrong with the security system."

"This is not what the police investigation reveals, Mister Harun, but let's leave these questions for later."

"And did you do as they ordered?"

"Yes, the man without the gun tied Musa's hands behind his back and feet with tape ... a grey tape used to seal cardboard boxes. They asked me to stand up and also tied my hands behind my back and ran the tape around my body so that I couldn't move my arms. The man with the gun ordered me to take him into the house. He asked me who was in the house, so I told him only my parents. I told him that he could have whatever he wanted, I would give it to him. But he told me to shut up."

"So where did you take the two men?" asks Samodien.

"Upstairs, to the bedrooms because this is where I assumed my mother and Professor Lurie would be. I didn't want to anger the man. I thought that if he got ... they got what they wanted, they would leave."

"The third man stayed downstairs, I assume?"

"Yes."

"And who did you find upstairs?"

"Professor Lurie was in the upstairs study. He was reading. We all went into the study together, and they asked Professor Lurie about the safe in the house. He said that he would take them to the safe. They told him to move onto the landing. They pushed me into the study and then taped my legs and ankles together, and then closed the door."

Samodien purses her lips, pulls her robe forward, rubs the tip of her nose with a middle finger, and says, "Don't you find it strange, Mister Harun, that the accused came to rob the house, but ended up killing Professor Lurie while leaving you, your brother and mother alive? What I mean is this: it defies logic that an elderly man, who posed no physical threat to them, with his arms tied behind his back, would be killed in this manner."

"Yes, I agree, it does not make much sense. I don't know why they would do something like that. It was so senseless, so brutal. I can't see what they could have gained."

"What does make sense," says Samodien, "is that someone wanted Professor Lurie dead. This can be the only, inescapable conclusion. Now, when one looks at motive, one can only look at

the facts, circumstantial as they are, that someone who was threatened, or stood to benefit, was responsible for Professor Lurie's death. Don't you think so Mister Harun?"

"Yes, you're correct. But if I were to speculate, there could be other reasons too--"

"Like an accidental slaughter, similar to the accidental stabbing, would you say Mister Harun?" says Samodien.

There is a stir in the court, a derisive laugh. Judge Pandy lifts his head and glares at the source of the sound. She turns around deliberately to look. Everyone has gone quiet.

Harun is undeterred. "I was about to say that perhaps Professor Lurie angered the killer for some reason, perhaps he said something to him ... maybe he insulted him when he should have said nothing. We are often told that we have to cooperate with our attackers. These robbers are sometimes poor and desperate people ... the accused here ... the men here, appear to be like this. Perhaps he resisted ... Or maybe he has enemies we are not aware of. After all, he has a history of sexual abuse and fraud. I think these could also be possibilities."

Samodien ignores the answer. "So who came to free you?"

"A police officer."

"And it is then you saw Professor Lurie's body outside the study?"

"Yes, but I didn't see his face. It was covered with a towel. But there was a large pool of blood forming around the head, and a large knife."

"And where was your mother?"

"She was in the main bedroom, sitting on the bed, crying."

"Crying Mister Harun?"

"It was the first time I've ever seen her like that. She was hysterical, it seemed to me. Miss Bennett was with her, comforting her."

"Did she take her medication that night?"

"Yes, Musa reminded her. We were both upstairs at the time, talking to her, saying we would stay in our grandparents' place for the night. We wanted to invite some friends over. Musa took her the pills and water before we went downstairs."

"Is the downstairs flat linked to the house?"

"Yes, there is a stairway that runs to it, with connecting doors at both ends that can lock."

"So you had friends downstairs, Mister Harun?"

"No ... we were going to have my girlfriend and her sister over, but they could not make it."

"So your mother took her medication at around six or seven then, before you went down to your grandparents' place?"

"Yes."

"And the men entered the house at about one in the morning, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"So by the time they woke your mother up it was probably just after one in the morning. Would you say, Mister Harun, that this would have been enough time for the medication to have worn off? Your mother would then have been somewhat normal, or should I say she would have

woken up and been in a normal state of mind, without being under the influence of the medication?"

"No, I don't think so. The medication made her sleepy, so the men woke her up from what was a deep sleep."

So the questioning by Samodien goes on for days. Watching Harun and Samodien in the court, she now feels more confident. It is not an overwhelming feeling of optimism. These are her sons, after all, it is expected that they would defend her. But hearing Harun utter those words, saying that perhaps it was David's fault, she admits feeling more reassured.

David just couldn't shut-the-fuck-up. He always had something clever to say. That I didn't understand what he was saying, that perhaps we came from two different worlds. With a different understanding of the way the world works. He said he was a scholar with a reputation for learning, a brain full of knowledge, in this age of ignorance, this post-Christian, posthistorical age.

He said he felt alienated in this postliterate home of mine here in Walmer Estate, with the plasma screen TV and the Xbox and the kitsch mementoes of my travels taking up every little small space in the living room. Of course, I knew what he meant, that even with a degree, he scoffed at me because my degree was in commerce, I was just an unsophisticated Muslim whore, with pretensions because of my money. If I had no money, I would just be a worn out poes walking down lower main road looking to suck a penis for R20. This is what I know he meant.

XXX

She recalls knowing their relationship was over six months before death parted them. He was, she concluded, not suited for marriage, was never suited for marriage, and not even prepared to learn to become a husband and father.

She knows for sure on a December evening, when a ceaseless wind over the past five days that has rattled her windows and peace of mind, has stopped, leaving the air quiet and hot. It is Thursday and she is dressing for a supper in Tamboerskloof with Khadija and some of their business acquaintances. She has asked David to come, but he has refused. He is morose, she can see, as he watches her step out of the shower and walk naked into the softly lit bedroom. He is lying on the bed reading from a tablet; he has discovered the advantages of digital books, which allow him to read in bed without disturbing her too much.

She dresses slowly, deliberately - black lace lingerie, sheer black dress falling to her ankles, ruby earrings set in platinum pods, a matching necklace, bracelet and ring. Flat, strapless silver-gray sandals. Her hair is tied up in a bun on top of her head as she puts on her makeup, dark around her eyes and red for her lips. She has bought a rose-scented perfume for the occasion, and sprays it lightly around her neck.

"You've been going out a lot lately," he says, places the tablet on the bed and props himself up with a pillow.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you've been out a lot, two, three times a week. All at night."

She does not mind a fight, but feels it unnecessary, so she says, yes, this is the time of year for that sort of thing, it is closing time for businesses, everyone is having a party, you know that. But

he does not seem to be listening. She feels, at that moment, a measure of pity for him, his bony knees and pale, dry, flaccid skin. He is well and truly an old man, out of touch, out of life soon, she thinks.

Then, unexpectedly, she is in an instant transported back to when she still served him. It is a vision of the utmost clarity of Windsor Mansions No. 113 in Green Point on a Thursday afternoon. She recalls how he arrives, rings the bell, punctually at two p.m., speaks his name, enters and heads straight for the bedroom, where he undresses and gets under the covers. She goes to the bathroom for one final check and then heads to the bedroom, drops her robe and slips in beside him.

Then you would fuck me as if I was your property. How you lorded over me. Even telling me to remove my vermilion lipstick and eyeshadow, too heavy, you said, because you did not like the stickiness of the makeup. How I obeyed and never wore it again. I was, as you had stated so rightly, a ready learner, compliant and pliant. I was not effusive in bed, but with a temperament rather quiet, quiet and docile. Not one of the women you created in your mind ever had any balls, so to speak. Never really challenged you in any serious way.

How could I reconcile my opinions with my line of business, is what you wrote about me, didn't you? I was surprisingly moralistic, you continued to say, offended by the 'udders', the bare breasts of women on public beaches; and how vagabonds had to be rounded up and made to work. Of course you were the educated professor and I only your somewhat melancholy whore. I suppose you thought your time in the little oasis, your indulgence of luxe et volupté, as you put it, would never end. Well, it is over. Those calm times are gone forever, but now you're still lying

on a bed, like my lord and master, trying to pretend as though nothing had ever happened and nothing has changed.

"Look David, I don't feel like this right now, so let's not. This is business. I don't watch what you're doing day and night, or question you about it, do I?"

"Not that you would want to know."

"Leave it, let's leave it, this is going to do no one any good. Please, I'm asking you ... pretty please."

"I suppose old habits die hard."

She looks at him. A little stunned. It was not expected, this level to which he stoops. So this is how it probably was with Evelina and Rosalind, and all the other girls and women, she thinks. Her voice is low and soft when she speaks. "I'm going to let that go David, this time. I don't know what's going on with you. And to be honest, I really don't care. But I'm going out now. If you want to come along with me, at this moment, or later, I don't mind. Perhaps you need to get out."

She continues to dress. He is silent now, and puts on the television, flipping between channels. When she leaves and stands for a moment at the front door, he has still not said anything. She knows it is pointless waiting for an apology.

NINE

It is two weeks out from her cross-examination when Zapped! begins pitting her against the State prosecutor. In one edition, across the tabloid's centrespread, *The Southeaster* features caricatures of the two of them in red boxing gloves and boxing shorts and shoes. There is, in the fighting game's parlance, a Tale of the Tape, with Shahieda "*The Poeseccutor*" Samodien listed as 1.6 metres, age forty-nine, large breasts with cleavage prominently displayed, married, two children at university, and major court cases won and lost: thirty-nine to three.

Opposing Samodien, Zapped! lists her, Soraya "*The Devil Wears Doekies*" Nuruddeen, as 1.78 metres, thirty-seven, also two children at university, with pale skin, the milky-blue eyes of a dead person, and hair tied in a scarf. She understands that Zapped! wants to portray her as a dead woman walking. In what has now become his signature depiction of her, she has horns, tail and clutches in a glove a three-pronged braai fork dripping with blood. She has zero experience in court cases, and is considered over-matched.

A week later, Zapped! has produced rubber and plastic models of the two characters, spitting images of her and Samodien, which his newspaper is giving away as special mementoes of the trial, a "free gift" only for new subscribers. She suspects that the newspaper has cash flow problems, just like her. She is advised to take legal action against Zapped! for his portrayal, but decides against it because she finds it so amusing. More importantly, she feels it is not the right time to launch a separate court action when her finances are so tight. Among other provisions for her trial costs, she has already sold two of her cars, and, quite reluctantly, a plot of land, a piece of farmland, in Paarl. (But nevertheless, David would be smiling at her from the Elysian fields,

or wherever it is book-learned secularists go, for standing up in defence of free speech, these days mainly linked with cartoons.)

She has remained in the single cell at the Tokai prison since the raid and has been receiving several messages on her new cellphone wishing her well, while others desire her dead or at least badly mutilated. There is no middle ground in this place, she believes. You are guilty or not guilty. This is her fate, she thinks, in a moment of self-pity, but then drives the thought from her mind.

She tells herself that she will refuse to be like David, who was constantly seeking sympathy for his suffering. She laughs out loud sometimes when she thinks of how David spoke about losing the gaze of females as he aged, how he became a ghost overnight, and had to learn to pursue or buy a woman like her. Perhaps this is why he turned to children, they were easier to manipulate, she thinks.

Who can take a man seriously who talks about cutting off his balls just because women don't look at him as they used to? What did you, David, say about retiring "from the game" of pursuing women? At what age, you wondered, did Origen castrate himself? "Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business." A clearing of the decks, so that the elderly could turn to the "business of the old: preparing to die."

How I laughed, till my belly ached, when you described how you would do it yourself with local anaesthetic and "a steady hand". You would be an "ugly sight", you said, snipping away at your balls, but not uglier "than a man exercising himself on the body of a woman." How could anyone, I wondered, pay good money to read this in a book, or see it filmed for the movies. What utter shit.

I can just imagine how your fucked up disciples must have gasped at your so-called insightful thoughts on ageing and death. At only fifty-two, nogal. Ha ha! Again, it was obvious you had never lived with the fear of death like I have. If this was your suffering, then I don't know what suffering is. This is how you, such a pathetic poet, tried to fool people.

Court One is packed. When she is led up from the holding cells and the shackles are removed from her wrists, she takes time to stand and look around. There is a mêlée of photographers elbowing each other to get the best possible picture. She turns to look at the gallery. Khadija is sitting to the left flanked by Musa and Harun. They wave, which she returns by raising her hand. Khadija mouths "good luck", but her boys are impassive. If she did not know better, she feels that they are accusing her, judging her.

Lucy and Anna Magdalena are on the other side of the gallery, peering down coldly at her. Anna Magdalena is clearly not a child anymore, from the way she is dressed, in a tight white top accentuating her breasts, black leggings with red stripes down the sides, and with the curls of her golden-brown hair loose, framing her face in a soft glow. She can see that most of the men and women cannot take their eyes off the girl. Anna Magdalena is taking photographs with her cellphone, and then standing and turning around so that she can take self-portraits, with the entire court in the background. The child has "blowtorch eyes", she had overheard David once say on the phone to someone about his grandchild.

When she heads to the witness stand, she sees Samodien having a conversation with colleagues, and then looking at her. It is a form of intimidation. Quite childish, she thinks, like schoolgirls huddling and whispering about a popular rival in the playground. Abubakr steps over and says something she does not hear. She imagines it is reassuring words, perhaps last-minute legal

advice. She smiles at him and places a hand on his forearm. Judge Pandy enters the court. It takes ten minutes for everyone to settle down.

"Miss Nuruddeen, can you please tell the court when you first met David?" Samodien asks. It is now a given that the prosecutor wears makeup; it is a little bit more extravagant this time, for the big day, false eyelashes, and a brighter crimson lipstick.

It does not escape her notice that Samodien is referring to her dead ex-husband by his first name. She will remain the cold, detached Miss Nuruddeen, Abubakr has told her. It is a cheap tactic but very effective. She takes her time to answer. "I met him at Discreet Escorts. He came there looking for someone to accompany him to supper ... for a meal out at a restaurant. He chose me," she says. She has been told to be a little expansive with her answers, to provide more detail, so that she does not appear unwilling to provide the court with the facts needed to make a judgement.

"How did he choose you, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"The way it worked was that he would be given a catalogue, so to speak, of all the ladies and gentlemen who offered escort services. I was photographed with a red passion-flower in my hair. He liked that picture, he told me later."

"You were pictured only with a flower. You were fully dressed, I assume, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"Yes of course. It was not a catalogue for a brothel."

"Of course ... I was not implying so Miss Nuruddeen. I merely thought you may have been in a swimsuit, or something similar ... like a model or mail order bride. I suppose you have not kept the catalogue from that time, have you ... so that we could see for ourselves?"

"No, I threw it out a long time ago. That part of my life ended years ago."

"And then you met David in person, after that, of course?"

"Yes."

She recalls that when a man came into the agency, which was in a three-story building two blocks away from Windsor Mansions in Green Point, he entered a small office with the owner, Anton Wyngardt-Mynhardt, sitting behind a high counter. The late Anton, who was fifty, fat and filthy, would tell the client he had three options: he could look at the catalogue at his leisure in the sitting room, meet the escorts as they filed in to make personal one-on-one introductions, or head for the bar area where all the ladies would be present.

Anton would always promote the bar, because there the client would perhaps be persuaded to have an overpriced drink, perhaps even a line of cocaine, that could be taken with a lady; the lady's presence being free of charge while the line is snorted, but not the cocaine. There was also the real likelihood, once the narcotics took hold, for the man to choose two ladies for an hour, or even a whole night at a hotel of his choosing. David chose to view the catalogue, she recalls, while sitting in the dim little sitting room with Venetian blinds over the windows, pot plants in the corners and stale smoke hanging in the air. He did not even have to see her in person. He knew what he wanted. A picture on a printed page would do.

I suppose I preferred being selected from the catalogue, if one can call it a preference; then there was no need to be walking single file into a room, or sit in the lounge, crossing and uncrossing my legs so that he, the potential client, could get a peek under my dress, if that was what he was into; and all the while with a smile plastered on my face for God knows how long,

while he decided who he wanted to fuck. Meanwhile he would sit there sipping on his drink, loving all the undivided attention. Did he really think that we were that interested in his penis?

After David made the choice in the book, Anton told me to go in to see him. He was in the armchair near the window covered by the Venetian blinds, his face lit up by the lamp on the coffee table. I could see he was a tall man, lines at the corners of his eyes, deep grooves around his nose, receding hairline. He had a certain flaccid quality to him, his clothing hung on his frame, as I imagined his skin hung from his skeleton. He had traces of what one could call handsome. But that quality was gone, those powers he had, or thought he had, must have fled.

I'm David, pleasure to meet you, he said. I'm Soraya, I said. And then he made some small talk for about five minutes, and I said that we could go into one of the en-suite bedrooms, if he wanted to. And he said yes, let's do. Inside in the room, he said he was a professor, of dead poets, he laughed, and then I understood the flaccidness. It was, I thought, in some way, just like that musty smell one gets when taking books with yellowing pages out of a cupboard or the attic after a few years. A mouldy, dated smell.

"I see ... and how long did this arrangement last? In other words, how many times did David pay to take you for supper ... or a meal, as you put it?" Samodien asks, with a faint purse of her lips. It is perhaps a smile, or mock disbelief.

"It lasted a whole year. He would come once a week to take me out. Mostly during the day. Thursday afternoons."

"He paid every single time, or did a relationship develop between the two of you? Also how much did you charge for your ... supper service? I assume there was also dessert involved?" asks Samodien, who appears as if she is warming up to the task.

When she answers, she decides to play along. "It was R400 back in those days, half of which went to the agency, as the middle-man. So I received R200. Yes, there was dessert involved. He loved red velvet cake as a happy ending to our meal." She smiles, but when she looks over at Abubakr, he is frowning, eyes narrow. He has warned her not to be too clever on the witness stand. No jokes, especially not lewd ones, that are a trap; she must be the grieving widow, Abubakr has said, whose husband was cruelly snatched from her by murderous criminals.

To make good money in the escort business relies on having a steady stream of walk-ins, especially at weekends. Importantly, it is vital to have regular clientèle. Of utmost importance was attracting those with thick wads of cash. In the early days, in those early days of my youth, anyone with money was allowed in, whether he just came stinking like fish off a trawler, or just out of prison, with green tattoos over his entire face and a penis starving for poes. Anton became a little more selective when a few of the girls were beaten up. I learnt the hard way. Got a black eye. Only once. But I bit half the fucker's ear off. So no one, at least not the regulars, ever tried any of that shit with me. I'd cut off the next fucker's balls who did that, I said.

Anton charged all of us out at the same rate, whether we were pretty or ugly, tall or short. It didn't matter if our hair was fancy or a dried out kroes kop. Some of those seamen from the East didn't like straight-haired bitches, too much like their wives at home. A little kroes koppie, a servant girl from the farmland, was what they wanted.

For being in this business, all of us paid the same price in some way or another; for me it was little scribbles on our front wall, facing the pavement in London Road: Soraya Likes Seamen. Soraya Swallows. Soraya Sucks.

"So it was always a business relationship then?" asks Samodien, her brow furrowing as if with disapproval. "This is the question I want answered Miss Nuruddeen, I want to know what developed between the two of you. Or let me put it this way: was there ever a time when David did not pay to take you for supper, or took you for a meal outside of your arrangement with clients at Discreet Escorts?"

"He always paid for my services," she tells Samodien. "We developed a relationship later, when we met up again."

"Miss Nuruddeen, what happened between the two of you when you first met? You were eighteen years old at the time, weren't you, when you met David, and you were married and living with your parents in London Road, Salt River, is that correct?"

"Yes, I was eighteen, but I was not married at the time when I was living in London Road. I had never been married when I first met David. As I have indicated to the court, the father of my children had died," she tells Samodien.

I was not married, no matter what David had found out through his so-called detective agency after I ended it and he tried to track me down. He was also wrong when he said that Soraya was not my real name. It has always been Soraya. I didn't feel the need to change my name. I didn't hide behind a pseudonym. Who gave a fuck anyway at that time. No one cared what I did, what we did in London Road to survive. They didn't put fucking bread on my table.

"You were not married?" asks Samodien. "This is not the information I have before me, Miss Nuruddeen."

"The father of my twins had passed away two years previously. I had never married him. I gave my children his surname out of respect."

"So when did it end ... what I mean is, when did your business relationship with David end?"

"We stopped seeing each other after a year. I ended it because he wanted something more than I could offer at the time."

"What did David want, Miss Nuruddeen, that he could not get through his relationship with you at Discreet Escorts? Are you saying that he fell in love with you, that he wanted a long-term relationship? Surely, this should not have been something to reject out of hand, considering he was a professor teaching communications at the Cape Technical University? And that you were an uneducated young mother, supporting two young children and ailing parents by working as an escort?"

"I didn't know what he wanted," she tells Samodien.

I remember when I ended it. David couldn't accept it. He called at my house, my home, my sanctuary against all the needy fucks like him out there, who think they can buy our bodies for an hour and own our souls. Did he think those cheap gifts he gave me, that enamelled bracelet at New Year and malachite heron at Eid would make me his property? How dare he, the poes. Just who the fuck did he think I was, or he was! Who gave people like him the right to do this, to just walk into your home and expect you to open your legs to their half-soft penises? For free. That's what he wanted. In any case, Gunther had come along. So fuck David. Goodbye needy, pathetic, cheapskate David.

The entire morning is taken up by Samodien questioning her about meeting David the second time: that second phone call he made, this time to her house in Walmer Estate. She tells Samodien that David had again made the first move, but there was distance between the two calls; time had taken the sharp edges off the history, so to speak, so she allowed it. It was all right because, on the face of it, he seemed to have changed from his trips to the Far East. He appeared warmer, more engaging, less cold, she tells Samodien, as lunchtime draws close. *Less like a black hole that sucked in the energy of everything and everyone around him*, is what she wants to say.

When the session ends, she sees that the woman with the red hair she has seen protesting in the streets, now sits next to Lucy and Anna Magdalena. She knows who it is. A reporter has informed her. Rosalind, David's Rosalind. It does not make sense to her why a man's former wife, no matter how good friends they have been, would take to the streets to protest like Rosalind has been doing. But these are not normal times. Fearful people are liable to do extraordinary things if they feel threatened. Rosalind, from what she can work out at a distance, is nervous, a little restless.

Why do women come to your defence, Davy boy? It was certainly not your fucking charm. Must be the goddamn crybaby look that you gave them, so that they felt the urge to rescue you, to mother you. Some fucking actor also has the same thing going on. What's that fuck's name again? Got caught being sucked off by a skank in some alleyway somewhere, wasn't he?

Now Rosalind is sitting here, all high and mighty, tits hanging out for the photographers, face plastered with too much makeup. She's probably a smoker, judging from her hands moving around all the time. Maybe she's trying to drum up support for her business ... travel agency

wasn't it? Here she is, defender of the author of a book on English nature-poet William Wordsworth, just like she was when she defended you against that student Melanie, whom she described as your inamorata who had dragged your name, your good name, through the mud at the university.

After lunch, Samodien is as energized as before and wants to move on to their marriage. "Why did David produce a will that gave you all his worldly assets?" she asks. "He does have a daughter, doesn't he? He made no provision for her in his will."

"We had an agreement that he would rent out his house and from the proceeds he would contribute to my house because he was living with me. There was still a bond, a small mortgage, on his house. He lost most of his pension after the sex scandal at the university, where he was found guilty of abusing his position of trust by having sex with a young student and guilty of fraud by falsifying her results. He didn't have much savings because he used most of his money to travel and teach in the Far East. He also did not have a job when he came back to South Africa. He said that he wanted to write more books. He had mentioned an opera. I really don't know what he was writing. He was so secretive about his writing. But I think he hoped it would make him lots of money, and give him recognition, and for it all to be turned into blockbuster films. So the deal between the two of us was that the house would come to me, to cover the costs of his living with me."

"Thank you for all that detail, Miss Nuruddeen. So you insisted on the house even though you knew Miss Lucy Lurie was his daughter? You felt no guilt over denying his daughter her rightful inheritance?"

"David told me that Lucy had been set up with a farm. He had helped her to buy the place, and that she was financially stable. The farm would go to Anna Magdalena if Lucy died. That's what he said."

"So you felt no guilt, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"It's not a matter of guilt, My Lord. I didn't force him to do anything. It is a matter of two people, who loved each other, ensuring that they provided for disability or death. My mother always told me that if poverty knocks at the front door, then love flies out of the window. It is also no secret, as the court has heard, that I was having financial difficulties too. He was living in my house. He owed me security."

"So it was really a business transaction then, Miss Nuruddeen. This arrangement between you and David seems very much like this, doesn't it?"

"That is not what I would call it, My Lord. This is what men and women do every day when they get married. Arrangements like these are made all the time. It does not ... did not detract from our love for each other."

"You say that you loved each other Miss Nuruddeen, but it appears that you harboured a great deal of anger towards David, didn't you? How do you explain the stabbing incident and the decision to sleep in separate bedrooms?"

"All couples go through rough patches. David knew this, he had been married and divorced twice before he married me. I had been married once, to Gunther Grass, but he died, as everyone knows. We were going through a rough patch and so we decided to sleep in separate bedrooms. It was a temporary arrangement. The incident with the fork was an accident."

"Let's go back again Miss Nuruddeen, to the stabbing. You've claimed in your statements to the court that you were confused on the night of the murder because of your medication, that's why you made those statements to Captain Cloete," says Samodien.

"Is that a question?" she asks Samodien.

Now Samodien is irritated. "This is a serious matter, Miss Nuruddeen. A man, your husband, an upstanding member of the community, a teacher, has lost his life ... And you are on trial for his murder. Which means the future of your life, your freedom, that is, also hangs in the balance. Need I remind you that in terms of the charges against you, that you face a minimum of fifteen years in prison. I would sincerely hope that you are not trying to waste the court's time by being obstructionist."

Obstructionist se ma se poes.

"My Lord, I am not trying to waste the court's time. I am merely asking if a question has been asked. It did not sound to me as if I was asked a question. If no question was asked then I cannot provide an answer. I certainly want to use the opportunity in court to clear my name. It has been a trying time for me and our family because of our loss. I have lost my husband, friend and mentor ... I want to ensure that those responsible are brought to book."

Samodien does not reply for a moment, but stares at her. "Thank you for that assurance Miss Nuruddeen. Let me then restate what I asked you earlier, perhaps I can clear up the misunderstanding you have about what I was asking you. Let's see ... yes ... did you tell Captain Cloete on the night of the murder, before he asked you any questions, that you were on medication, that you were confused? And ... did you also tell him, without any prompting, that the stabbing was about a minor disagreement over finances?"

"Thank you for those questions. My Lord, I cannot remember what I told Captain Cloete that night. I was confused, I had been woken up from a deep sleep because this was the effect of the medication. I also mentioned this in my bail application."

"Are you saying that Captain Cloete is a liar, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"No, My Lord, what I'm saying is that I cannot remember. I just don't know."

"I'm going to deal with that in argument, Miss Nuruddeen. But unfortunately, I want to put it to you, that your evidence is becoming more and more improbable. Do you want to comment on that Miss Nuruddeen?"

"No, I don't want to comment on that, My Lord."

This questioning goes on for an entire week. She feels that Samodien wants to tire her out, to force a mistake, a confession. But she has been sleeping and eating well. Prison food is not to her taste but she had been brought her favourites, with the aid of a Mother. She has been eating brown rice, special cuts of meat, green salad, dark chocolate and drinking lots of water.

She believes there is nothing anyone can do, not least Samodien, to divert her from the truth: that she is no criminal. Even so, she feels that public opinion is against her, and that Judge Pandy will ultimately decide to send her to prison. Even though she has been calm and articulate and presented herself well, perhaps this is not enough. She recalls David's trial, his secular trial, he called it, how he said he had been standing up for a principle, in the face of the charges at the university. This is what she is doing – standing up for a principle.

What fucking principles did he have? Rape and fraud. That's all. He hadn't changed. This is what I want everyone to see. He was still chasing after little girls. Why, I don't know. Maybe it

was his upbringing. He seemed determined to do whatever he liked, to gloss over what he had done, and then to walk away from me as he had done with Evie and Rosalind. They were fools, these women, to do nothing. I would never have allowed it.

XXX

A month before his death, David comes into the house with a bottle of wine, places it carefully on the living room table, and pours himself a glass. It is about nine p.m.; she has just showered, and is wearing only a wrapper. She is sitting on the couch, feet up, and does not see him immediately. It is only when she turns around and greets that she sees the bottle. Meerlust, again. She wills herself not to get angry.

"Look David, this is unnecessary. Why are you doing this? This is my house. I'm asking you nicely, again, like I did the other day, to stop what you're doing. Put that away, throw it away. Especially before Musa and Harun get here."

"You drink don't you, Soraya? Worse even, you are not averse to a line of cocaine on occasion, so what is the problem?" David says to her. "What is the whole story with hiding it from your children? Stop being such a hypocrite."

"This is not about the wine or the coke, is it? You're just trying to make me angry. This is about me and you, what you think I've done to you. I've done nothing, I'm still prepared to stay in this marriage and see it work."

"Don't think I'm a fool. I know that I am an old man, that you are a young woman, with needs that I cannot meet. Desires of the unlovely, that is how you view me. That's how all you women now view me. That is what whores are for ... for people like us ... men like us ... are they not?"

Stop your whining, she wants to say. She recalls reading in that book of his the same tired old story when he met with Rosalind, after his disaster with Melanie, about how whores were there to "put up with the ecstasies of the unlovely". *You've well and truly run out of material*, she thinks.

"I'm telling you again," she now tells him, "I'm going to ignore what you're saying. Whatever you're thinking I'm doing is not true. Yes, I go out, spend nights out, but there's nothing going on. It's all just business." She stands up, walks over to the table, and takes the bottle. "You're drunk. I'm going to excuse what you're saying. You don't know what you're doing." She places her hand on his forearm. "Come, sleep it off. It's all going to be like a bad dream in the morning. You can apologize to me then."

He pulls his arm away. "You are never going to hear any apology from me, you whore. I don't owe you anything," he says and lunges for the bottle.

She steps back, and pushes him away with her left hand, still holding onto the bottle in her other hand, and walks towards the kitchen. She is not surprised at how easily she can handle him.

"Come back here, you whore," he says as he recovers his balance.

She ignores him and pours the contents into the sink. "Stop your shit David, you've already gone too far."

But he has followed her into the kitchen, pointing an index finger at her. "You are just a cheap sucker of men's penises. I am going to divorce you and leave with my house and life insurance, and take whatever else I can from you. That is what I am going to do. And there is nothing you can do about it. Absolutely nothing."

As soon as he says it, she flips the empty bottle over, holding it by the neck and hits him hard on his outstretched hand. She hears a cracking sound as bone breaks. David drops to his knees crying out in a high-pitched shriek. Moments later the sound transforms into a mewling, or whining whimper, like a dog, she thinks. As he catches his breath, holding his hand, with the bent, twisted fingers, he looks up at her, snot running from his nostrils and says in a voice hoarse with pain and hatred. "I will kill you."

As she gazes down at him, he seems slowly to recognize how empty the threat is, without substance, coming from an old man on his knees in front of a young woman in the prime of her life.

"Just fucking stop it now, David. Stop it," she says to him.

"We will kill you all," he says.

As she stands over him, still gripping the bottle having let it drop to her thigh, her sash comes loose and the wrapper falls open, revealing her breasts, her smooth flat belly, her shaved mound. *In a certain light, in a certain soft, forgiving light maybe she can pass for twelve?* She does not make any attempt to close it. She recalls reading how David loved breasts, mostly the neat little upstanding nipples of girl children. Ripples of desire, he had written, of a lust that did not seem to want to go away at that time, but that, she knows, never went away. She wants him to have a long look, she thinks. *It will be the fucking last time.*

What did he say of Lucy's? Seeing them as demure rosebuds when she was a six-year-old, and then again, years later, when her breasts were heavy, rounded, almost milky. The last time he saw them was when he had beaten her alleged rapist, that boy, Pollux. How things seem to stay the same, she thinks. Did that boy not threaten to kill David, just as he was now threatening her

in her house? Does history repeat itself like this - tragedy and farce? Is this plausible, or just ridiculous melodrama? Now she cannot help but think that that is how David, all of them, assess time and write history. *On the bodies of girls.*



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"Can you describe your relationship with Mister Faadiel Galant, Miss Nuruddeen?" Samodien now asks her.

It is the fourth week of the cross-examination. She has not slept well. Someone has been wailing about losing her baby. *The whole fucking night long.*

"We were old friends, as Faadiel indicated to the court in his testimony, but it is not true that we had a sexual relationship as he has claimed. He was constantly borrowing money from me. I was generous. I wanted to help him."

"And how did you help him Miss Nuruddeen?"

"I gave him money for his children, for their schooling. I even took his children on holiday with me, the two little girls. They were like my children. David welcomed it, he didn't mind at all. He encouraged it, he said it was the least we could do for those less fortunate than us. I knew, from the experience of my own childhood, what it was like for little girls to grow up without real support; how anxious they become if they have no money for school outings and other activities. They loved music so I paid for their violin and piano lessons. I felt an obligation towards them because Faadiel was like a brother to me. We had literally grown up together. He had helped me and my parents when we were in trouble."

"Soraya the Samaritan?" is the rhetorical question in *The Southeaster's* headline at the end of the week. The story run below continues the tone of disbelief: "Nuruddeen, 37, in often long, rambling answers, claims that she is not the monster that people have made her out to be. She has continually denied claims made by Galant that she was the mastermind behind the murder, and

that she had only been a good friend to him and his children. However, in a relentless grilling that went on for days, Prosecutor Shahieda Samodien attempted to call into question Nuruddeen's version of events, referring to the 'extraordinary number of phone calls' between her and Galant in the week leading up to the murder. The State Prosecutor claimed there were several inconsistencies in her answers, and that she had pestered the divorced Galant to kill her elderly husband Professor David Lurie, 70, the retired academic and teacher."

In the online comments section of the newspaper, she reads an overwhelming number of messages from readers condemning her. Gold digger, femme fatale, Black Widow, Black Bitch, *Slamse Hotnot*, is the consensus. It is all predictable anger. There are, in her view, a few reasonable people stating that she is innocent until proven guilty, that it appears David may also have married her for her money because he was not a rich man, despite his house and life insurance. There is little moderation of the comments. She understands that it is a place for people to vent their anger, often anonymously, a practice to purge themselves of the need to spill her blood. Or perhaps heighten the desire to spill it, she thinks.

At the start of week five of the cross examination, she feels more rested. It has been unusually quiet in prison. No woman crying out for help or attention, disturbing everyone's peace of mind, she thinks.

"On the morning of the murder, you said that the robbers got away with cash, in the region of about R100 000, but did not take the diamonds and dollars in the safe. Why is that Miss Nuruddeen?" Samodien asks her.

"They asked me to give them the contents of the safe, and gave me a carrier bag. I cleared out the South African currency. The dollars and diamonds were in a small flat black bag at the bottom of

the safe, and could not be clearly seen because the safe was built under the bathroom sink, into the ground. I was hoping that they would not check. And if they did check, I hoped they would not see it," she tells Samodien.

"They didn't check, did they?"

"No, they didn't."

"Did you not find that quite strange, that they did not check the safe that you, or was it David, had just opened?"

"No, I did not find it strange. I opened the safe."

"I assume David also had the combination? But they did not ask him to open it?"

"Yes, he did have the combination. He could not open it because his hands were tied behind his back."

"You didn't find it strange that three men, who had entered your house for the purpose of a robbery, would not carefully check the safe of their wealthy victim?"

"No, I did not."

"You were confused then, as you indicated earlier?"

"Yes, I did not think about it."

"But you were not confused enough to make a decision to leave behind the dollars and diamonds, Miss Nuruddeen, were you?"

"I suppose I just did it automatically."

"Automatically you say Miss Nuruddeen ... you automatically decided to save your valuables in the safe during an armed robbery. This does not sound like a confused person. If you were afraid for your life, with armed robbers entering your house, surely you would have given them the dollars and diamonds, wouldn't you? Because if the robbers had checked they might have hurt you for withholding from them. In fact, I want to put it to you, that you did not seem at all afraid for your own safety when you made that decision. After all, you were the one the robbers would have targeted if they did not get their money. You were not worried at all. Now this is strange. So why did you do that, Miss Nuruddeen?" asks Samodien.

"As I've indicated, I was confused. I think I made an irrational decision. I didn't really know what I was doing. It must have been the effects of my medication, combined with the anxiety caused by what was happening. I don't think I would have done that if I was thinking clearly."

Samodien shakes her head, purses her lip and raises her eyebrows. "And where was David at this time?"

"He was standing at the edge of the bed. One of the men was holding a gun against his back."

"Did David say anything to you?"

"He was looking at me, saying 'it's okay, it's okay, just do as they say'."

"But you didn't do as they wanted, as David advised you, did you, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"No I didn't. Again, I want to say that I was not by my full senses."

This is how the cross examination goes the entire day. She knows Samodien is making every attempt to have the court view her as the guilty fool, not even able to muster a proper defence for

her behaviour. David was the rational, intelligent, innocent one, she hears Samodien saying. All the men she ever knew would now be cast in the same light.

There is no analysis of David's behaviour. There is not going to be any real attempt made, I know it. How he walked away from all the women in his life. Even Anna Magdalena, the little mongrel child that he desired so much because she was just at the right age, with the right precocious temperament. A little fille fatale. If he had had the chance, he would have used Anna up also, and discarded her at whatever age she became a grown up. He just wasn't interested in real women; they were all part of the fantasy in his head. Whores, colleagues' wives, tourists at bars on the Waterfront, any pussy he could pick up with the least possible repercussions and responsibility.

He was like an addict in full-blown active addiction, this is what I want to tell the court. It has something to do with the endorphin rush of the pursuit and the climax. The obsession and the compulsion. I know what that's like, I've seen it so many times. He didn't drink or smoke. So how was he going to get his kicks? He was more interested in saving dogs and sheep. Do girls have souls like dogs? Most likely they do not. Otherwise how could he have sent them to the incinerators so easily. Incinerators where they burnt but did not turn to ash.

It is so laughable that he tried to reduce his culpability, in that softly lit room fucking me. Contrasting his act with the brutality of Lucy's rapists. What was it he said in that book? They do rape. And they want to enslave. At least, David suggested, his victims were not afraid of losing their lives, like Lucy was afraid when those men attacked her. Byron, David said, fucked legions of countesses and kitchenmaids, and there were "no doubt those who called it rape. But none

surely had caused to fear that the session would with their throat being slit." This is how David takes our suffering away from us and absolves himself.

She recalls how empathetic David tried to make himself out to be, how he said he was able to think of himself in Lucy's position, how she was frightened near to death, her voice choked, could not breathe, her limbs going numb. This is not happening, David imagined her saying to herself, as the men forced her down, it is just a dream, just a nightmare. He thought of how the men drank up her fear, revelled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. Call your dogs! they said to her, he imagined. Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show you dogs!

So it must have been okay if I, a mere whore, did not feel any fear of having my throat slit, of being terrorized, because you were only a man, a harmless academic, worried about getting old, about not having the powers you once had, weren't you David? You didn't act like a dog, and were incapable of the terror inflicted by those darkies on Lucy's body. And you didn't rob anyone, you argued. Like those darkies driving away in their Toyota with all Lucy's household goods, their penises, their weapons, tucked warm and satisfied between their legs.

What did you think of your penis all the years David? Did you ever dream of a bed of blood, a bath of blood when you fucked me, those other little girls, those children, like you emphatically imagined when Lucy was raped? Did you ever think about what price I paid for staying on at the agency? What choice did I have? What choice did your world give me - the world you made. Jacobus, Cecil, David - you are all one to me. Was it a lesser price than Lucy's price for continuing to live on the farm? The court will never truly know how I felt, how I feel now. It is not necessary for the court to know now, because the payback has been made.

"Now, Miss Nuruddeen, what happened after you gave the men the money?"

"They tied me up."

"How did they tie you up? From the evidence before the court, it appears they taped your hands in front of your body, not behind your back, as they did with your sons and David. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"When they did this, they then allowed you to make that telephone call to Advocate Khadija Bennett, during which you told her that you were being robbed?"

"Yes."

"Why did you call Advocate Bennett, Miss Nuruddeen? Surely you could have telephoned the police yourself? And why do you think that they tied you so that you could use your hands, and left you in a room where you could make a telephone call from the landline on your pedestal that was clearly visible from the door?"

"I don't know why they tied my hands like that. I called Khadija because I thought she would know what to do. I felt helpless, terrorized, fearful for my life. I had never experienced someone invading my house in this way, taking over my property, making me submit to them in this way, threatening my husband and children with their weapons. I think that anyone in my position on that night would have felt that way, My Lord."

"But why did they tie you that way, and not check for the telephone, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"I don't know why they would do something like that, My Lord. It appears that they were not experienced in robbing people's houses. This is how it appears to me. Also, I can't be sure, but I think the telephone was covered with a towel, or my clothes. I can't remember exactly."

"So they didn't check, a second time, for what appears to be an obvious thing such as a telephone?"

"That's correct. They didn't check."

"These are either highly incompetent robbers or they must have had some other reason ... But let's leave that for a while. So ... let's go back a little ... they locked the door and took David from the room?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't, like your sons, find this strange?"

"I don't know what I felt at the time. As I've said before, I was not thinking clearly. I don't know why they did that. Maybe they wanted to keep us apart for some reason. Maybe they thought it was better that we were apart so that we couldn't encourage one another to do something against them."

"You could barely encourage one another to do something, as you put it Miss Nuruddeen, with your hands and feet taped, could you? At any rate, was that the last time that you saw David alive?"

"Yes, that's the last time I saw him alive. I will never forget the look on his face. It was as if he was angry and resigned to his fate at the same time. I cannot explain it."

Resigned to your fate like one of your dogs being put down.

"Yes ... yes ... thank you for that. And then you say you waited a while and then called Advocate Bennett? How long did you wait?" asks Samodien.

"It seemed like an eternity--"

"In minutes or hours, please, Miss Nuruddeen," says Samodien pulling her little frame upright and adjusting her black robe.

She ignores Samodien. "It seemed like an eternity that I sat there thinking what to do. I saw my whole life flash in front of me. I could see my children, my parents, my grandparents in that bedroom with me. I was so afraid, I felt numb, I couldn't move my arms and legs thinking of the menace outside. They were animals, I thought, with no regard for my life, our lives ... I think it must have been about twenty minutes."

"In that twenty minutes, what did you do?"

"I first tried to pull the tape off my legs, but I couldn't. I could barely move my fingers because the tape was pulled over most of my hands and fingers. But I managed to move into a position where I was sitting on the bed. I first listened, to make sure that they were not coming back into the room. But before I called Khadija, I heard a commotion outside the bedroom, as if someone had cried out and fallen. I called out then to David."

"What do you mean you called out to David?"

"I shouted, asking him if he was alright, and I then pleaded with them not to hurt him. I said they should take whatever they wanted but to just leave us alone, in peace. There was no need for violence, I said. But no one replied."

"Why did you think they were being violent, Miss Nuruddeen?"

"It's because I heard that commotion. I thought the worst. It had sounded like David crying out. Then a banging, like a loud cracking sound. And then I heard footsteps hurrying away, running down the stairs. And I thought I heard a car starting up in the driveway. It was then I called Khadija. I thought that they had left."

"Who arrived on the scene first, Miss Nuruddeen? Advocate Bennett or the police?"

"It was Khadija. She opened the door; the key was in the lock on the outside. And then she came and started to pull the tape off my arms and legs. She said she had called the police, they were on their way. She told me to stay in the room ... she kept the door ajar and then sat down on the bed with me. She said they had hurt David. I wanted to get up and go to him, but she advised me not to. It would be better for the police to come and inspect the scene first."

"Let me ask you this, Miss Nuruddeen, did you kill David, or were involved in any way in hiring your fellow accused to murder him for his money?"

"No, I categorically deny it. I loved my husband. We loved each other."

XXX

Eight hours before he dies, David is in the kitchen removing the packaging from the supper he had ordered. She greets and says she is going to shower. It is Thai green curry, from the smell. Her favourite. She sees him making careful, deliberate movements with his right hand. His fractured middle and index fingers have been taped together but the splint has been removed. His bones are dry and brittle she thinks, heading to the bathroom, the bones of an old, dying man. She had not hit him very hard, she believes.

This has been the nature of almost all the men I've been with. So ready and eager to dish out the pain, the humiliation with their penises. But less willing to have their balls busted once in a while. They can cry, these fuckers. How they can cry! And if they don't get sympathy, they go around apologizing as if there's no fucking tomorrow. All various sly ways to manipulate. Then they write books and make obscure art house films about their sorrows. What did you do, David? Compose songs on your seven-string banjo, the one you got for Lucy in KwaMashu when she was a child. How you lamented your condition. Plucking the strings of your heart for the whole world to see. Ha, ha.

A whole fucking opera you were writing, page after page. How you imagined yourself as Byron who suspects your early ecstasies with Teresa would never be repeated. How your life was becalmed, and you obscurely began to long for a quiet retirement; failing that, "for apotheosis, for death." And how you imagined me, one of your Sorayas, as one of your Teresas, whose soaring arias ignite no spark in you. And your own vocal line, dark, convoluted, goes past, through, over me, or her, or them. Of course, you claimed you were in the opera neither Teresa nor Byron, nor even as some blending of the two, but were held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line.

And who is your Teresa, how did you imagine her? She is the eighteen-year-old charmer, bride of another man, whose skirt an Englishman first lifted in an Italian forest between Ravenna and the Adriatic Coast. Then, you cannot help yourself David, you imagine her humiliated in middle age, as a dumpy little widow, with a heavy bust, stocky trunk, abbreviated legs, looking more like a peasant than an aristocrat. You have her calling out for her love. Where is he? He is lost, is the answer. And how did you imagine your Lucy? ... as little five-year-old Allegra, Byron's daughter,

longing for her father, while dying of la mal'aria in a convent. And this you thought was art, David, this is how you thought it worked when you wanted to talk about love and women and girls. How strange and fascinating you found it. Siestog, you poor miserable motherfucker.

As she heads to the bathroom, she recalls that yesterday he had confirmed it; he wanted a divorce. He had not done so yet, but was going to ask his lawyers to draw up the papers. He would, obviously, he had said, remove her as the beneficiary of his insurance policy, and make adjustments to his will. He was grateful that she had not kicked up a fuss. It had surprised him, he admitted, at how calm she was, and that she had not asked him to reconsider. You would not have reconsidered if I had asked, she said to him. He had nodded.

"Whatever you want, David. It seems like this marriage is not working out. Perhaps it is better this way," she had said.

In the shower, she thinks of Faadiel and their meeting two days earlier at The Dutch Townhouse Hotel. She had needed the sex but he had spoiled it. *His constant fucking harping, wanting to know about my life with David. So jealous. He just couldn't shut the fuck up. They all can't shut the fuck up and just accept things the way they were. She decided to get dressed and leave early, not waiting for the lunch they normally shared together after sex. He had been angry.*

Now, she steps out of the bathroom, dries herself, and throws the towel over the telephone on the pedestal. Still beautiful, she thinks, looking at herself in the mirror. A goddess, with this body and face of hers. But for how long? She dresses in grey sweat pants and a white t-shirt, and heads into the kitchen, hair hanging damp and loose.

"Do you want to eat?" David asks her. He has placed two plates on the granite top. A small candle, in a red glass holder, is burning, her favourite sandalwood. The rice and curry are steaming. He has a bottle of sparkling red grape juice on the table. All her favourites.

"Yes, the last supper," she says, and they both laugh.

"I'm relieved it is ending in a civilized manner," David says. "I thought it was going to be rough, rougher than this," he says, raising his hand to show the taped fingers.

She dishes up for him. "I'm sorry David. Sorry about that and sorry it's ending this way. I suppose I can't control myself sometimes. You must know how I hate being called that ... labelled like that. I cannot stand it. It reminds me too much of a very dark place I was once in my life."

"Yes, I'm sorry. It was uncalled for. I do get jealous. But it seems our age difference is too great to overcome. I tried ... we both tried. I'm so sorry about this, really I am."

No, David, you are not really, truly sorry. How did you write about that apology of yours to Melanie's parents? It is so farfetched, the whole story, that I don't even know if it is true. In fact, at first, I laughed so hard and long, I had tears streaming down my cheeks. It took me a half-an-hour to recover. Whenever I thought about it, I couldn't help shaking my head in wonder, at the comedy of it.

Having fucked up that girl, you go to their house in George, to make amends, and then, unexpectedly and inexplicably, get invited for supper. If this had been real life, you would have gotten a beating right there and then. Anyway, as your unlikely story goes, you start hemming and hawing, talking about lacking the lyrical, not managing love too well, and other shit. Then

you rush to the bedroom, where Melanie's mother and her teen sister, whom just minutes before you were lusty over, and thinking of lubricating, are sitting on a bed. Then, with your little hard on, you drop to your knees, put your head to the ground, and say you're sorry.

Let me say again, that I laughed at first. I must emphasize this. At first. Because after thinking about it for a while, I realized what you were really doing. You were really mocking everyone. You sly shit. You were out to see if you could hook up with Melanie again, to see if you could fool her again. And then, when you saw Melanie's sister, Desiree, you thought it could be two birds, so to speak, with one stone. Which is how I view your balls, David, two cold, hard, tiny little stones. Pebbles in fact. So, you were really ridiculing everyone the whole time, thinking we were stupid and would never catch on. I know what you thought of Melanie's father, you thought he was the little dumb half-breed guy in the suit too big for him and an overreliance on the God that people like you introduced to him - a dog in breeches that will not die.

I know you, David, you're the type who would never apologize. You make the right noises and laugh at us behind our backs. That is why you have to pay. That is why I am going to have the last fucking laugh. Then who are they going to say is the fucking genius? Who has the better story: you little man, with pebbles for balls, with all your book learning? Or me, the Kaapse Slams, uncivilized, street-educated whore? I'll show you, all of you, who can spin a story better than anyone else in the entire fucking world.

Later, she invites him to return to the main bedroom, where they make love. It is early, eight p.m., she allows herself to fall asleep because there is enough time. At ten p.m., when she wakes up, he is not next to her. She knows he is probably reading, in the study, perhaps writing. She does not know which. She makes a call to Faadiel. She does not worry that afterwards it may be

used against her. She has an alibi. Faadiel sounds nervous, so she hangs up. She dozes off, wakes up, reads, watches the news.

At one p.m., she hears voices coming from the study. They have arrived. They come into the bedroom, with David's hands tied behind his back. She stands up, pulls her hair up, ties it into a ponytail. It is Faadiel, she recognizes, even with the balaclava. She does not know the other man. "The boys?" she asks. Faadiel says they are tied up. *Safe*, she wants to say.

"Not here," she tells them. "On the landing, on the tiles." She does not want blood on the carpet, she thinks, because then everything would have to be replaced. She sees the realization now on David's face. His eyes widen in disbelief, anger, pain, and then he appears as if he is about to cry.

"No, please, not like this," David says. "Please Soraya. Why like this? I'll sign anything, please don't." He is crying now, tears and mucus flowing into his mouth.

She takes some tissues from the box next to her bed and wipes his face. And then they move onto the landing. She asks Faadiel: "Did you bring the police baton?" She can see him hesitating, even though she knows he is filled with rage. He nods and says nothing.

"Do it," she says.

They place a sock in David's mouth, covered with tape. Faadiel pushes him to the ground and pulls down his pants. Faadiel opens a bag he has been carrying, removes the baton. Faadiel says wait and goes downstairs and returns with another man, a third man, and tells them to open up David's legs. "Hold him still," Faadiel says as each man grips a leg and forces David's legs open. He forces the baton up between David's legs, who cries out, struggles as the hard plastic is thrust into his body, and then passes out.

She goes down to the kitchen and takes the large butcher knife from the rack, and washes it carefully in the sink. Then takes two pairs of surgical gloves from a kitchen drawer and pulls them over her hands, before picking up the knife. She goes upstairs and takes a large towel from the bathroom. It takes ten minutes for him to regain consciousness. She drops onto her knees beside his face, so that he can see her face.

"Goodbye David, it'll be quick now, don't worry. Over before you know it," she says. He shakes his head, crying uncontrollably and starts to thrash his legs about, trying to speak through the gag, to tell her to stop, she thinks. "No more talking, David," she tells him. "Time for that has passed a long time ago."

She gets up, places a knee on his back, pulls his head up by his hair, and starts cutting his throat with a sawing motion because she has to get through to the large blood vessels. The knife she has had sharpened. It has to be very sharp. She knows because she has done this before, slaughtered sheep several times, even a large bull once for Eid Al-Adha. The animals' heads were placed over a hole, dug in their yard in Salt River and held down, just like this. When the throat is cut, all the blood gushes into it. She has never been squeamish. She knows she has to do it, not Faadiel or the other man. *They would fuck it all up*, she thinks.

There is a hissing sound from David's lips, then gurgling and his blood spurts out onto the tiles. His legs continue to thrash about. She thinks that the last thing to happen now is for him to survive, recover and tell everyone about it. She pulls his head up by the hair again and repeats the movement until the blade hits the bone of his spine. His body slacks and then goes still. The two men are looking at her. In horror, amazement, maybe both. She places the knife next to

David's head, takes one towel, wipes the blood off her hand, pulls off the gloves and wraps them all up in the towel. "I'll get rid of it," she says.

She tells the men to tie her up and lock her up in the bedroom. When she looks at the clock it is two a.m., a fitting time for a killing.



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The night before her High Court appearance for the verdict, she decides that there would no longer be any pretence. She had asked Khadija for one of her dark business suits and a white blouse, cut low, that would show off her breasts. She had been happy with the outcome of her chest augmentation. The scars had healed up without any problems. The scarf would be dropped completely. Perhaps draped around her shoulders if she felt cold. She has never been able to understand the requirement of the scarf over hair, but then again, each to her own.

In the morning, Judge Pandey enters the court with a leather briefcase. The case reminds her of one of her teachers at primary school, an officious little man, with pudgy fingers and a body shaped like a rugby ball, with a tendency towards violence with a cane. She also thinks of the finance minister entering parliament and everyone waiting with some expectation of what sins would be taxed.

Judge Pandey takes almost an entire day to read out his verdict. He says Faadiel Galant, although an unremarkable man, "with a crude nickname not uncommon in his community", was a trusted witness for the State. He says that Faadiel had faced "a long and gruelling cross examination by Accused Number One's advocate Abubakr Ali Omar. Although apparent discrepancies emerge, as inevitably happens in such cases, the essential features of his version of events remained intact and plausible."

Pandey says Faadiel had simply been caught in the "web of a worldly wise woman, a multimillionaire, who ran her businesses with an iron fist in a velvet glove". She chuckled to herself at that one. Pandey added that to him, although it was not within the court's scope to make

a moral judgement on her marriages, she appeared to have taken "advantage of the vulnerability of elderly and frail gentlemen to build up her fortune".

Just after lunch, Judge Pandy gets to the heart of the matter: "... unreliable, inconsistent, a testimony that festers with lies, who committed the brutal, premeditated murder of her husband for material gain." It does not come as too much of a surprise. She had hoped that it would be different, but the odds had never been good. Being a realist is an undervalued virtue, she reminds herself. When she turns around to look at the gallery and her boys, she smiles. They do not understand why she is so unconcerned, she can see.

A month later, Pandy announces the sentence. For her "sheer savagery", he sentences her to twenty-eight years in prison, with her fellow accused, Goolam Parker, Armien George and Jeffrey van der Schyff receiving twenty-four years each. *Faadiel Galant, the fucker, walks free.* She sees Faadiel smile as the sentence is announced, just as he did when she was found guilty.

Now you have left me no choice, she wants to say. Two months later, she accesses *The Southeaster's* special edition on her phone. She is lying on her cell bunk, in the Worcester Valley Women's Correctional Services Facility, where she has been transferred. The phone's book-shaped screen illuminates a faint smile.

"Dooie David's Dirty Dozen" is the headline. The faces of the children and their private parts are obscured with black bars. The newspaper has not done the same for David, he is recognizable in most of the twelve photographs published. One shows a child lying naked next to him on a bed, another of the same child standing in a tub next to the bed, while he washes her body with soap. "Taming a barbarian child", is the caption that appears written on the photograph. In one chiaroscuro photograph, a girl child in a diaphanous white gown stands in a doorway, watching

adults have sex, with the background, seen through an open window, appearing to be Russian church domes. "Developing taste in a child" is the caption.

There are several depicting a man appearing to be David in sexual role play. This includes him in the robes and wig of an English magistrate mounting a young, skinny, Asian-looking black-haired girl. The caption is: "The sweetest, the youngest, the newest." And another of him as a farmer, in riding boots and hat, heaving on the same girl, on a bed with a Victorian-style, wrought-iron headboard. There is also one of what seems to be a mother and daughter in bed with David, who is fast asleep, with the caption: "Loving the mother, destiny to love the daughter."

And another of a small girl sitting on a man lying down on a bed, with a caption, "A little goddess in ecstasy as she mounts the god Shiva". It is just like in that disgraceful book she read, where a famous writer, whom David liked so much, imagines having sex with a small girl; and hurting child prostitutes, again and again, so that they are beyond mere wincing, mere bearing of pain, where their very lives are in danger.

In an editorial, *The Southeaster's* editors say they had agonized over the decision to publish the photographs, which are only a few of more than twenty, passed onto them from an anonymous source. "In the final analysis, it was decided to go ahead in the public interest," they state. "Everything possible has been done to protect the identities of what appears to be children in these photographs. We are acutely aware of the high rate of crime against women and children in this country, and feel we would not be doing justice to the victims of sexual assault to keep these barbarous photographs from public scrutiny."

The Friends of David Campaign issue a statement questioning their authenticity. "Perhaps they are photo-shopped, fake news," the organization states. "This appears to be an attempt to subvert justice, to sully the good name of a respected member of the community, a teacher, an author, a man who cared for the intellectual development of young people," the statement reads. "And who knows if these are children? Has someone checked them out? We call for a full investigation, and for the law to take its course before any snap judgements are made."

She makes a note that Zapped! has been conspicuous by his absence. There are no cartoons of her published with the pictures. There are attempts by the newspaper, and all the country's media houses, to get comment from her. She initially refuses politely, but with the prison authorities inundated with requests, she issues a short statement, through her lawyer. "I do not know what to make of these photographs. If it is true, this is not the David I knew, he was a loving man, husband, father and grandfather. I cannot reconcile my life with him with these horrendous images."

She has, to the consternation of some of her cellmates, been collecting clippings and video of all the news concerning her. Many find this strange. Ruby, her fellow husband-killer, who bunks below her, says she has a ghoulish sense of humour. Ruby, she thinks, has been reading too many modern-day crime novels, and has no sense of history. *It is material I'm gathering, I've got a story to tell*, she wants to tell Ruby.

She had also made some enquiries about having her life story written. She had even written a letter to the prize-winning Australian author, Elizabeth Costello, urged on by the book she had read *The House on Eccles Street*, about Molly Bloom, the wife of Leopold Bloom, the principal character in James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*. Elizabeth had made her name with that book, her

fourth one. Molly is a fiery woman who takes *no shit* from men. She had been pleasantly surprised when she received a reply from Elizabeth. She thinks it is probably because her trial had garnered worldwide attention because of the minor celebrity of David in the academic world. She had been intrigued by the fact that a small critical industry had developed around Elizabeth and she was making good money out of appearances, even though she has, apparently, written nothing useful in years. This is the reply she has received:

Dear Soraya,

Thank you so much for your letter. I am honoured that you have considered my mother, Elizabeth, in your desire to have your life story written. It is a noble enterprise. Women's voices should be heard, such as that of Molly Bloom, Lady Chandos, Mrs Elizabeth Curran, Magda and Susan Barton. Unfortunately, she cannot take up your offer at this time. You may not know it, but my mother has reached the stage where she thinks her writing life, her earthly life too, is coming to an end. In any case, even though my mother has the power to think her way into other people, into other existences (she has even been a man and a dog, as I once told someone), she believes that she would not be able to write authentically about a woman from your part of the world, which would be a disservice to you.

I wish you all the best with your proposed book.

John C. (On behalf of Elizabeth)

Melbourne, Australia.

She has followed the media frenzy carefully and made careful note, in her black book, of the headlines: "Lewd Letch Lurie", "Lurie's Litany of Lies", "Soraya's Seedy Spouse", "Scholar se Skande", "Scholar's Shameful Secret", "Lurie Loer Laaities", "Lurie Verlei Laaities". There has been an outpouring of sympathy for her. Among the sceptical, there are those who believe that

she leaked those photographs herself. Who else could have taken them? Who else could be the mystery photographer?

A week later, *The Southeaster* now runs a story with two new photographs, of two young girls lying naked in a bed next to David. The report states that they are the children of a person involved in her court case. "In a sensational turn of events, *The Southeaster* can now reveal that it has identified the father of the two children, aged nine and ten. Since they are minors, the name of the man cannot be released to the public at this stage. The authorities have been informed." Zapped! makes an appearance with a cartoon, and a caption: "The Devil was David."

She remembers that she had found out about that second safe, David's hidden one, by chance. The boys had told her David had workers come to the house while she was away in Dubai for two weeks. They had been doing some drilling. Cupboards and shelving space for more books, David had told the boys. But the workers had been carrying small amounts of brick and concrete out of the house. It could not be from installing cupboards and shelves, Musa told her. Maybe it is for his manuscripts, she told them. What manuscripts, what was he writing of any use these days? Musa said to her. *Maybe it's for the pictures of his little girls*, she wanted to tell them. He had the safe built, she discovered after poking around in the study, in the concrete floor under the bookcase. It could only be accessed by removing all the books.

When she had the safe opened by a locksmith, she had found those photographs. She confronted David, who was remorseful. He said this "thing" he had just did not go away on its own. Perhaps he needed help with it, psychiatric intervention. He was so sorry, he said, so ashamed. More ashamed than at any other time in his life. Could she forgive him? Of course, she said. She could.

This is what a supporting wife was all about. She said she would destroy the photographs. But she never did.

Those photographs had given her the idea. It was business, she thought, just leverage, a simple principle that she had to apply to a man that she felt had proven himself fickle, to say the least, with his affections. She got the sedatives she needed from her doctors; sleeping pills and anti-depression tablets. When Faadiel's little girls came to sleep over because their Auntie Soraya was taking them on holiday or an outing, she ground up some pills and fed it to them, and to David. When they were sound asleep, she picked up the little ones, undressed them, and took the photographs. She stored the images with Khadija.

The night before David died, she had sent the pictures to Faadiel on his phone. When Faadiel telephoned her in a blind rage, she told him David's behaviour had shocked her. She had no idea he was so sick. Faadiel wanted to hurt David. Fuck him up so that he never forgets what he has done, he told her. She was so sorry, she said, because the girls were under her protection. She should have known. He had a history of violence against women, she told Faadiel. David may have said it was not violence, but it was. His actions had sucked the lifeblood out of some of his victims, she tells him. Faadiel had cried on the phone that night. Rage and helplessness would do that to a man, she thought.

It takes two months to sort out all the paperwork, to have her released from prison. There has been an investigation. Faadiel's witness protection is revoked and he is arrested. Goolam Parker has confessed and testified that Faadiel raped David. Goolam insists that it is not Faadiel who cut David's throat, but no one believes him. They are all liars, is the verdict of the appeals court. "They are the worst sort of criminals, not content to rob, they also murdered and then tried to lay

the blame on an innocent woman, a mother, a self-made businesswoman," the court's judgment states.

What happens when you kill a man? You become a little nostalgic, thinking of him, living and breathing one moment, and dead the next. It's as if you know him better than his own parents; they knew him as a baby and you know him as a cadaver. You take away all he's got and all he's ever going to get, as someone said in a movie. So what happens when you kill two men, or three? Gunther, I suppose, did not deserve it, at least not as much as David. Faadiel is not dead, but he might as well be. This is what it is; possession of his soul.

An hour before she is scheduled to leave prison, she checks herself in the bedroom mirror of the house situated on the grounds of the Worcester Valley correctional services facility. It is a special concession for a woman wronged. She has enjoyed putting on her makeup again, the way she wants to. She runs her palms down her sides and swivels in the mirror. Still slim, tall, honey-brown skin, lustrous long, dark hair, liquid eyes, and a whole life to live. Not bad for a woman of her age, thirty-seven, twice divorced. She has to her mind, solved the problem of her sex, the second sex, rather well.

Khadija is inside waiting for her. They are going to leave together. She pulls on her red coat, the one she got in Germany with Gunther. When she walks out of the gate, it seems as if the world's media has turned up. Reporters, behind a police barricade, shout out questions. How do you feel? What will you do now? Will you sue for wrongful arrest and imprisonment? She does not answer, but raises her right hand in a clenched fist salute and smiles. She holds tightly onto Khadija's hand.

Free, at long last? Can it really be true, can I place everything in the past, all of it? Can I finally let go? No, not yet.



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