

**MASTERS IN CREATIVE WRITING**

mini thesis



**UnSettled**

**a collection of short stories**

UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

by  
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## A note on sources

While some of the people who appear in this collection of short stories actually lived, they appear in this book as fictional characters.

I am indebted to my aunt Dorothy for our family history, *Four Families* (unpublished) which she researched and compiled and which I relied on for the information underpinning 'South Bound'.

I am similarly indebted to my cousin Ian for his booklet *Isabella* (unpublished) which provided sufficient anecdotes to pique my interest in my maternal great-grandmother resulting in the story 'Thicker than Water'.

Sources cited in 'South Bound'; 'By Any Other Name', and 'Unsettled' respectively include:

Woolf, V. *Selected Short Stories*. London: Penguin Classics, 1993.

Krog, A. *Body Bereft*. Cape Town: Umuzi, 2006.

Velthuijs, M. *Elephant and Crocodile*. London: Andersen Press, 1990.

## Plagiarism declaration

I, Sandra Hill, certify that this portfolio is my own work. I understand what plagiarism is and I have used quotations and references to fully acknowledge the words and ideas of others.



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Harriott is asleep under a jacaranda tree in her daughter's lush Escombe garden. Escombe is no longer part of the Natal Colony, the Natal Colony exists only in the minds of people like Harriott. Escombe, though still in the same place it's always been, is now part of the Union of South Africa. It is the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1923. Harriott has lived in the Natal Colony for thirty years exactly. She has been married for only one day less.

Dorothy's garden is wonderful, but according to Harriott, not as wonderful as it could be with a little more effort. Dorothy's bougainvillea are a riot of cerise, peach and white. Her dipladenias climbing the pillars of the front veranda – a profusion of pink. The creamy day lilies are in full bloom. The lavender is a field of purple and the plumbago hedge, where dragon-like chameleons lurk, is thick with blue ... a cool blue cloud at the bottom of the garden, Dorothy thinks. Boy is hard pressed to keep the monkeys from the guava, mango, paw-paw and avocado trees. Harriott pays little heed to the real reason Dorothy has no time for her lawns, beds, shrubs, hedges and trees. In a quarter of an hour or so, Dorothy will lift Harriott in her stout arms and carry her away from the heat into the cool of the house. It is not the time of year to be outdoors, but Harriott insists on being in the garden.

'That's the way it's always been,' Dorothy confides to her new husband, 'Mother insists and Dorothy obeys.'

Harriott is asleep under a jacaranda tree in her daughter's lush Escombe garden. The barometer has dropped. Harriott does not notice the thickening of the air, nor the band of dampness spreading along her back. Her chair is covered with blankets and a white sheep fleece. It is the day-bed of a woman whose own padding has melted away, whose bones are dissolving, whose joints have swollen over.

'It won't be long,' whispers Herbert to his bride as they lie side by side sweltering in the room next to Harriott's, the door ajar so Dorothy can hear her if she calls out. 'I'm afraid, it won't be for very much longer, my dear.'

Harriott's book is lying on the grass. It is a very slim volume, the slimmest she owns and the latest addition to her collection, thanks to dear Rose who tracked it down somewhere in London and sent it over. Harriott cannot hold anything heavier than the slimmest of books, nor can she make

the pages turn one by one. She reads Virginia Woolf's collection of short stories, *Monday or Tuesday*, published by Hogarth Press just two years earlier, in the most random of fashions. A page here, a paragraph there. What does it matter? Would the authoress object? Would she feel slighted if she knew an old (only fifty six mind you) ... would she mind if a woman riddled with arthritis was reading her latest book in so random a fashion that each character seeped into the next? Lily, the woman he might have married, the sad woman in the train, the sleeping Miranda, Castalia, Miss Thingummy. Would she mind that each story was losing its borders?

Harriott had wanted to read the story 'Kew Gardens', and Dorothy had opened the book to the right page, and placed it firmly in her hands. She reads the description of colours, patterns and plants before her eyes snag on a sentence a few lines ahead:

"Doesn't one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees?"

Yes, she thinks, yes. That's it. That is what a garden does ... it makes you think of the past, of where you have come from.

Harriott tries to turn the page. Oh bother, now the story is taking place on a train. Try again, Harriott. Now at a tea party. Try again, fingers. Is this the right page? Is it still 'Kew Gardens', or a different story? Hard to tell. Now there are lovers on the grass, lying under that tree perhaps?

"If madam, you will take my hand —"

'Sir, I would trust you with my heart.'

No, no don't! Not your heart, you foolish girl, idiot woman.

Harriott, defeated, drops her book on the grass and drifts into a fretful sleep. She groans out loud: foolish girl, idiot woman. The birds, little black-headed orioles, pecking the paw-paw skins the maid arranged on the bird table where Harriott could see them, hear the groan and fly off. The green mamba napping in the thick foliage of the orange clivias hears it and lifts his head. The monkeys in the mango tree hear it, stop chattering for a moment, and look about thinking Boy might be coming. Dorothy, her hands mixing a batch of scones for tea, the butter already too soft to turn sifted flour into crumbs, hears it and pauses. Was that Mother calling? She'd turn the radio down but her hands are sticky with dough, besides it's her favourite programme and in a few minutes, the news. Herbert likes her to listen to the news ... it makes dinner more interesting. Besides, Mother had insisted she wasn't to be disturbed till tea time. Dorothy goes back to her mixing, back to her programme, hums along with the music. She'll check on the old girl as soon as the scones are in the oven. Pretty warm out there under the jacaranda tree.

Harriott is asleep under the jacaranda tree in her daughter's lush Escombe garden dreaming about the past. And while she sleeps, she groans a long drawn out groan, as if puzzled, as if vexed. Perhaps she is wondering how it can be that women are still foolish enough to entrust their hearts to men? Perhaps she is thinking of her own choices? Life hasn't turned out the way she'd imagined. What was it that made her leave anyway? Has she ever regretted boarding that south bound ship? And why did she marry that man?

\*

### Rose's theory

It was an act of rebellion. That is what it was. And my sister Harriott paid the price for the rest of her life. I have no doubt it was disappointment that killed her, not the awful climate, not the hardships, not the horrible tropical diseases, those she could weather manfully. But disappointment, that's more insidious: that she couldn't tackle head on in her usual fashion, that she was too stubborn to acknowledge, not to herself and especially not to us. She never said much of course, had to keep face in front of Mama. But over the years her guard would slip, and now and then the odd line or phrase in her monthly letters would let me know how disappointing her new life was, how little it matched her expectations. *At least I have my garden* she would write, or *I'd join the League too if I were home*.

I don't think Rowland featured much in her decision to go, but his marriage proposal gave her spinning compass a direction different to the one Mama wanted. No, it wasn't about Rowland – my sister hardly knew him when she boarded the SS Nubian, south bound for Port Natal. They had met one summer when Harriott, sixteen at the time, had accompanied Lord and Lady What-What to Cowes as under-governess. Rowland had just returned home from fighting Zulus in darkest Africa. Their romance was brief, just a few weeks and a short exchange of letters, but it left Harriott heart-broken. She didn't hear from him for almost ten years, and then, quite suddenly he wrote to her and a fresh correspondence sprung up between them. It was wrong of course, for Mama to intercept his letters – she didn't want to see her daughter so hurt again. When Harriott

discovered her perfidy, there was an awful, awful row.

Rowland, back in Africa by then, must have been perplexed when he didn't get a reply to his latest letter, a proposal of marriage no less, so he wrote to a mutual friend and asked him to find out why Harriott had stopped writing. I still remember the day he came, that friend of Rowland's. His name was, Mr Clarke, Mr James Clarke:

There was a bite to the wind that made passers-by pull their coats tight about them, their hats low over their ears, as they hurried on down the road. We were in the parlour, Harriott and I. I was busy with some tapestry and she was pacing up and down at the window, always restless was our Harriott. Just as I was about to ask her to settle down for pity sake, she stopped dead still. There was a man walking up the road, glancing at a slip of paper in his hand and then at the cottages he passed. He was not from Stratford, even I could tell that by the cut of his coat. London perhaps? Was it someone Harriott knew? Was that why she drew behind the curtains, but kept staring out at him? The man stood just outside our house, took off his hat, smoothed down his fair hair and pulled on his sideburns. Harriott stood immobile, but I jumped up and ran out of the room, calling to Mama that there was a visitor, a strange man at our door. I knew something was going to happen.

That was James Clarke. Harriott introduced him to Mama as a friend she'd made in Cowes, a brother of Lucy Clarke. Mama was disapproving. She knew Rowland was also from Cowes and must have suspected a coup. Poor Mr Clarke. He was very polite and kept up pleasantries all throughout a lengthy tea. When Mama finally put her cup in its saucer, he jumped up and said to Harriott;

'Shall we take a stroll, Miss Lane?'

'A stroll? But it is bitter outside,' protested Mama.

'Just give me a moment to find my coat and hat,' Harriott said standing. 'We won't be long Mama. Be sure to keep the fire bright, May, and Rose, do your best to finish up that cloth.'

May and I clearly weren't to think of accompanying them. Harriott pulled on her heavy, grey serge coat and winter bonnet, but her gloves would not behave. Here was a finger turned inside out and she had to blow into it and slap it against her thigh, but still it would not cooperate. Mr Clarke took the glove from her and righted it.

I watched them leave from the sitting room window. Harriott had forgotten to change her boots, by the time they reached Chapel Street, her feet would be sodden. There were not many



people outdoors now. Those who were scuttled past them like crabs. But Harriott and Mr Clarke walked slowly, heads together. I watched them until they turned at the corner.

'You forget I am a person!' Harriott shouted, barely a minute after Mr Clarke had said good-bye at the door. It was already dark by then and Papa was home, scrubbing his hands at the kitchen sink. Mama was making apple turnovers for afters. May and I were setting the table. It was still half set next morning.

In one of the very last letters she wrote to me herself, towards the end of 1922, shortly before she had to give up writing altogether (already her handwriting was so deteriorated I could hardly make it out), she said she thought God was probably punishing her for the sin of insurrection, and if so, He must regard it as one of the worst sins a person can commit, for she was suffering terribly.

So perhaps I am right. Perhaps she gave up her home and her family all those years ago just to prove a point. Just to remind us all that she was a person.

### **Mrs Turner's theory**

When Harriott read to us, it made everything else seem like fiction. A dusk-like softness would fall across the faces before her, a softening and a slowing down, as if every gesture were in slow motion, every sound muted. Only Harriott's voice existed. The words themselves often escaped me, but the music of them filled my ears. Harriott's voice was like my mother's hand stroking my brow, lulling my mind. Her words would loop and dive around us, tumble at our feet and swim off in the breeze. Then one morning, it was the same morning Captain Maloney announced we'd reach Port Natal within two days, Harriott stopped reading, very abruptly, just broke off midway through a chapter.

'That is all for now, I'm afraid,' she said, more than a trifle brusquely. 'Mrs Turner, it's time for luncheon is it not?'

She'd caught me by surprise, I was far away, dreaming about summer picnics no doubt, and while I fumbled for the watch I wore pinned to my bosom, she disappeared down the gangway.

The girls were always pestering Harriott to read to them. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was their favourite. They wanted to know what happened to Elizabeth and Mr Darcy – the Dreadful-Mr-Darcy, as they called him. I don't think Miss Lane, Harriott that is, cared two jots about the lovers, she was more interested in the magazines borrowed from the Captain, but she always obliged them by reading a chapter or two before going back to her own books and magazines.

Harriott was a tall, skinny girl with hazel eyes and a mass of dark hair she wore pulled back quite severely, in the way of a governess, and to my mind, quite unattractively. She was a plain girl though her skin was lovely, a real English rose. She wore a cerulean blue skirt, with no hint of a bustle. Her tiny waist was accentuated by a darker sash and widening skirt which flared just above the knee. I remember that outfit exactly: the white shirt waist blouse with ever so slightly puffed sleeves and the short, matching jacket. It was the only outfit I ever saw Harriott wearing. The rest of her trousseau went to the bottom of the ocean, as did everyone's luggage, when our ship ran ashore in the River Tagus. Every few days, one of us would stay in our cabin – we were cabin mates Harriott and I – wrapped in a sheet, while the other would wash her set of clothing and hang it out to dry. It was the only thing we could do under the circumstances.

Harriott was very bookish, always reading, whatever she could get her hands on, or writing in her little notebook. She seldom joined in the games or play acting, not that she was unfriendly, or melancholy, not at all, she was full of life and thrilled to be aboard ship, always asking the Captain questions about what she could see from deck. I preferred to keep my eyes on board ship, watching the girls' goings-on from my deck chair. Being somewhat older and already widowed, I took it upon myself to look after them.

'What a lark they are having,' I had commented to Mr Pritchard that morning. I think everyone was excited by Captain Maloney's news, excited and anxious no doubt.

'Indeed they are.' Mr Pritchard settled himself in a deep wicker chair, pleased I'd invited him to join me. 'It is best they enjoy themselves in the time left to them, my dear,' he said rather familiarly, as one tends to be when meeting under such transient circumstances. Having dined with us each evening since Portugal, he now spoke to me as if he had known me all my life.

'Life can be hard in the colonies, especially for a woman.'

'So I believe.'

'Do you suppose it's the lure of romance that has them south bound?'

'For grooms most of them have never met? I very much doubt it, Mr Pritchard.'

'Ah well, there some who'd say any husband is better than none.'

'I'm afraid I simply can't agree. Given half a chance there is many a woman who would be better off on her own. But that is not possible in our great Empire, is it now, Mr Pritchard?' I said it lightly, but there was an edge to my voice.

'There now, Mrs Turner, I didn't mean any offence.'

'All I'm saying is that if these girls had better options they would surely have taken them.' I turned my attention back to the girls who were flocking around Harriott again. Lord knows if I had had any options I would not have been buttoned into that stuffy black dress, off to live as my brother's perpetual guest in some God-forsaken corner of the world.

Mr Pritchard leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The poor fool probably had no idea what to say to women with opinions of their own.

'Harriott,' clamour the girls, 'will you read to us again?'

Harriott smiles and slips her half-written letter into a magazine and tucks it neatly into her bag. 'What about a different story?' she asks. 'I could tell you a story about an adventurer, a woman adventurer who travels to foreign places just for the sake of ....'

'No, no. We want to know what happens to Elizabeth Bennet, don't we, girls?' It's Ida – ring-leader from the start.

'Really? All right then – where were we? Ah yes, Elizabeth just refused Mr Collins.' Harriott begins reading. But it wasn't for long before she broke off. 'That's all for now, I'm afraid.' she said, more than a trifle brusquely. 'Mrs Turner, it's time for luncheon is it not?'

After lunch I went down to our cabin, knocked and entered. Harriott was lying face down on her bunk, though she sat up very quickly, embarrassed I'd caught her all to pieces. She certainly looked a sight, her face was blotchy, eyes puffy.

'I told the girls, too much reading must have given you a headache. Do you feel a little better now?' And her hair, rich dark hair, had come completely undone from its usually sober bun. It made her look younger, hanging loose about her shoulders, more vulnerable. I picked up her hair brush and began brushing it.

'Tell me about this man you are going to marry,' I said after a while. 'When did you meet him?'

'In Cowes, in the summer of '83. Mr Hill, Rowland, was home on holiday after a stint in the army. I had a day off from my duties.'

'1883. That's a long time ago.'

'Yes, yes it is. Ten years.'

'Have you seen him since, your Rowland?'

'No.'

'Ah.' I kept on brushing her hair, long strokes from the scalp all the way to the bottom of her spine.

'He went back to Africa just after we met, adventuring. But he has a good job now as a clerk on the railways – a job with prospects.'

'And do you love him?' She was quite for such a long time, I thought she wasn't going to answer my question. Granted it was very impertinent.

'I don't know, Mrs Turner. I liked him when we met, but I was just a child then. So much has happened since. The thing is ...'

'Yes?'

'The thing is I don't know if I am cut out for marriage at all.'

'Some people are cut out for marriage, my dear,' I said, 'and some are not.' There. That is what I said to her, and I still believe it. 'Very few women have the luxury to say no,' I said. 'It's not that we lack courage, but alternatives.'

That is my theory. Harriott lacked alternatives.

### **Big Dorothy's theory**

Sometimes I think daughters know least about their mothers, or perhaps being more like them than is comfortable to recognise, we try to hide it, we become forgetful of how very like them we are. At least I am, though I think my father's gentle influence, his placid nature is part of my make up too. It was just that – that placidness of his – that annoyed my mother so. Daddy was artistic, given to day-dreaming, quite happy to sit and do nothing, or so it seemed to Mother, but really he was observing beauty, a leaf, the curve of a branch, the patterns on an emerald spotted dove, the shape-shifting shadows of the frangipani tree, the colours of the gaudy bougainvilleas. Daddy liked

to sketch, he had a notebook full of beautiful drawings, but Mother, in a fit of pique, tossed it out. I don't ever remember seeing him sketch again, not even after she had died. If he did, he did it in secret.

Harriott, my mother, was not at all dreamy. She was matter of fact and very organised, a hard worker, tolerated no nonsense – though she loved to kiss and cuddle us, play hide and seek with us in the garden – but only when we were alone, when Daddy wasn't there. She was very clever, and wanted us to be clever too. That was all right for my brother Harry and much later for little Arthur, they were naturally clever. When I reached my teens, she gave up badgering me to study harder.

'It doesn't matter much I suppose,' she said, 'women have to give up any sort of noetic life when they are married, and I dare say you will marry one day too.'

Mother seemed resentful of Daddy, not just for being placid, but for the way her life had turned out, as if it was his fault. I didn't know what noetic meant at the time, but it was clear Mother felt she had sacrificed a lot for very little. It's true she'd had a very hard life.

Mother arrived in Durban with only the clothes on her back. The very next day, in a little church on the Bluff, she married a man she had last seen ten years prior. Daddy had a house in the new suburb of Berea, and she was obliged to begin her wifely duties immediately. Just imagine, if you can, the shock of it all. Arriving in sub tropical Durban in the height of summer, every day scorching hot and pouring with rain, and Durban a small, scabby little place.

It didn't take very long, a matter of weeks in fact, before Mother was pregnant. My brother Harry was born before the year was out, and a very sickly child he was, not at all suited to the harsh climate. Mother succumbed to tropical fevers too, and they came down with at least one very nasty bout of Malaria each. Between looking after frail little Harry, coping with her own poor health, and running the house with no mother, no sisters, no family at all to help her, life must have been very tough indeed.

And then I came along, one miscarriage and three years later, a robust baby that didn't need (or get) the mollycoddling Harry got. Mother always loved him most, more than anyone – including Daddy.

War broke out with the Boers - The Second Boer War that is – when I was three years old. Down in Durban we were well away from the worst of it, but then at the beginning of 1900, Daddy, who

worked as a clerk for the railways, was sent up to Ladysmith, an important rail town, immediately after it was relieved from a long siege. Mother, Harry and I followed a little while later and we all moved into a small house. It was painted black and the grounds (you cannot described them as a garden) were still strewn with discarded shell cases. It was only a temporary home, and as soon as something better came up we moved again, this time close to the railway station and next door to the police station.

Mother started working in the garden immediately. That was always the first thing she did whenever we had to move. One thing I can say for Natal, plants grow even when your back is turned. I remember playing in the bottom of the garden, behind one of the beds mother had planted, plants whose cascading branches were already covered with masses of huge yellow trumpet flowers. While down there I heard horses. It wasn't the sound horses usually made when they came into town, the quick, crisp clip-clop. It was a much sadder sound, and it was the sadness that made me look up. Coming along Lyle Street was a party of bedraggled horses with even more bedraggled riders. Neither horses nor riders looked up when I called out 'Hello!'.

I heard Daddy tell Mother later that a group of Boers had come in to surrender at the police station that afternoon. 'Poor buggers,' he said. And Mother didn't even chide him.

Some years passed before we moved back to Durban. Daddy had stopped going to work – there was no longer work for him to go to, no money left to maintain the railway. It was during this time, a time of great depression across the whole Colony, that my little brother Arthur was born. Though she loved him, he was a great strain on Mother who was nearly forty by then.

Daddy turned down a new job with the railways because it was of lower status than the one he'd held in Ladysmith. Mother was furious, she couldn't keep a family together on the vegetables he grew, she said. They argued a lot, but always behind closed doors. The differences between them seemed to grow, rather than shrink with time. Mother would lose herself working in the garden and Daddy in his day-dreams. It was Harry, darling, sainted Harry who found work first, then me. When the Second World War broke out, Mother was frantic with worry about darling Harry, but he was found to be unfit and could not enlist – perhaps because of all those childhood illnesses.

A few years after the war Mother began to show signs of rheumatoid arthritis. At first it was manageable, but then she could no longer garden, no longer cook. Then she could no longer bath or dress herself, no longer write, no longer hold a book. As her pain and disability increased she

began needing more and more care, so I gave up my job as a dress-maker and nursed her. For years. My poor dear Herb. When he married me, he got my mother as well.

After she died, I found a small suitcase I'd never seen before. It was made of sturdy red leather and measured only five by twelve by fifteen inches. Daddy said he'd never seen it before either, so I thought it wisest if I opened it sometime when he wasn't visiting. The key, well that was easy, there was a small brass key tied on a scrap of faded cerulean blue fabric in among her under-wear. I'd always wondered about that key, but had known better than to ask.

Inside the suitcase was a magazine from the Royal Geographic Society dated 1892; a newspaper clipping about a woman explorer where Mother (I presume) had underlined just one sentence; "I could not endure a domestic lifestyle" said Miss Bird"; a type-written note from the *Natal Herald* dated 13 August 1908, which read, "Dear Mrs Hill. We regret to inform you, there are no vacancies for columnists at present." My mother had entertained notions of being a writer and not one of us knew about it. There was also a thick white envelope addressed to Mr R. Hill, 13 Enfield Road, Durban, Port Natal, in Mother's hand. There was no stamp on the envelope, nor was it sealed. Inside was a letter dated 24 December 1892 – and the address given was Residencial da Opiniao do Porto, Lisbon. Mother must have stayed there when ship-wrecked.

My dear Rowland, I read with trepidation.

There is something I must tell you. It weighs heavily on my heart. I thought I should be able to live with it. I thought it better not to burden you with the truth, but there is something about surviving a ship-wreck, something about another chance at life, that makes you look at things differently.

I could not go on. I could not go on reading Mother's unsent letter. I did not want to know what had weighed so heavily on her heart. And why, if she had written it, had she not posted it? Why ever had she kept it? My always composed mother in a turmoil? My matter-of-fact mother with a dreadful secret?

I was always known as the rough, tough one – but in all truth I am a coward. Boy was burning dry leaves in the fire pit at the bottom of the garden. It must have been May or June – the deciduous trees, jacaranda, leopard, golden trumpet, and the coral trees were all losing their leaves. I folded the pages carefully along the worn lines, and without looking down at the letter in

my hands even once more, I slipped it back into its white envelope, and stood-up. Perhaps I was in shock. I walked across the lawn, past the violas, the marigolds, past the sunflowers and the zinnias, past the purple cosmos growing beneath the leafless jacaranda and down the stones steps to the fire pit. Mother's secret blackened at the edges, contracted, and then burst into flames.

I suppose you could say I don't dare have a theory.

### **Little Dorothy's theory**

I don't dabble in make-believe, I like facts, so I will only tell you what I know. The facts we have about my Grandmother Harriott don't tell us anything about why she agreed to marry Rowland, nor why he took ten years to propose. We don't know what she did in those years, though she'd clearly had enough of governess-ing by the end of it, and we only know a little of what Rowland was up to. The only certain thing is that a correspondence ensued between them and towards the end of 1892, he asked her to come out to Durban and marry him. She must still have been fond enough of him to say yes.

Rowland, my Granddad, first went to South Africa as a member of the 60<sup>th</sup> Foot, King's Royal Rifle Corps. Why he joined the army was always a bit of a mystery. As far as I can tell, though he never confessed this to me himself, he had been involved in fisticuffs with some fellow who had insulted his girlfriend. The police were called, and Rowland spent the night in jail. Next morning, unable to face his shocked and pious father, he fled to the army. Some months later, two hundred men were needed to go to Africa, to Isandhiwana, where the British Army were preparing to go into battle against the Zulus. One February morning, their Colonel said;

'Let any men who wish to go, take one step to the front.'

Apparently, all eight hundred men stepped forward. Granddad said it was one of the most thrilling moments of his life. They sailed at the end of that same month ... ten thousand men in all. It was 1879.

The English made short work of the Zulus and troops were out of Zululand by September, except for some, including Granddad. And he was still there when the First Boer War broke out. He was at



the famous Battle of Majuba, a disaster for the English, but Granddad survived.

The following year, his sister died, and Granddad, who had been in and out of hospital with various tropical diseases and was by this time sick of being a soldier, appealed to his father to buy him out of the army, which his father duly did. He worked his passage home aboard a ship, probably as steward, and that is how Rowland Hill came to be in Cowes, the summer of 1883.

Harriott died before I was born. Though Granddad said very little about their meeting, I do remember him describing their first kiss, 'Aah! Nectar!' is what he said. But whatever he felt for Harriott at the time, it wasn't sufficient to keep him in the home country. Africa was in his blood, and he left again just a few months later.

Once back in Natal, he took on all sorts of jobs. He was overseer of a road-making gang on Town Hill, Pietermaritzburg, and a clerk for an accountant, before moving to Johannesburg, the City of Gold. It was there he became engaged to a Miss Zoutendyk, some connection of Paul Kruger, I believe, but gave her her walking ticket when he discovered something questionable about her moral standing. Perhaps because of this, he moved on to the Cape Colony next, where he lived in quarters in the Castle, as civilian clerk for the military. Next he took a job with lawyer William Schreiner (brother of Olive), again as a clerk. Eventually he returned to Natal. He had always admired his former enemies, the Zulus, preferring them to the Cape Coloureds whom he considered devious and unreliable. He became a clerk in Durban with the Natal Government Railway – a steady job with prospects.

No guesses or theories. That's all I know.

### **Sandra's theory**

Have you ever heard of Nellie Bly? She was so determined not to be confined to writing about gardening, fashion or food that she spent ten days in a mad house so she could write an article about it for the New York World in 1887. In 1889 she travelled around the world in seventy two days, six hours, eleven minutes and fourteen seconds – a record breaking trip.

Have you heard of Isabella Lucy Bird? In 1889 her father gave her one hundred pounds and told

her she could travel until she had spent it all. Isabella Lucy Bird visited India, Tibet, Persia, Kurdistan and Turkey. She stayed and stayed and stayed, adding to her purse by writing travel articles. She reportedly said, this Isabella Lucy Bird, 'I cannot endure a domestic lifestyle'.

Have you heard of Mary French Sheldon? If not, Google her too. American born, she moved to London in 1876. In 1891 she left , not only to explore East Africa, but to explore it alone (being the 1890's – alone meant without other Europeans). 'For what good?' she was asked, and 'Whatever prompted you?' Her answer? 'My interests lie outside the limitations of women's legitimate province.'

My great-grandmother Harriott Hill, nee Lane had heard of them. I have her red leather suitcase, and in it I found an old Royal Geographic Society Magazine which had an piece on Isabella Lucy Bird; several newspaper articles by Nellie Bly about her round-the-world trip (which one of Harriott's American cousins must have sent her) and an advertisement for Mary French Sheldon's book, entitled, '*Sultan to Sultan: Adventures among the Masai and other tribes of east Africa*'.

Perhaps I am guilty of transference, given my own penchant for travel. Perhaps I am guilty of making things up. I like to make things up. But my theory is this: Harriott wanted to see the world, and Rowland with all his stories of adventure, so far away across the seas in deepest darkest Africa, was the best ticket she had.

## Thicker Than Water

All Queenstown has come to see them off. The Mayor and his Relief Committee, lost among the jubilant well wishers crowding the platform. The Town Guard plays 'God Save the King'.

'We're going home,' calls out a child suddenly, dancing about in the aisle, and the quiet in the carriage bursts. There is a hubbub of women's voices; talking, sobbing, even singing. It is March 1902.

'Home,' Isabella says to Ian, who laughs because she laughs, then presses his face back to the window as the train jolts forward. What does he know of home? she thinks. A worn, bell-shaped canvas tent? A bath house, camp kitchen? Too young to remember the little house (number nine) left behind when we fled Johannesburg with the other Uitlanders. She smooths down Ian's hair, looks over his head and out the window. The refugee camp is behind them, on the other side of town. She will never see it again.

Isabella watches Queenstown creep past. St Michael's magnificent square tower rising above the town. Their own St Columbus (the Kirk, as George always called it) away in the background. There's where Market Building and Town Hall would be on Cathcart Street. There is the bakery, oh and there is Mr Spencer and his boys, waving.

'Look Ruthie, look Ian, there is Mr Spencer, the baker. Remember how he used to bring us sugar buns on Sundays? Right in the beginning ... when we first arrived? No?'

Ian tries to shake his head and wave wildly at the same time. The result makes the grown-ups around him laugh.

'He was just a baby then,' says old Mrs Goldberg, 'he cannot possibly remember.'

'Fancy that,' says her husband. 'Fancy remembering that, such a long time ago. What we wouldn't give for a sugar bun now, eh lad?'

'Good-bye, dear Mr Spencer. Good-bye. And thank you for the buns,' says Isabella, waving.

They pass a last scattering of buildings, a few small tin-roofed houses, and that, ...that would be the outer ring of defence. Isabella wonders they put so much faith in a few mounds of earth, trenches and sandbags. Would they have made a difference had the Boer come any closer?

'Goodbye Bowerskop. Good-bye Longhill. We're going home.'

The mountains lapping the north side of town are covered in all shades of Tamboekie Thorn

yellow. Slowly, slowly, the train pulls them away from Longhill's protective arm. Isabella would never forget any of it

The Goldbergs, as wrinkled both of them as a school boy's sock, and their spinster niece, Ruthie, sit opposite Isabella. They have the seats to themselves, right at the end of the last carriage, just before the guard's-van.

'Second class is not so bad. Not as bad as the cattle trucks we came in, huh?' says Mrs Goldberg looking around the carriage. 'Not so cramped, either. Though a sleeping coach would have been better for a 500 mile trip.'

'Look what I've got,' Ruthie says to Ian, cupping something in her large hands, lifting one work roughened finger to make a peeping hole for him to peer into. Ian slides off Isabella's lap.

'Is it something to eat, Miss Ruthie?' he asks.

Across the aisle sit the Harris family. Three girls in their too-short, washed out frocks and pinafores, no socks in their boots, turn away from the window. Isabella smiles at them.

'Mother, we're hungry,' clamours the largest girl, 'starving hungry.'

'What already? But we have only just started,' Mrs Harris says. 'I don't know how in heaven's name I'm going to feed you lot when we get home. Such appetites.' She scratches about in her carpet bag and takes out their food-parcel. 'I suppose this is a special occasion. Let's see what we have here.'

Ian looks up from Miss Ruthie's game at the first sound of paper crinkling, watches, but doesn't say a word.

'Sandwiches.'

There's a familiar, dusty smell, sweetish even. Isabella won't turn her head to look. She hears the girls chewing their coarse oat bread. There is no more chattering. Mrs Goldberg looks round the carriage humming to herself ... Beethoven's *Fleur de lis*. Mr Goldberg has his hat tilted over his eyes.

Should Isabella open her parcel too? Perhaps she could share just one sandwich with Ian now? Pretend it's ham, not horse meat? No, better to save them till later. Who knows how long the journey across the Orange Free State will take, or when next she'll get more? Besides, she notices, Ian is back to his game.

'Is it a ball?' he asks.

If we're lucky, Isabella thinks, George will have found some kind of work already, and surely,

food will be easier to come by?

'Is it a frog? It is a frog! Mother, Miss Ruthie has a frog.'

'Who's she?' Mrs Goldberg leans forward suddenly and taps Isabella on the knee with a gloved hand, the stitching coming apart at the finger tips. She jerks her head in a sideways direction. Opposite Mrs Harris sits a woman in a dark cloak too heavy for the weather. Her dress is black, her boots polished. Isabella can't see much of her face, just a smooth expanse of cheek and a sharp chin protruding from under the brim of her large, black bonnet, bent towards the babe in her arms.

Nobody I recognise either, thinks Isabella, emptying out her mental pockets, trying to remember all the women she's helped during their confinement in the past three years.

'Mr Goldberg heard there might be Boers on the train. Overheard one of the committee saying so while queuing for our food-parcel.' says Mrs Goldberg.

'More likely just someone lodging in town. Lots of women did.' Isabella whispers back, then closes her eyes, grateful for the noise of the train. She will not be drawn into Mrs Goldberg's prejudices. But Mrs Goldberg is not to be dissuaded.

'Why, Mrs Harris,' she says loudly, 'I am sorry to interrupt your dinner, but you haven't introduced us to your companion yet. You must be Mrs ... ?'

'Not with us,' says Mrs Harris, from behind a hand covering a mouth full of bread.

The woman in the black hat looks up. 'Morgan. Mrs Andrew Morgan.' She sounds like someone clearing their throat of an annoying crumb, the 'gr' and 'g' gravelly, the 'n' heavy, drawn out.

'Ha!' says Mrs Goldberg, settling back into her seat, eyes saying I told you so. 'Ha! As if the Bittereinders out there, God knows where, aren't enough, we have a Boer in our carriage.'

'We're quite safe, my dear, quiet safe,' Mr Goldberg says patting her arm, 'block-houses all the way.'

'This monstrous war is over, Mrs Goldberg,' says Isabella firmly. 'and everyone here has suffered. I'm very sorry for your loss, Mrs Morgan, Reverend Morgan was a fine man.' Isabella turns her eyes on Mrs Harris, then Ruthie, then back to the Goldbergs. Everyone in camp knew young Reverend Morgan. Mrs Goldberg picks at the holes in her glove, looks out the window. The train begins its ascent.

Ian climbs onto Isabella's lap, and tugs at her sleeve. 'Look Mother. It's a frog,' he says.

Despite the warm berg wind blowing in through the open windows, Mrs Morgan pulls her cloak tighter about her, and rocks her babe forward and back, forward and back. Isabella feels her own body rock with the sway of the train. How her past and her future are trammelled together by this track and the clackety-clack of the wheels, the dust, soot and the smoke. For the whole of Isabella's life, whether in Scotland or in Africa, in the Colonies or in the Republic, there have always been railways, the making of railways.

She can hear now, in the engine's whine, the whistle blowing on either side of her father's shift. She can hear in its rumble, the shouts of men, dust covered and sweating as they work the line. She can hear them grunt and curse as they hoist rock for her father's pride, the Vyfboogbrug. Yes, there had always been bridges, tunnels, tracks and tents, always been rough working men. Like the Boers, and the Uitlanders – English, Scottish, German, Portuguese, and the Kaffirs too, who built Kruger's line across the Lowveld. She had nursed them all.

Isabella thinks of the Boers she tended back then, when her father was foreman and she the only nurse for hundreds of miles. How many of them still alive? How many Englishmen had they killed? Isabella watches a curve of track shimmer in the last of the day's sun, then disappear behind them. She cannot know what Mrs Morgan is thinking. Cannot know that their journeys move in opposite ways. That she is on an inbound journey, the other on an out.

The train pulls into a station, more siding really, no proper platform. Nobody dares get off, there is no station master to inquire how long they will be stopping. There is nobody about at all. Isabella gives Ian a drink of water, wishes it was milk.

'Dreadful place this Stormberg,' says Mr Goldberg looking at the mountains all around them. 'It will be dark before we reach Burgersdorp, that is for certain.'

The Harris girls play cat's cradle with a piece of grubby string. They have Ian entranced.

'This is the cradle,' Sarah says, 'and this one is called fish-in-a-dish. And this is the soldier's bed.'

'It is almost time for bed,' says Mrs Harris. 'Put that string back in your boot, Alice.'

Ian climbs back onto Isabella's lap and whispers 'I'm hungry' into her ear. She breaks a sandwich in half and lets him choose which piece he wants. He really looks more like his uncle Malcolm than his own father, she thinks.

There is one Boer Isabella remembers in particular, what was his name? A man who reminded her of her brother Malcolm. It was the way he recited poetry, like Malcolm could, though this man

recited poets she hadn't heard of before, Boer poets. 'Die Dans van die Reën.' He loved to recite that. She can remember the poem, and the way his voice sounded, his oos and rrrs and the ghs; the 's' words like suster, skaam, saggies, skitter. Funny that she can remember the words, but can't remember his name.

He was the one that had the fever so badly, she was sure he'd be dead by day-break. He kept calling out a name, a girl's name. One afternoon, when he could first sit again, he had motioned for his jacket, pulled a dog-eared photo from the inside breast pocket;

'My vrou.'

'Shall I write to her for you?' But he'd waved her gesturing hands away.

'Ek sal dit self doen.'

The next time death came calling, there was nothing Isabella, nor anyone else could do for him. They heard the *grau, ggrrau* of the lions, as they sat, the men around the evening fire, Isabella in the shadow of her tent, head wrapped in fine netting, a small bunch of fragrant green twigs smouldering near her feet to ward off the mosquitoes. Where had he gone? Just to walk. He loved to walk out in the veld. Be careful, Old Solomon would caution, as he set off alone.

They had heard the lions, and Old Solomon had come from the Kaffirs' camp with his kierie, her father had taken his gun from beneath his cot, and with some of the others, gone out, their torches far away stars in the dark, to look for him.

'Tschwall Tschwall!' they had shouted at the lions, and a rifle shot retorted across the veld. And another. Then back they'd come, faces folded in on themselves.

It was Old Solomon, hat in hand, grey hair ribbed across his head, who brought one of his boots and the sleeve of a blood-soaked shirt to her father the next morning.

'Vir sy vrou,' said Old Solomon. 'Something to bury, so that his spirit can find its way home.'

Home. There is that word again. Isabella eases Ian's limp body out of her numbed arm and lays his head on her lap, the knitted frog in his hand. So like Ruthie to have made that frog, she thinks, looking at the dozing woman, and then at the Goldbergs, clutching each other, even in sleep, as if scared of being torn apart. The sky outside the train window is almost black now, except for the powdery moon-light sifting like fine flour into a bowl.

Isabella fingers her mother's silver bar-pin brooch with its little moon-shaped pearl pinned at the neck of her high collared shirt. She would hate to sell it. No, she would never sell it, nor her wedding band. She would rather nurse again if she had to, though George wouldn't care for it, now

the war was over. Isabella doesn't want to think about what desperate times might mean for them in Johannesburg. She will not, no cannot imagine what they will do if there's no house, no work, no food. If George's illness flares up again. Her brain simply stalls.

There would be the house – there had to be the house. Isabella can see number nine standing there expectantly. For it seems suddenly to her, that the house is longing for her return. Perhaps George is inside right at this moment, getting things to order, getting ready for them, knowing they are to arrive a mere fortnight after his own return on the first repatriation train.

No. Most likely not. Most likely he has taken lodgings somewhere. Most likely the wooden railings, the front door with its little glass panes and brass knocker, the floorboards, all their furniture, are now broken up, used as fire wood. The last winter had been a desperately cold one, everywhere. Or perhaps a Boer family had taken advantage of the situation and moved in? There had already been one or two of them in the neighbourhood when they'd had to leave. Maybe not even a family, but a bunch of ruffians who stayed on to work the mines? Had deserters or commandos sheltered there? Their house would be gutted. Johannesburg had become a place of lawlessness. That's what the *Dispatch* said.

Irritated with herself, Isabella tries to reel in her imagination. George would have found them a place to stay even if number nine was no longer habitable. He would have found work. If the city needed rebuilding, they would need architects, wouldn't they? If not, what else? The Kirk? More charity? God forbid.

The train lurches, slows to a halt, wheels screeching. 'What is it?' says Mrs Harris, waking.

'Doesn't seem to be a station.' Mr Goldberg is peering out the window.

'Not the Boers,' wails Mrs Goldberg. 'Please God.'

'Sssh, be quiet.'

Ian sits bolt upright. 'Not to worry, my laddie, just watering the horses.' Isabella hugs him to her. It is what George would have said to him, just watering the horses.

Ian makes little snuffling noises, draws his knees up to his chest as if wishing to make himself smaller. 'I want Father.'

The baby begins to cry and Mrs Morgan hurries to nurse him. Isabella can only see the top of the woman's head as she bends low over her baby, a dark bun of braided hair neatly coiled and pinned in typical Boer style. Perhaps she'll speak up for us?

From outside, the sound of feet, and then men's voices, coming closer. English voices. The



guard jumps down from his van and goes towards them.

'It's only a checkpoint,' says Mr Goldberg. 'We must be nearing Burgersdorp?'

Isabella looks across at Mrs Morgan, and seeing her rigid, reaches over the aisle and pats her arm. The train begins to move.

'Not to worry,' she whispers. 'Not to worry. Just watering the horses.'

And now they can see the dark shapes of soldiers turning away from the train, others hunched around a small fire, a face lit up here and there, the ghostly white of a tent. Over there, in the distance, the glare of something much larger going up in flames, spitting sparks at the moon.

\*

Mrs Hester Morgan is on her feet, staring out of Isabella's window. The railway line does not go past Bakenkop, Hester knows that, but had it gone just a few miles further east, it might have been her home they see burning, the glow of it growing smaller and smaller as they gather speed. The train jolts, and she lands clumsily next to Isabella.

'Ekskuus,' she says blankly.

'Here, take the window seat,' Isabella whispers. 'I'll hold your baby.'

Hester doesn't hesitate, thrusts him at Isabella and presses herself to the window. That would be the Jouberts' place, wouldn't it? But perhaps she is already losing her bearings. If only the moon was brighter, if only she could be sure. Is that Klaarfonteinkoppie? Or maybe Rooikop? Sometimes she and Albertus would ride to the top of the Rooikop to see the train from Queenstown passing far away in the distance, on its way to Burgersdorp and Bloemfontein.

Liewe Vader, and where is Tannie Helene then? Do the English have her? And if it wasn't Rietfontein, then whose farm was it? The Venters'? The LeGranges'? How long since they'd past Molteno? Hester looks for the Southern Cross, but can't find it. Perhaps it is later than she thinks, perhaps they have long since passed every place she knows? But those koppies, they look so familiar.

I'm leaving, Hester thinks, I'm leaving this behind. Leaving the vlaktes, the veld and the koppies. Leaving home, leaving Bakenkop, with its proud white-washed house. Leaving its gardens, the outbuildings, barn and kraal standing so neatly in the werf, with no more than a low rock-wall

to hold back the bitterbos, the bloubos, the khaki-green veld; and the Rooinekke. Was her Aia still there, still sweeping the stoep every morning with her besembos broom, *tssk tssk tssk*. Or was it all burnt?

Hester wants to scream, to howl, to fling herself from the train. To throw off the ridiculous black bonnet, hitch up her long black skirts, steal a horse and ride back home. For though she knew, when she married Reverend Andrew Morgan, that Pa would never let her return, she still thinks of Bakenkop as home. She wants to scream, I'm sorry. I was wrong! But there is nobody there any more. Nobody to take her back. Nobody to forgive her.

Hester leans her forehead against the cold glass. There is nobody left. She wipes her nose on her sleeve, then turns from the window. She reaches towards Isabella, asking with her arms for the baby. He is still asleep, so is the boy with his head on the lavender blue of his mother's lap. So too the other children, and the grown-ups opposite. The whole carriage is silent. Only the train is awake, and the woman sitting next to her.

'What is your baby's name?' Isabella asks.

'Albert.'

Hester takes two pieces of dried peach from her pocket, and hands one to Isabella. The other she places into her mouth. It tastes of orange sunshine, of summer-time at Bakenskop, and the sweet konfynt Ma used to make when Hester was a girl. If she were alive, would Ma have forgiven me?

'Thank you,' says Isabella. 'I don't know when last I ate a piece of fruit, or anything so sweet. That tasted like – well like sunshine, or honey.'

Hester nods. They sit quietly, side by side.

'Have you family in Johannesburg, Mrs Morgan?'

'No.' Then, 'Yes. My husband, he has family there.' Hester turns back to the window.

She's heard nothing from her own family. Not a word from Pa since she married. And only a note from Hendrik, shortly after the war started.

Pa is leaving the farm in Outa Bokkie's hands, what else can he do?

He has called the commando together. I am riding with them.

Hester and Andrew had to leave the mission-station, it was not safe to stay. The Church insisted. But Hester hated Queenstown. Hated staying in Reverend Peters' parish bungalow. Hated being hemmed in by the Town Guard, by hostile eyes, at church, at the shops, along the main road. The

women were the worst. She could almost hear their whisper, ssssspy, felt it stirred into the weak tea she suffered after every Sunday service.

Every day Andrew would scan the notices pinned up in the square, or find some reason, as a priest, to be about when any Boer prisoners were brought in. But they could not find news of her family. 'We have to trust in God,' Andrew would say, 'God knows we can not trust man in times like these.'

'...And also my brother's wife, though I don't know how to find her,' says Hester slowly, the idea claiming itself as such, though she hardly knows she's been thinking it. 'Albertus, that's my brother, my late brother, his wife wrote to us from Johannesburg. But it was a long time ago.'

Albertus. Why, that's the name of the man with the fever, thinks Isabella.

'One day a parcel came from Johannesburg. Pa fetched it from Burgersdorp when he went for supplies. In the parcel were some of Albertus's clothes. And a note. It was signed by a Mrs Nelia Roos. We didn't even know he was married.'

'That is who you named your boy after, your late brother Albertus?'

'Yes.' There is a long pause. 'And for your King. It was my husband's idea. For Boer and for Brit, he said. He hated the war. But he died, of pneumonia, as you know, before it ended.'

'I'm so sorry,' says Isabella, 'so very sorry.'

'There is nothing for you here any more,' the Reverend Peters had said to Hester one afternoon when she carried the tea tray into his study. It was just before evensong, but he wasn't at his desk, he was in the arm chair near the window, with the morning's paper, open on his lap. 'They are building a camp in East London for Boer women and children... it's in the *Dispatch*.' He doesn't tell her what else the newspaper says. Farm burning is old news.

Hester puts the tea tray down carefully on the little side table, careful not to rattle the fine bone china nor spill tea on the lacy tray-cloth. She doesn't tell him she read the paper before bringing it to him this morning with his post. She doesn't say a word, just stands back a little, so she doesn't have to watch his heavy jaw at work, pushing words out like sausages.

Reverend Peters wonders if she's heated the pot properly, can't abide his tea lukewarm, nor stewed, for that matter. He doesn't tell her that he's galled by the plans for the new camp, wooden houses with proper corrugated-iron roofs, a school, hospital and a store. Why, it was to be far better equipped than the tented refugee camp for her Majesty's own subjects right here in Queenstown ever was. Still, he doesn't wish it on her. She is Morgan's widow and the child is half

English, after all.' I think it would be best if you went to your in-laws. They will be able to look after you.'

Reverend Peters doesn't want to be responsible for her. He couldn't stand her Boer ways, so out of place in an Anglican parish, from the first. And besides, people will talk, are already talking, if the verger is to be believed.

'You won't have another chance once the refugees have gone.'

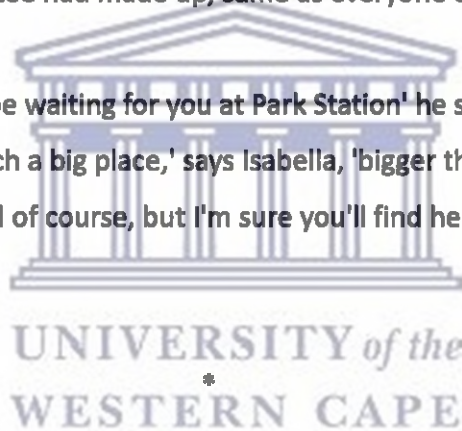
Reverend Peters has written to Reverend Morgan's brother in Johannesburg himself, taken the reply to the Mayor, argued her case. The Mayor is a member of his congregation, a reasonable man. Yes, he would ensure that a Mrs A. Morgan and infant were on the repatriation list.

'Your husband would want you to go to his family under the circumstances, for the child's sake, if nothing else. I can't keep you here much longer.'

A week later Reverend Peters gives her half a pound (from the collection plate), and a parcel of food the Relief Committee had made up, same as everyone else had. He warns her not to speak, at all, if she can help it.

'Mr Charles Morgan will be waiting for you at Park Station' he said.

'Johannesburg's is not such a big place,' says Isabella, 'bigger than Queenstown, mind you. And you'll have to be very careful of course, but I'm sure you'll find her, your brother's wife.'



'Isabella dear, I hardly know how to say goodbye. You've been a good friend, a daughter to us, hasn't she, Mr Goldberg? To think what we have been through together these last years. And it is true what you said, everyone suffers when men fight.' Mrs Goldberg is crying and clutching onto Ian. He struggles to free himself from her stiff bosom. 'Good-bye my dear boy. Don't you go giving your mother any trouble now, you hear? And listen to your father.' She gives him a little shake and lets him go.

'We're not quite there yet,' says Mr Goldberg, 'still plenty of time to say goodbye.'

Isabella writes her address on two slips of paper torn from the long-empty sandwich wrappings. 'Take this, Ruthie,' she says, giving her one 'and if for some reason we're not there, ask for us at St Mark's Church on Cavendish St. I've written that down too. Yeoville is not so very far

from Doornfontein.'

'We're nearly there, oh girls, we're nearly there. Look out for Papa,' says Mrs Harris. 'You can smell we're nearly there ... it's the dust, isn't it? Never thought I'd be so pleased to smell it again.'

Isabella turns to Hester, leans over little Albert and hugs her. 'Here is my address, Mrs Morgan. Once you've had a chance to settle in, do come to see me. Or ask for us at St Mark's Church. They should know where to find us, if – if we've had to settle somewhere else. And if ever you should need help, or a place to stay, you won't hesitate, will you?'

Hester keeps a tight grip on her hand, 'Please, call me Hester,' she says.

It is late in the afternoon when the train finally pulls into Park Halt Station. The platform is crowded, but there is no band, no ceremony, just people looking for family. Beggars and thieves too no-doubt, thinks Isabella, keeping a tight hold of Ian with one hand and of her carpet bag with the other. And soldiers. Hester stands half behind her, not moving. Oh, where is George?

A man in ill-fitting clothes and a slouch hat sidles up, 'Need a place to stay Ma'am? A carriage maybe?'

'No thank-you,' says Isabella. 'My husband will be along any minute to collect us.'

'Perhaps, Ma'am, it would be best if you wait at the station master's office. There are ruffians about, ready to take advantage, Ma'am, if you know what I mean. Crowd thinning quickly.'

Isabella inclines her head. She turns to Mrs Morgan. 'Perhaps we should do as he suggests. It would be a sensible place for your brother-in-law to meet you,' Isabella says. 'Have you any way of knowing him?'

There is Mr C. Morgan, waiting just a few yards away. Even Isabella recognises him, he has the look of Reverend Morgan about him, only sterner. Hester sucks in her breath, then walks towards him. They say something to each other, Isabella can't hear what. Hester looks back and Mr C. Morgan lifts his hat, bows towards Isabella ever so slightly, then turns and walks away. Hester follows him off the platform.

'Well, well, well, and what do we have here?' and there is George, swinging Ian into the air, a close embrace for Isabella. 'My very own family come home.'

'It is a remarkable story, my dear,' George says as they walk towards Yeoville. 'The street is a mess, a dreadful mess. Everything is at sixes and sevens. But our house is quite safe. A bit worse for wear, and covered in that chalky dust you used to fuss about so much, but it is quite safe. The Kirk too.'

It is not as much of a hill as Isabella remembers, but the road is deeply rutted, and Ian is tired. George swings him up onto his shoulders. 'We'd better hurry, before it gets any darker.'

'Do be careful of yourself, George,' Isabella says. 'He's heavy.'

George is looking wan and wheezes terribly. 'I'm sorry,' he says, stopping to rest again, 'that we couldn't have a carriage. They're asking a small fortune for the shortest of distances.'

Here and there a lamp burns inside a window, the house around it still standing. They pass a plot full of rubble, run wild with weed, and another with a broken chimney where a house once stood. An incomplete wall riddled with bullet holes, more rubble. They turn into Honey Street. The house at number four is still standing, so is number six.

'Boers,' said George. 'I've not met them, but Mrs Roos told me. Probably having to lie low for a bit. Mrs Roos is our neighbour, a widow. Moved in next door and runs it as a boarding house. Decent place. I've been taking my meals there.'

Number five is where the Munros should be, but it's empty and the windows are all splintered. Number eight is in a state too, and then ... across the road, their very own number nine.

Isabella stops. It is her very own house. There are the three steps, the stoep. There is her front door. Isabella's legs don't seem to know whether to walk on or stand there shivering. George looks anxiously at her.

'I'm all right, George. It is just my legs are all excited.' They stand there together, looking. Ian stands between them. 'Our house is safe, and all our things, you say?'

'Mrs Roos took care of it. How she knew it was our house I don't know, perhaps someone came looking for you? But she did tell me that once she learned it was Sister Isabella's home standing empty next door, she did everything she could to keep it safe for you. She said something quite lovely ... how exactly did she put it? Ah, yes – "When you extend kindness, it always comes back to you." You nursed her husband, she said, years ago, in the Lowveld, Black-water fever, I think it was. He told her about you in the last letter he ever sent her. Poor chap was killed not long after that – by a lion.'

Isabella climbs the steps onto her front stoep and opens the door. Life can take us away from where we belong, but we don't lose the longing for it, she thinks. If we are lucky we get to make our way back. And find it is still there.

There is nothing wrong with the new apartment in Sea Point. Nothing she can lay a finger on. Nothing she can point to. The front door opens onto a lounge, dining room, and open plan kitchenette (in pale pinks and blue). There is a large window above the kitchen sink that catches the morning sun, and sliding doors onto a small west-facing balcony with a view of the ocean. The main bedroom is a good size and has a wall of built in cupboards with an off-white pearly finish. The second room is somewhat smaller, but still big enough for her children when they visit, one at a time. When they are not visiting (which is most of the time) it could be a work room, a place to write letters, do puzzles, dry her personals. The bathroom with its non-slip bath and shower, and hand rails at all the places she may need them, is conveniently situated between the two rooms. No, there isn't anything wrong exactly, but she likes nothing about it.

Andrew has already, it seems, made up his mind. And Lisa is right behind him, thinks Joan, egging him on the way she used to when they were little. The two of them together had always made a formidable front.

Joan is tired, very tired. She wishes he would leave. Not just her room, not just the hospital, but the country. Wishes he would get back on the plane, 'thank you very much for the visit, darling', and leave her alone.

She watches him through half-closed eyes, sitting there in the leatherette lazy-boy with another clutch of documents in his hands. His head has the look of a moulting animal about it. His cheeks have gone flabby, his neck puggish in the expensive collared shirts he wears. Middle-age does not suit Andrew. Not in looks, nor demeanour. The gentle boyishness, the easy charm ... gone. All that's left is the bully.

'Just think, Ma. No more cooking. You can eat in the dining room everyday. The medical facilities are world class, and the club offers all sorts of activities. There is quite a social programme on offer; movies, concerts, outings, games evenings, pottery classes, even dancing. You can make new friends there.' Andrew sounds remarkably like the promotional video the Atlantica salesman (no, not salesman, lifestyle consultant) had shown them. 'And a twenty-four hour concierge service. You won't have to worry about a thing there.'

What he means, is that he won't have to worry about a thing, with me in a place like that.

That Lisa won't have to worry about a thing, with me in a place like that. Joan is not fooled. 'I don't need twenty-four hour service.'

'Besides the house is too big for you to manage any more. And it's looking really dilapidated. Needs a lot more than a coat of paint, you do realise that, don't you? It would take a fortune to renovate. I'm surprised the neighbours haven't complained.'

Actually the neighbours have complained. But not about the house. It's a bit of a joke in her street really, old Mrs StClair and her late night music. Joan thinks fondly of her classical music club, but says nothing. The partial collapse of her lung has left her short of breath and with a relentless pain in her chest.

Andrew picks up the remote and flicks to the golf. 'You could've broken your neck, never mind your hip. Why didn't you send Xolile up the ladder, that's what he's there for, isn't he? And all for some bloody pears.' He's muttering now.

Joan remembers how she'd caught Andrew sitting in that same pear tree pelting passers-by with the soft fruit.

'Next time it could be worse. You could have a heart attack. Or a stroke or something. What would you do then, all on your own? Sydney is not just around the corner and ... ,' Andrew glances up at his mother. For a moment, just the briefest of moments, he remembers what it was like to snuggle in bed beside her, the way she curved her long body to make a cave for him. What was that rhyme she would murmur? "I love this boy like a rabbit loves to run ...".

Andrew looks away, looks back at the contract on his lap: She would never concede to something like this if she was up and about. Perhaps he and Lisa should back off? No. The time has come. It's for her own good.

Andrew moves fast. The following day he signs the paperwork for Atlantica; gives Pam Golding sole mandate to sell number thirteen (it will be snapped up in no time); contracts Stuttafords Removal Company to pack up the house; and arranges temporary security measures with WatchDog. He consults his mother's doctor; speaks to the matron at Atlantica; and makes arrangements for Joan's transfer from hospital to the recovery centre. She won't manage on her own for at least six weeks, maybe longer. He can't possibly stay that long, can't even stay another six days. He has to move fast.

Joan moves slower than Andrew. It is unthinkable to her that she will never go home again. It is unthinkable that this is what her children think best for her. That she no longer has it in her to



stand up to them. Atlantica Retirement Resort: just the name of it makes her lips pucker.

A nurse comes in to check her pulse, temperature and blood pressure. She shifts the support beneath Joan's hip into a different position, fiddles with the drip feeding her pain-killers and antibiotics, adjusts the tubes draining her lung. 'Feeling any better, sweetie?' she asks. 'Need to wee-wee?'

Andrew wants her to decide on things now, and when she won't, or can't, he does. He makes lists on his iPad. Things for Lisa. Thing for him. He chooses small, non-breakable items he can take on the plane; some of his father's books; the Pierneef etching of Chapman's Peak, Dawid Botha's oil painting of a fisherman's cottage (frames to be removed); the gold clock from the mantelpiece, the Chinese paperweight and a pair of silver candlesticks. Her fur stole and some diamanté jewellery for his (second) wife.

'And now things for your new apartment.' He sits next to her hospital bed, and reads the list he has drawn up: bed, bedside table (only one), the floral covered lounge suite from the sun-room (smaller than the living room suite), four antique chairs from the dining room and the stinkwood table from the entrance hall ('It will do as a dining room table, don't you think?'), the two smaller Persian carpets, display cabinet, red velvet chaise lounge, television, decoder, DVD player and her writing desk. Two outdoor chairs and a little table for her verandah. He lists the few kitchenware items he thinks essential ('You'll probably eat most of your meals in the dining room.'), the pictures (the Tinus de Jongh series), paintings (the Rene Le Roux will fit perfectly behind the couch), and photographs (of children and grandchildren mostly) that will make the apartment feel like home.

'It will be ready by the time you get there, I've got it all organised. The rest ...' he casts his hands out as if all her belongings were piled before him, 'will have to go. They won't fit in your new place and I can't heave them back to Australia with me.'

Joan eyes are steady, her eye-brows pulled down at the sides in a look he remembers well. She says just one word. 'Storage!' It is a command.

'Okay, okay.' Andrew concedes. It's simpler for him to organise anyway. Let Lisa deal with it when she comes over at Christmas, he thinks.

Dear Val

Thank you for your lovely letters. Of course we could Skype or email, Andrew saw to all the 'essentials' as he calls them, but I do so love a real letter ... even short ones like ours. Of course I understand you can't leave John, so don't worry about it. Husbands must take priority and I am managing fine on my own. I can't tell you how good it is to be mobile again and able to do everything for myself. Whenever the weather permits (and we've had some dreadfully wet Cape winter days) I'm even managing little walks along the Promenade. As you predicted, there is nothing like walking to lift the spirits. I do miss number thirteen dreadfully. But there you are. Everyone says moving is a great upheaval and takes time to adjust. Andrew did a relatively good job of furnishing the flat, but frankly I wish he had left it to me. I keep looking for things and then think, ah yes that must be in storage I suppose.

Your loving sister

Joan



Dear Val

An inventory is an excellent idea. How silly of me not to have thought of that for myself. I called StoreSecure immediately and they promised to send one straight away. I am still waiting – two days later. Brenda took me for a drive past number thirteen yesterday. I wish she hadn't. They've all but knocked it down, and worse still, taken out my pear tree. From the architect's board it seems they are planning to build four units on the property, the tree must have been in the way of one of them.

Dear Val

Despite StoreSecure's assurance that the mix up is only administrative, I am growing more and more worried they've lost what's most precious to me. It really is the only item I care about – and they can't quite 'locate' it. Surely it is either there or it isn't? Andrew thinks I'm panicking unnecessarily, but has agreed to do what he can from his side. To think

he never checked the inventory at the time! He's usually meticulous about any sort of paperwork.

I'm glad to hear John is making steady progress. Do give him my love. You can be quite glad you didn't come down when planned, it's been a frightfully cold winter thus far. Early summer is a much better idea. I look forward to it tremendously.

Dearest Val

Just a quick note because I couldn't get you on the phone and wanted to tell someone straight away. I have just been appointed the new piano teacher at the Massimo School of Music! Yes – I am to start work again. You are probably only a little more surprised than I am. Without my house and garden to keep me busy, time has been hanging heavy on my hands, and you know I can't abide being idle. I also can't bring myself to join the awful 'club' and go about here there and everywhere with a bunch of oldies. So when I saw the advertisement in the local Atlantic Sun, I thought why not? It is a temporary appointment while the regular teacher is on maternity leave, so if I find it too much, I'll only have to manage for three months. The school is situated in a lovely old Victorian house, an easy walking distance from here. And more importantly, I have the use of a wonderful Bösendorfer – it is in really good condition. How I miss my own piano.

\*

Julian chose Sea Point because it had always been there, on the fringe of his childhood. He chose it because although Cape Town was 'home', he was unlikely to actually know anyone living in Sea Point. It's not a family kind of place, not the sort of place you want to raise kids. Men his age mostly had kids, though of course they might well be grown by now.

Julian chose the house in Gordon Street between client meetings. It has everything he needs, kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom with shower and a small courtyard at the back. The lease agreement was straightforward, and he'd asked Nicky to deal with the agent. She would

also organise things with the movers. That would be the last thing she did for him as his personal assistant.

Julian chooses a cigarette in the courtyard rather than active supervision. The sun has only just pushed over the rim of Signal Hill, dappling the mossy paving. Grover Washington sits near him, his focus on a little stop-start lizard. He wonders how long the cat will stay, how long the lizard will live. Julian can't see the sea, but he can hear it above the traffic in Main Road and the voices in his new house.

'We're finished, Meneer. You sure you want everything in the lounge? We can carry things upstairs if you like?'

'Everything is fine as it is. Thank you,' says Julian, without looking at what they've done. He takes the clipboard and signs his name in the blank spaces the man in a Stuttafords overall points to, then follows him into the kitchen and towards the front door. Boxes line the wall, J. StClair written in big black letters on them. Two Morris chairs stand side-by-side, and a worn leather couch fills the bay window. In the middle of the living room, is an enormous piano. Julian stops dead in his tracks.

He should have said something straight away.

Julian awakens. His back is stiff from sleeping on the couch and there is a bad taste in his mouth. Whiskey and cigarettes? Too much garlic in the Woolies lasagne? He shifts onto his back and lies quietly, listening to the noises in the street. The little beeps of car alarms being deactivated, the bang of doors, high heels against the tar, voices, irritated mostly, and hurried. The sound of engines starting, the swish of tyres on a wet road. There is not much between them; a cement pavement, a leggy plumbago hedge, the glass and brick of his front wall. Everyone, it seems, leaves at once and Gordon Street is quiet again.

Julian is alone, except for Grover Washington and the bergie who pokes around the rubbish bins hopeful of left-overs or serviceable throw outs. Julian knows he'll be there today, is probably there already, because it's Thursday, garbage day. He knows the man's name is Gordon, like the street. They are on first name terms, he and Gordon. Both of them homeless, though Julian has a roof over his head.

He gets up from the couch, walks past the boxes and goes into the kitchen, puts on the kettle and spoons Nescafe into last night's mug. Sonja got the espresso machine. 'If there is

anything I miss,' he says to the cat, 'it's the espresso machine.'

Julian looks at his watch. Usually by this time he is already on site, or with clients, or in meetings with contractors or engineers. But Julian doesn't have a job to go to. He is taking a break. That's what his friends in Durban said he should do.

'You need to take a break, buddy, get out of here.' Karl was a good friend. 'For your own good.' Then, a week later he'd said, 'Are you sure you know what you doing? Moving to Cape Town? That's radical, bro. What I meant was like, go on holiday ... a surf trip, or climb Kilimanjaro, or something. What about your job? Are you sure you shouldn't think this over, when you're not so upset?'

In the bathroom Julian washes his face, feeling it bristle under his hands. He squeezes a generous amount of Palmolive Shaving Cream into his palm and works up a lather before unwrapping a disposable razor. The bristles are days (weeks?) old, the blade nasty. Julian slices himself just under the chin. In the mirror, he sees the sudden blood scarlet against the creamy foam. He stares at his face in the mirror. Sorry bastard, he thinks, pull yourself together.

In the small cling-wrapped pile of clothes from the laundry he finds underwear and an ironed shirt. His black jeans don't show the grime. He wears wine-maker boots, brown one. His other shoes must be in a box somewhere. Another feeble excuse not to go for a run.

Julian goes back downstairs, sits at the piano and lifts the lid. The ivory keys are a sulky yellow. This baby must be old. He runs his fingers over them gently. In his mind he hears Vassily Primakov play Chopin's piano concerto and wonders how long it took him to get that good, or if he was born a maestro? It had been the first concert Julian had been to in ages.

Julian walks along Main Road till he reaches Al Frascatti, run by an Italian couple. The old man never smiles or greets him, but brings a double espresso and plain omelette without Julian having to ask. The ciabatta is served with olive oil, not butter. All the tables are full. It's noisy. He feels better for being among people. There are two women at the window counter next to him. They look Sonja's age, more or less, but wear more make up than she ever did.

'I thought Steve was going to platz!' the blonde says to her friend. 'I thought he was going to kill Ash, he was so angry.'

'Oh my God Laura, poor you. Poor Steve. But it could be worse, you know. It could've been drugs. Remember my cousin Michelle? Her daughter's in rehab again, only seventeen you know, and that's not all ... '

Laura is not really paying attention. She doesn't want sympathy and is annoyed her story is being outdone. In the window she can see the reflection of a middle-aged man sitting at the counter on the other side of Tracey. His face is plump, quite puffy actually, and his nose is large, like a Greek, but otherwise good looking enough, she thinks. There is a tiny cut on the side of his neck. His thick hair is greying and in need of a good cut. It stands up in spikes, though not the kind made on purpose. Laura knows that, she used to be a hair stylist before marrying Steve.

Laura nods at Tracey, says 'Mhmm.' But she's thinking about running her hands through this man's hair, pulling on his side-burns and touching the back of his neck. She is talking to him, from behind, about what style he fancies. That's how she'd met Steve, in her salon, talking about the style he fancied.

The man in the reflection is not wearing a wedding band. Laura hasn't lost the habit of looking for wedding bands, yet. He is wearing a turquoise open necked shirt with a kind of paisley pattern. His arms are heavy in the sleeves, muscular or just chubby, she can't tell. Laura sighs and smooths her shirt over her flat stomach, looks down admiringly at her cleavage and the trim bod below. Not bad for forty-five hey? she thinks.

Julian finishes the *Cape Times* and picks up the *Atlantic Sun*. He tries to ignore the woman with her bottle blonde hair and ridiculously erect tits staring at him in the reflection. The local headlines are about a new sewer pipe the Council plans to lay from Granger Bay, just north of the light house. Julian remembers the light house, and the foghorn from when he was a kid. It used to blare out with a loud *baaap* whenever the sea mists were too thick for ships to see the shore line as they headed for Table Bay Harbour. Back then, before GPS.

Julian flips through the paper. There is an article about what to do with the stadium, something about tourists at the Waterfront, crime statistics for the area, a new deal with taxi owners. On page five, there is a picture of a group of kids standing next to a grand piano that catches his eye. It looks a little like his. Next to the photo is a small notice welcoming Mrs Joan StClair, the new piano teacher, to the school. It's not a common surname, but there are no Joans in his family that he knows of. Julian tears the notice from the paper and puts it in his pocket.

He leaves the right amount of money and a generous tip under his plate, nods to Roberto and Rosa on his way out, and leaves.

'Such a sad man,' Rosa says to her husband, watching Julian jay walk between the taxis, buses and cars already bumper to bumper along the narrow road.

Julian carries himself along Main Road heading towards the city. It's a long way, he could hop onto any number of buses or taxis, but prefers to walk. It's the moment Table Mountain first comes into view that makes it so worthwhile. For blocks it's hidden by Signal Hill, ugly buildings crawling up its slopes, the tiny military base he can just make out by the white flag poles, and above it all the road, a ribbon cutting into a grey-green coat of vegetation.

Julian stands at the corner of Main and Glengariff, waiting for the light. It's the edge of Sea Point, the beginning of Green Point and urban renewal. Through the old blue gums lining the street, Julian can see the stadium looming like the shell of a giant sea urchin. The surrounding area has been well designed. Julian knows some of the architects and landscapers involved from varsity days. The other side of the road hasn't had the same attention, though there are a whole lot of new eateries that have been nicely done up. The light changes and Julian crosses the road thinking he might give Mrs J. StClair a call.

Julian avoids the dog turds and McDonalds packets that strew the pavement. An old woman in a maroon dressing gown shuffles along behind her poodle. A prostitute, Nigerian possibly, gives him the once over and returns to filing her nails. Julian wonders what makes him look such an unlikely client? He passes a group of kids in school uniform, heavy bags slung over their shoulders, talking loudly, half Xhosa, half English. They seem to be in no hurry. Arriving late? Leaving early? Playing hookie? He can't tell.

A man and a woman brush past, intent on their conversation. Their perfumes are shrill, he can smell them long after they have turned into a coffee shop. He passes advertisements for penis enlargements, pain-free abortions and Jesus (*have you given your life to the Lord?*), posted on walls, street-light poles, post boxes, and empty windows. As Julian draws level with the Traffic Department, he looks up to the right. There it is – Table Mountain.

By the time he reaches the City Hall, Julian is pooped. He leans against the sandstone wall, rolls a cigarette nimbly between fore-finger and thumb, it's an old skill he's not forgotten. Two street kids come up and ask for money. He shakes his head, looks away. The street is full of people walking to or from the Parade, or the station. It's the busy end of town, the African end of town. Why did he come here?

The kids move closer. 'Ag/man/give/us/the/skuif/then/baas/please/man/my/baas.'  
Julian takes a drag, exhales and hands it over. He reaches into his pocket and gives them all the loose change he has. Enough for a lolly, he thinks, taking in the dilated pupils, the bony wrists and

elbows, the way their words run into each other. Or a packet of slap chips.

Julian used to go to classical concerts at the City Hall with his granny, she'd make him wear a tie. He'd loved them, the concerts, loved the music and the display of musicians. Dressed all in black, they looked like tok-tokkies from up there on the balcony. But Julian thinks of himself more as a jazz man now. He listens to Abdullah Ibrahim, Basil 'Manenberg' Coetzee, Miriam Makeba, Dave Brubeck, Billie Holiday and the rest. He does love movies about classical music though, *Amadeus*, *Mr Holland's Opus*, *The Piano*, *Shine* – they were his favourites, especially *The Piano*. He saw that three times, though Sonja wouldn't go with him. Not even once.

Julian could go to a coffee shop. He could call up one of his old Cape Town buddies and see if anyone is free for lunch. As far as he knows Greg still has offices on Dunkley Square. Nah, he doesn't feel like telling the whole boring story, putting up with the show of sympathy, the jokes, the 'Mandy and I would love to have you round for supper ... some (other) time.' Besides, he hasn't even let anyone know he's back in town, though most likely word's out – Sonja probably posted it on Facebook weeks ago.

Sitting on the Hall's main stairs in a slice of pale winter sun, Julian pulls out the newspaper cutting and reads it again. Then he takes out his mobile (there are two more messages from Karl) and types in the number. After the phone rings a few times, it cuts to an answering machine.

'Hello,' he says, 'this is Julian calling. I am phoning about piano lessons. For a beginner.' He leaves his number, then hangs up.

There is music coming from across the road now, from somewhere on the Parade. Julian walks over to get a closer look. A group of musicians, not a full orchestra, but a good collection of violinists, cellists, wind instruments and even a piano, are giving a free performance, donations welcome. Julian makes his way towards the piano. The girl behind it, twenty perhaps, has long dark hair spilling out of the rough knot she's tied it in at the nape of her neck. She has a small earring in her nose and wears patterned leggings under a short denim skirt. Her purple shirt is half unbuttoned and he can see a leopard print vest under its thin fabric. He closes his eyes against the look of her and concentrates on the music, as she is.

When the concert ends, Julian puts a two hundred rand note in the hat, and heads back towards Sea Point.

Julian takes the route past Green Market Square, where traders try to sell him curios from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola. He looks at the clock on the Inn's tower – it's only mid



afternoon, still hours to fill. At Sturk's Tobacconists on Shortmarket Street, he buys more Rizzla and another packet of Drum, then adds a packet of Boxer for Gordon. Outside, he waits for a delivery van and a scooter to pass before crossing, their wheels *wadawadawada-ering* across the cobblestones.

Boardmans is still where it used to be. Julian wanders up and down the aisles until a young shop assistant with faultless skin, full lips and a perfectly straight nose, corners him near the electrical appliances.

'Anything particular I can help you with, sir?' The man is not as young as he first appears. There are lines around his eyes and at the corner of his mouth that widen as he smiles. 'Nothing? Nothing at all? Shopping for a present? For your girl-friend, or wife perhaps?'

Julian shakes his head. 'I need an espresso machine. That's all.'

'A single, or double? Can I recommend the double?' The assistant leads the way down the aisle, 'You never know when you might need it – even if you're single.' The man's laugh is tinny.

Julian tries not to let the joke sting. He realises it's one the man's cracked hundreds of times before.

'They come in a stainless steel finish, or in just about any colour combo you can imagine, but, unfortunately, we only have red or steel left at this very moment.'

Julian points to the stainless steel model. 'Single,' he says.

The assistant bends over to find one still in its box, showing Julian a tight butt in tight pants with a faux suede finish. He straightens up, then prances off towards the till, puts the box down on the cashier's desk with a flourish. 'Come again,' he says, 'I'm always here, we're open till six, seven days a week.' Then he makes a little bow and walks off.

Julian feels ridiculous. He has a long walk ahead of him and now a large bag to carry. Why on earth did he do that? The machine he didn't intend to buy is heavy. As soon as he reaches Strand Street, Julian hops onto a taxi heading for Sea Point.

Gordon Street is empty. Grover is waiting for him. So is the piano. He lifts the lid and props it open so he can admire the insides. Then he plays Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* on his iPod really loudly, while letting his hands run up and down the keyboard. The music finishes and Julian gets up to pour himself a whiskey, sits down again and tries out the first few notes.

When his mobile rings, he checks to see who it is. Unknown. Julian lays the phone back next to the key board, then snatches it up again, remembering suddenly his call to the music

school. 'Hello, Julian here.'

'This is Joan,' says an elderly woman's voice, 'Joan StClair. I'm phoning from the Massimo School of Music. You're interested in piano lessons, I believe?' Joan tries hard to keep the warble from her voice. 'For a beginner your message said, how old is the child?'

'It's for me. I mean, I want to learn to play the piano myself.'

'Oh. Oh I see.' There is a longish pause. 'Have you any experience, ever played before?'

'No, never. No experience. But I have just, er, acquired a piano, and thought I should learn to play it. My mother was very musical. So was her mother. They always said it ran in the family, I've just never been interested to try it until now.' Julian is aware that he's talking a lot.

'I see,' she says again. Joan is not quite sure what to say. As far as she knows all the pupils at Massimo's are school children, still nobody explicitly said she shouldn't take on adults. But honestly, they are the devil to teach.

'What kind of piano?' she asks, stalling.

'Steinway & Sons.' Julian runs his thumb over the gilt letters.

'Really? Gosh. That is something special.'

'It's a Grand',

'Oh?'

'Concert size, I think. I've been reading up about them on the internet.'

Joan smiles, sure he must be exaggerating. 'Well if it is, it's a remarkable piano indeed,' she says. 'Goodness me. There weren't many of those in the country in my day. You are very fortunate.' Or maybe just a crank? she thinks.

'Do you have space for another pupil? I can come mornings or afternoons. We could make it on a trial basis if you prefer, say three or four lessons to begin with? Then you can decide if you see your way clear to keep me on.' Now that he has her on the phone, Julian is determined not to let her go until she agrees, at least to that much.

Joan and Julian schedule a class for Thursday, three thirty. The School is busy on a Thursday afternoon, it would be quite safe, if he is a crank. And if he doesn't turn up, she hasn't lost anything. She warns him not to expect too much. And how odd they should have the same surname?

Julian puts down his phone, takes a sip of whiskey, then places the glass carefully on a piece of newspaper so as not to spoil the wood's sheen. He hums while trying, over and over, to get the

opening notes right. Tomorrow he'll buy a big flat screen TV and DVD player. Mr Video is just down the road – they're sure to have *The Piano* or *Shine* on their shelves. He could watch them both, back to back, after he's gone for a run, no-one to complain or suggest he fixes the cupboard handles instead. Maybe I should make a start unpacking those boxes tonight, he thinks, bending down to pick up Grover, and I should really let Karl know I'm doing okay.

Joan walks slowly back to Atlantica, the days are starting to get a little longer, she can take her time without worrying about it getting too dark. She greets Norman-the-Doorman, then takes the lift up to the ninth floor apartment she might yet call home. She unlocks the door and flicks on the lights, walks across the room to her television and picks up the photo of herself as a much younger woman. There she is, dressed in a ball gown, hair up in a chignon, large diamanté earrings dangling from each ear and draped around her throat. In her left arm is a large bouquet of carnations, and beside her, holding her right hand in his white-gloved ones, is Otto Klemperer himself. But Joan is not looking at the man, nor the woman. She is looking at the piano in the photograph, her piano. A Steinway & Sons Concert Grand.

They'd better track it down and soon, she thinks.



I. Adeela

It was the girls' idea, getting them together, Lilly's and Vanezu's. They set it all up, booked a table for four, organised their respective parents.

'Can't you wear a dress rather?' Lilly fussed at her. 'It's Eatly we're going to, Mom, near Union Square. Think fancy.'

Adeela stands in her underwear, hair still wet, a favourite pair of jeans in her hand. It's hard to please a teenager, and though she generally tries to be accommodating, draws the line at dresses.

'Nope. I don't do dresses, not even for you,' she says, 'not even for a blind date.'

'Okay then, how about this?' Lilly takes down a heavily embroidered silk shirt Adeela hardly ever wears. 'This will zhooosh your jeans up a little, and with my big silver earrings and your long boots, you'll look all right. It's not a date exactly. We just think it's a good idea you two finally meet.'

Victor and Adeela like each other immediately. Though they avoid any talk of nationality, there is an ease between them, a familiarity, a feeling of belonging. The girls buzz around, filling the slightest pause with chit-chat. They speak about their favourite New York haunts. The wonders of living in a first-world city. Lilly loves the Museum of Modern Art best, Vanezu the shops in Soho. Adeela the bookshops, and Victor the people.

'If you'd asked me twenty, ten, even five years ago, I would have told you I hated Americans and all things American. But somehow, in their own country, they aren't so bad,' he says.

Now here is Victor, she knows it's him without turning around. He crosses the small space between her front door and her chair in only nine paces, bends down to kiss her.

'I'm happy to see you looking so well this morning,' he says. It's a lie, but he feels compelled to say it. He pulls up a footstool and sits at her feet. Still Adeela has to tilt her head up a little to see his face.

He takes off his steel-rimmed glasses and carefully polishes the lenses, puts them on, and with a little nudge, edges them into place. He watches her come back into focus, but finds she looks the same as when he first came into the room. The joints in her fingers are swollen, the skin

along the top of her hands taut over the bones. Her arms limp on the side-rests of the old corduroy-covered rocking chair are as spindly as the topmost branches of the tree at her window. She is wearing an old grey cardigan of fine wool, and on it she, or more likely Lilly, has pinned a white, heart-shaped brooch made from springbok hide. He gave it to her, last Valentine's or the one before. The space where her breasts were is concave beneath a cotton T- shirt. Like sinkholes, he thinks, where the earth has suddenly collapsed, swallowing whatever was there ... houses, people, animals, trees – whole lives disappearing in an instant.

'Your tree is especially beautiful this time of year.' Victor nods towards the elm, takes a sip of the tea Lilly fixed them before going out. He wishes Adeela would dress like a dying woman, cover her deformity with a robe or a blanket for Christ's sake. Wear a scarf or a hat of some kind over the fine hair that pushes so pathetically from her scalp. To Victor's complete surprise, he begins to cry. First the rise of heat up his pockmarked cheeks, then the tell-tale burning at the back of his eyes. The blurring of his vision. God, this woman could always reduce him to an almost unbearably sweet state of rawness. He feels naked, always naked when he is with her.

They will be refugees again, Vanezu and him, when she is gone.

'I think I made a friend today. Her name's Lilly.' Victor can picture Vanezu the day she'd told him that. She sounded so formal. So hopeful. So homesick.

'Sounds positive,' he'd said. 'Sounds positive' was how he'd greeted all good news since arriving in the States. They'd only been there two months or so, and something about the place, the sheer size of it maybe, made him feel, well, cautious.

Since Adeela's diagnosis he'd given up using the word positive altogether. He and Vanezu had stopped joking about how the Americans can turn their own words inside out and upside down. It didn't seem funny any more.

Victor is usually able to stem his tears before they show; a nail pushed into the palm of a clenched fist or into the soft tip of his thumb; the removal of his spectacles, the methodical polishing of their lenses on a corner of his shirt. Then he is ready to look up, to resume the distant stance of a respected academic, the authoritative look of a father. Or in this case, the detached fondness of an ex-lover. But this time, his tricks do not work. This time, almost before he knows it, Victor puts his head on Adeela's lap and sobs.

She strokes his head with a hand she doesn't fully recognise. She feels the familiar prickle of

his recently shorn head under her fingers. She watches a finch flit from branch to branch before it drops two storeys down to Mr Cohen's bird feeder. It is quiet inside, just the rasp of Victor's sobbing, and the slight rumble of the refrigerator as its motor kicks in across the room. The street noises seem far away.

'I used to think,' Adeela says when Victor is quiet. 'I used to think I'd like my ashes to be buried here under the elm. It's an alien, you know, like you and me.' They sit quietly for a moment looking out at the English elm that doesn't really belong. 'Somebody probably brought this tree over from England. Somebody unwrapped the roots from the damp sacks bound around them, soil still clinging to them in great clumps, crumbling and trickling away as it dried. Someone dug a hole and planted it, a little, withered, homesick sapling, right here. Planted it, watered it, tended it. That somebody had conviction, didn't they, Victor?'

Victor doubts the tree sailed across the Atlantic with some early settler. Hell, that would make it hundreds of years old. More likely, it was grown in a nursery somewhere closer at hand. Central Park was full of elms, wasn't it?

'Do you want Vanezu to put her roots down here, Victor? Lilly has. She's never lived anywhere else. And I thought I had roots here too. I thought I was as well transplanted as that tree. But now, I'm not so sure.' Adeela chuckles. 'Anyway, old Mr Cohen won't let anybody into his yard and I don't want to make things harder for Lilly, so now I'm thinking of asking Sukey to take my ashes home with her. There's a place I used to go every Christmas when I was a kid. Maiden's Cove. Sukey knows it; she grew up near there. She can just tip them into the Atlantic. What do you think?'

Victor says nothing. He puts his head back onto her lap. It feels to Adeela as heavy as a rock. The grey spikes glint like quartzite against his black dome. And she feels it crushing her legs. Feels her legs disintegrating, turning to sand beneath the weight. She is short of breath again. Feels the weight move up to her chest. She focuses on the tree. On her breathing. The finch is back. It hops along a twig away from her, then flies off.

'I'm sorry,' Victor says, lifting his head.

Adeela looks down to find her lap as it was, not crushed, not crumbling away. Just two very thin legs cased in faded blue denim. She motions for her tea which is just out of reach. He passes it to her, waits until she has a firm grip on the handle. It steadies her a little, this ancient ritual of drinking tea. Not American-style tea, but proper English tea, with milk and one sugar.

'We used to go there, to Maiden's Cove, every year on Boxing Day, until we moved away

from the city.' She's speaking to Victor, but her eyes are on the tree. 'Half the neighbourhood would go. Ma would pack all our stuff: blankets, towels, shorts, warm jerseys for the trip home, into a big string bag. The rotis and sandwiches, bottles of Fanta or Coca-Cola went into plastic OK Bazaar packets. We'd walk down Constitution Street, right into Buitenkant and then along Darling, into Adderley Street, where we'd catch the bus to just past Clifton, but before you got to Camps Bay proper. Those were whites-only beaches back then.'

'Hmm,' Victor says.

'There wasn't exactly a beach at Maiden's Cove – but there was sand here and there between the rocks, and a huge tidal pool. My cousin Ryder was the only one of us who could swim. He would run along the white-painted walls and dive into the pool just before the huge waves knocked him off. It was a game the big boys played, a bit like chicken.' Adeela pauses, takes another sip of tea. Victor's mug is already empty.

'We used to explore all the nooks and crannies between those rocks, Amina, Huda and me. They were just granite boulders, but to us, they were castles, the walls studded with diamonds. We would go back one day and get those diamonds out, we promised ourselves. We would chip them out and be rich as princesses. I can't remember what Amina wanted to buy, nor Huda, but I wanted roller skates, like the white girls I'd seen when the bus drove past the Sea Point Boulevard. I didn't know what they were called, nobody I knew had them, but Ryder told me.'

Adeela puts her mug down, too heavy to hold any longer. 'I have a picture of Ryder in that box. Do you want to see it?'

Victor does not want to talk about Ryder. He does not want to talk about scattering ashes. He wants to pretend this isn't happening. He wants to hurl his mug across the room, listen to it smash against the framed Matisse print, watch the tannins stain the white wall brown. He wants to fling the French windows wide open. He wants to fly with her through the gap between the apartment buildings and show her what's left of the autumn leaves, show her the skyline, the bridge, the river, the new independent book-store that's opened not three blocks away on Court Street. He wants to stop in at The Chocolate Room and have the waitress bring their favourite coffee. He wants to keep her here. He doesn't want her to go anywhere.

'Sure' he says, feigning what, exactly? Enthusiasm for the reminiscence of a dying friend? Victor is aware of trying to rise out of his own need to be comforted. His need to talk about them as they were. He wants Adeela to say how she regrets ending their affair, regrets relegating him to a close friend. He imagines the moment she finally concedes. He imagines he can rescue her. Even

from this.

'Sure,' he says again, aiming for encouraging.

The box is down on the floor, between her chair and the wall. It is a medium-size cardboard box that has been hand decorated and then varnished. On the lid, there's an amateurish portrait. It takes Victor a moment, as he stoops to pick it up, to realise that it is Adeela's face on the lid.

Adeela laughs at him. 'Good thing I usually leave painting to Lilly, hey?'

Her name is printed under the self-portrait, and a date. Her birth date. She lifts the lid and rummages about, then pulls out a newspaper cutting, slightly crisped by age, and hands it to him. *Cape Times*, 30 June 1976. There are a lot of people in the picture, mostly young, students, school-kids even, a few older people. 'Police disperse thousands of protesters,' reads the caption.

He gives the newspaper cutting back to Adeela, 'Which one is your cousin?'

Adeela is hugging her chest as if cold. Victor feels a flash of guilt for wanting to yank the door open.

'Do you need a blanket? Want to lie down?'

Adeela shakes her head. 'This one,' she says, pointing. 'And that's me just behind him.'

Victor looks again, but can only see what looks like the corner of a skirt behind the wavy-haired boy she's pointing at.

'That was the last time I last saw him. He was supposed to be looking after me because the schools were closed. But Ryder said he had to go on this march, did I want to go along? There had been marches in our neighbourhood before, but Ma had always kept me home.'

Adeela stares at the grainy black-and-white picture. 'You can see,' she says, 'the clouds are down low over Table Mountain. It was really cold that day and rainy, but we still went. Ryder helped me do a double bow on my takkies before we set off up the street. They had been Elza's takkies and were still a bit too big. I loved those takkies – they were plain white canvas with a green-and-yellow stripe down the side of the foot to the rubber toe. They had thick rubber soles. Good for running and jumping. Ryder said we might have to do some running, so I put them on. There was a crowd gathering; we could hear the singing while we were still walking down Buitenkant Street. There was a helicopter flying low over town, and police vans. We used to call them Black Marias ... I don't know why. That made me kind of nervous. We walked with some of the other boys from Ryder's school who lived near us, bigger boys who were joking with Ryder about being the next Hector Pietersen. I had no clue who that was. I thought maybe he was a movie star. Ryder loved going to movies at the Avalon bioscope. I remember feeling quite proud



that these big boys thought Ryder was going to be a star. I only found out later, much later, who Hector Pietersen was.'

Adeela stops talking. Victor takes a yellowing hand into his. The heavy silver ring swings loosely on her middle finger. He turns it the right way up so the big blue stone, the colour of Adeela's eyes, is on top. It's a ring, he knows, that belonged to her grandmother. The only thing she has ever told him about her family. He covers the withered hand in both of his big, indecently fleshy ones, careful not to crush her.

'I had to wear shoes too small for my feet the rest of that winter. Not that Ma was mad with me, she was just too distraught about Ryder to notice things like shoes. I felt so guilty ... maybe if I had run faster, if Ryder hadn't tried to stick with me. I still ask myself, what if that takkie hadn't come off? Would Ryder have been arrested? Would he have died?'

Adeela withdraws her hand from Victor's and pulls at her cardigan. 'Someone found me and took me home. It was dark already. Ma put me in her bed and gave me something bitter to make me sleep. I was only seven, turning eight. They never told us how he died.'

Victor stands at the French windows with his back to her. The wind has picked up a little. The tree's branches scratch lightly against the glass. What, apart from platitudes, is there to say? What words ...?

'I think,' she says, 'I should lie down a little now. We were up very early this morning, Lilly and me.' Adeela grips the arms of the chair and tries to lever herself out of it. She feels exhausted and the pain is making her nauseous. 'I'm sorry, Victor, to rattle on so. I don't know what's got into me this morning.'

Victor helps her to her feet.

'You will come again tomorrow, won't you?' she says. 'You and Vanezu? I want you to meet Sukey.'

Together they cross the faded Persian, and into her room. Next to the three-quarter bed, with its thick down duvet, though it is only fall, is a table with her medicine, a stainless-steel dish, a glass of water, and an old-fashioned travel alarm clock that folds into its own ruby-coloured leatherette case. Her customary pile of books has been replaced by the nurse's green plastic file. Even Adeela's reading glasses are gone. The bedding is already turned down, and the curtain half-drawn. Victor helps her lie down, kisses her gently on the forehead.

'We were good together, weren't we.' She says it as a statement.

## II. Lilly

It is eleven o'clock when Lilly comes through the front door. She has been gone just a little more than an hour, but is already anxious about her mother.

Victor takes the groceries from her and starts to pack them away in the small kitchen: skim milk; eggs; a small piece of fresh fish; miso soup; half a watermelon, the seeds dark and slick; a bunch of roses; coffee and bagels.

Lilly walks across the sitting room, noticing as she passes that her mother's cup of tea is still three-quarters full. A white film has settled on the surface. Adeela's room, it used to be Lilly's, is no more than an alcove off the living room, but it has a huge sash window filling up the external wall and it looks out onto the tree. She thinks of it as her mother's tree, though it really belongs, she supposes, if it belongs to anyone at all, to old Mr Cohen on the ground floor. Grumpy old fart.

They swapped rooms the day Lilly turned seventeen. It was her mother's idea; she wanted to simplify – at least that's what Lilly remembers her saying.

Lilly is up the ladder, painting the walls Plascon's sun-kissed yellow when the intercom buzzes, so Adeela puts down her roller and peels the latex gloves from her hands. They're just about done anyway. The intercom buzzes again. And again.

'Hurry up, Mom,' Lilly says.

Adeela presses the button for the speaker. 'Who is it?' she asks.

'Hi, Mrs K. It's us. Is the birthday girl in?'

'Vanezu?'

'And Kate and Loren. We've got cake.'

Adeela buzzes them in, but it is Lilly who flings the front door open and goes out into the hall. She can hear voices coming up the stairwell, the sound of feet. Somebody is wearing heels, probably Kate. Lilly half-expects Mr Cohen to yell at them for making such a racket. Then a moment later there they are filling the landing, her very best friends. Kate is carrying a chocolate-raspberry cake from Mila's Cake Shoppe. Loren has a bunch of yellow lilies.

'My favourites!' Lilly squeals.

Adeela rescues the cake and flowers while the girls fling their arms around each other,

shepherds them into the apartment.

'For you.' Vanezu produces a bottle of Californian sparkling wine from the bottom of her tote bag and offers it to Adeela with a kiss. 'From my dad, for putting up with Lilly for seventeen years.'

The candles are lit. They sing 'Happy Birthday'. Lilly stands leaning over the table, her long black hair hangs straight and smooth as an ironed sheet on either side of her face. She clasps it out of the way with one paint-freckled hand, and blows the candles out.

'Make a wish,' Adeela says.

Under Lilly's white vest, apple-pert breasts fill the lace-edged bra with such confidence that a spasm of longing for her once-little girl catches in Adeela's throat. It is all right, she tells herself. This is how it goes. These are her friends. I am her family. They will lie on the couch, they will drink my champagne, they will eat one modest slice of cake each (except for Loren who will sneak another when she clears the plates), they will listen to music and talk about boys. They will check their mobiles constantly and respond to messages while continuing their conversation. They will see what others are up to, then plan where to go. They will discuss what to wear. These are the things girls this age do. And on Monday, they will go to school, and not prison. This is, after all, how a girl should be spending her seventeenth birthday. This is 2011, New York.

Lilly passes her a piece of cake and a glass of champagne. 'Are you still going to get that poetry book today?' she asks.

Her mother takes the hint. 'See you girls later,' Adeela says. 'I'll be back in time to make you some supper before you go out. How about pasta with roasted baby tomatoes and parmigiana (Lilly's current favourite), and a nice big green salad?' She waves from the door.

Lilly knows that after clearing away the supper things, her mother will sit in her favourite chair and read the poems in her new book one by one. She knows this because her mother insists that's the only way to read poetry, slowly, expectantly, the way you eat oysters. The magic, she always says, comes after you swallow. Lilly knows her mother will go to bed in the little alcove room with the curtains not yet hung before she gets home. What she doesn't know is that during the early hours of the morning Adeela will confuse the light left on in the window opposite with the bulb in the interrogation room, and wake up frightened.

Lilly has forgotten exactly what the doctor said to her. The exact words probably don't matter that much. She remembers more clearly the spread of colour up the doctor's face, the way the tiny

veins webbed across her cheeks seemed to light up, how her eyes narrowed. She must have taken the time to put make-up on that morning – there was a smudge of blue mascara just above her right eye. She must have drawn her hand across her face before coming into the room to speak to Lilly. The treatment wasn't having any effect any more. There wasn't anything else left to try. Not a whole lot to say, really.

Lilly calls Victor; he'll come over at once. Then she skypes Sukey.

'Oh, Lilly,' Sukey says, her short curly hair all tousled from sleep, her mouth moving slower than her voice. 'I'll get an earlier flight. I'll be there as soon as I can.'

This is the plan. It has all been discussed. Lilly knows what she is expected to do. She and her mother and Victor have worked it all out. She knows they are to engage a nurse from Central Hospice to help. She knows Victor is executor of her mother's will. There is enough money for college and she is already the legal owner of their apartment.

It's almost noon. Lilly says goodbye to Victor. He holds her face in his hands and kisses the top of her head.

'She was pretty talkative this morning,' he says. 'Probably wore her out. That and all the excitement about Sukey coming.' But they both know she is more than just tired.

Lilly goes to pick up the tea mugs near her mother's chair. There's a box with its lid lying to one side. Lilly stops. She recognises it immediately for what it is. She has helped her mother prepare for the memory box workshops she used to run as a counsellor at the HIV/Aids centre.

Lilly knows that on the lid there will be a self-portrait of her mother. She knows that her name and her birthday will be written underneath it. She knows, without looking, that there will be a space left open where Lilly can write in the date Adeela dies. She knows it will be soon.

Lilly kneels on the floor next to the coffee table. She cannot read the writing on the side of the box, though she knows it will be a timeline charting the events of her mother's life. She cannot read the writing because of the tears in her eyes.

'Lilly,' says Adeela. She is standing in the doorway, leaning against the wide, white-painted Oregon pine frame. 'Lilly. Lilly. Lilly.' She crosses the room and lowers herself onto the floor, holds onto her daughter. They cling to each other, but it is Lilly who is propping Adeela up.

Lilly helps Adeela into her chair, fetches a glass of water, then sits on the stool Victor sat on only hours before. The kitchen clock, a replica (though granted, it's somewhat smaller) of the one in Grand Central Station, says twelve forty-five. Crystal is only due at two to administer today's pain

meds.

'Shall I call Crystal, ask her to come earlier?'

'Uh,' says Adeela, 'I'll be okay for a while still.'

Lilly lays her head on the armrest of her mother's chair. Its familiar, slightly dusty smell is mingled with something sharper, something menacing. Can a smell be menacing? She wants to burrow her head into her mother's side like she did when she was little. Wants her mother to smell the way she smells when they've been lazing in the sun. Or out in the wind. Wants her to smell of pancakes, or of the spicy lamb casseroles she calls bredie, of the chopped dhanya Americans call cilantro. Not this sharp, impersonal smell that tastes metallic in her mouth.

Adeela strokes her head. Lilly's hair has been cut into a Chinese bob and Adeela tucks a stray end behind her daughter's ear. At the base of her neck, just where it begins to curve into her shoulder, is a small tattoo, the shape of the African continent.

'I was sure you were a girl, long before they could tell one way or the other, and by then I was already calling you Lilly,' Adeela says. 'When I went into labour, I knew I had chosen the right name. I knew you would arrive that night, even though you were taking so long. And you did. Quarter past eleven on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September. The same day as Lillian Ngoyi.'

'Lillian Ngoyi? Who's that?' Lilly lifts her head and looks at her mother. 'Was she an aunt or something?'

Adeela is quiet, looking out the open French window, at her tree.

'Somebody in South Africa, or somebody here?' Lilly prompts. Her mother doesn't ever talk about her family, doesn't like to talk about when she lived in South Africa at all.

'They called her the Mother of Black Resistance, the woman I named you after.' Adeela takes a sip of water. 'Have a look in the box, Lilly. There are a few pictures of her, near the top.'

Lilly puts the box onto her lap and lifts out a clutch of papers. There is a set of black-and-white commemorative postcards tied in a striped ribbon. She pulls the ribbon, takes a card and turns it over to look at the photo. A middle-aged African woman looks away from her, her eyes gazing off to one side from beneath a high, pointed forehead framed by tightly combed back hair. There are deep lines running down from the sides of her nostrils to the edges of her wide-mouthed smile. It's a formal picture, taken in a studio, maybe.

'She looks like she's seen something that has made her really sad,' Lilly says, passing it to her mother. She always thought being named after a flower was lame, but she's not so sure about being named for some politico either.

Lilly looks at another postcard. Four women in old-fashioned clothes are linked arm in arm; behind them is a whole crowd of women. One of the four is wearing a sari, another is in a smart suit with a handbag draped over her left arm. She has dark glasses on under a careful hairdo.

'That's Lillian.' Adeela points out the third woman, the one with a wide-collared shirt tucked into a full, calf-length skirt, two lines of braid stitched just above the hem. 'That's Helen Joseph' – she points to the dark glasses lady – 'and this is Albertinia Sisulu. I can't remember who this is just now. Her name will come to me ... Sophia something.'

'What are they doing? Looks like a march of some sort.'

'Yes,' says Adeela, 'a very famous women's march, in protest against the passbooks African people had to carry with them wherever they went.'

'So I am named Lilly after a South African activist? Not the flower?'

'Mhhh. I wanted to be like Lillian Ngoyi when I was a teenager. She was an incredible woman, Lilly.'

'What happened to her?'

'A few months after this picture was taken, she was arrested for high treason with hundreds of others, including Nelson Mandela. That was 1956, before I was born. She was kept locked up until she died. 1980. I started high school that year. She wasn't just an activist, like those bourgeois types marching around Central Park shouting the odds for gay rights or gorillas in Uganda; she was a real heroine. She sacrificed her life fighting for an end to racism and sexism. I used to think our generation would finish that fight.'

Her mother is sitting upright in her chair now, twisting the big silver ring around and around her finger, staring straight ahead. Crystal said she would have energy surges. Is this what she meant? She looks kind of crazy. Lilly wishes Crystal would come. Her mother is sweating. Little beads of it line her top lip; there are damp stains under her arms – and she smells.

Lilly gets up to close the doors, pulls the curtain over a little, sits down again. What's with her mother, anyway? Why couldn't she just have left that damn box well alone. Why does she have to give her the whole damn name-story thing now? What difference does it make why she's named Lilly? Yeesh, but an activist?

'So you want me to go to law school rather than art school, then?' she says.

Adeela sinks back into her chair, puts a hand on Lilly's arm, 'I didn't call you Lilly because I wanted you to be an activist. I did it to remember how strong a woman can be when she really believes in something. Do you understand?'

Lilly desperately wants to understand.

Adeela takes a tiny piece of watermelon from the plate Lilly put next to her and takes a bite. Lilly watches. Enough chewing, she wants to yell. Swallow, damn it, swallow.

Adeela swallows. 'It's late for watermelons, isn't it?' she says. 'It is watermelon, isn't it?'

'Nice, huh? I found it this morning, down at Gianni's. Have another piece. Look, I took all the pips out.' Lilly knows her mother thinks it's criminal to eat anything that's been flown in from the other side of the world.

The watermelon feels good in Adeela's mouth, cool, like drinking from a mountain stream, but it tastes like coal. How does she know what coal tastes like? She doesn't really. Okay then, it tastes like black, pitch black. She knows what that tastes like.

Adeela takes another little bite. She wants to see Sukey tonight. Sukey who, like the watermelon (Lilly can't fool her) is also flying in from the other side of the world. And she wants to see Lillian turn nineteen. On Monday.

'I wasn't named for anyone in particular,' she says. 'Adeela is the Arabic word for equal.'

'Equal? To what?'

My father named me that because, he said, I was an equal disappointment to my mother and my sisters. He'd wanted a son.'

'Yeesh Mom. Why did your mother let him call you that?'

'I was born the day they first began demolishing houses in District Six, where I grew up. My mother said she could hear the bulldozers from where she lay in the Peninsula Maternity Hospital. By the time she got back home, a dozen houses in her neighbourhood were gone. My parents were among those who refused to move. It was a long, long fight. Eventually they gave up.'

'What's that got to do with your name?'

'Muslims believe it's a child's right to be honoured with a good name. The barakah of the name is its lifelong blessing. My mother believed in equality. She said I'd come out fighting and that she hoped I'd keep on fighting, all my life, for things like justice and equality. I couldn't do it though, Lilly. I tried, but I couldn't.'

'Mom, it's all right. Don't cry. Mom.'

Adeela has her eyes screwed closed. Even so, tears run down her cheeks.

'It's okay, Mom. It's okay. Really, don't cry.'

Adeela opens her eyes. She wants to tell Lilly she'll be all right, just give her a minute, but

her daughter is only a silhouette with a voice that seems to come from the other side of the room. Adeela feels a band of dampness spreading down her back. The smell clogs her nostrils; she is repulsed by the stench, short of breath. The pain in her gut tightens like a tourniquet. The glare hurts her head. The room seems to be fracturing into thousands of moving coloured pixels.

‘Mom? Mom, are you okay? I think you’d better lie down now. Mom?’

Lilly half-carries her mother to the bedroom. Shit, where is Crystal? ‘Crystal will be here any minute to give you your meds, okay? Then you’ll feel better and can have a good sleep,’ she says. ‘I promise I’ll wake you in time for a bath before Sukey gets here. Okay, Mom? We can wash your hair and I’ll get out the new sweatpants Vanezu brought you at the GAP sale and your favourite polo neck. Okay, Mom?’ Lilly is close to tears. ‘Okay?’

‘I want to tell you ...’ Adeela whispers.

‘No more talking, Mom, okay? Sukey can tell me everything, all right, Mom? Here. I’m going to give you some oxygen.’ Lilly unhooks the oxygen mask and fits it over Adeela’s mouth and nose, slips the elastic behind her head, then lowers her gently onto the pillow. She turns the dial and checks the flow. Where the fuck is Crystal? Of all days to be late.

Lilly sits on the edge of her mother’s bed, watches her chest as her breathing slowly eases. She takes her mother’s hand and begins to hum ‘Thula Baba’. It’s a Zulu lullaby Adeela used to sing her when she was little. Hush now, be quiet.

But Adeela is restless; her free hand picks at the embroidery on the duvet cover. Her left leg jerks in a sudden spasm of pain. Lilly wonders if she can administer the morphine herself. Should she give her mother a sedative? Maybe wait five more minutes. She wishes Vanezu would come, or Victor.

Lilly closes her eyes and sings louder. She sings all the names she can remember her mother ever mentioning: Ryder, Huda, Amina (not that she’s ever met or even spoken to any of them) and Peter, her own father (killed by the security forces, Sukey tells her much later, before you were born). She sings the places Adeela has talked about: District Six, Table Mountain, Lavender Hill (where drug lords and gangsters rule and little kids are killed in the crossfire – she’s read about it in the *New York Times*).

‘Thula thu, thula South Africa, thula wena.’ She sings for Vanezu and for Victor, their longing for Zimbabwe. She sings for Adeela’s homesickness. ‘Thula thu, thula mama, thula thu.’ And for her own ache to be African.



### III. Crystal

Crystal has a key, but always uses the buzzer, just to let them know she's arrived and on her way up. She doesn't like surprising her patients. She pauses on the landing to catch her breath, unlocks the front door and steps into the apartment. Things are not going well. She knows that before she has taken three steps. Lilly is in Adeela's room, crooning. The French windows are wide open and the curtains are standing straight out in the stiff breeze. As if it wasn't chilly enough anyhow.

Crystal crosses the room and closes the doors, startling a little bird, one of those nondescript sorts she doesn't know the name of, from its perch. She turns her back on the tree and looks around. The room is tidy, really very tidy, except for an old painted cardboard box (one of Lilly's latest creations? Hell no! I know what that is) and a few leaves blown across the floor. The magazines and newspapers have been tidied away. The poetry book she gave Adeela last Thanksgiving is lying on the kitchen table. Crystal recognises the cover at a glance: a naked woman with two pendulous breasts half shielded behind a hand whose fingers are thickened by age or disease. *Body Bereft*, that's the title. The poet's a South African. She thought Adeela might like that, even if the poems were shit. Crystal couldn't tell. She didn't know a shitty poem from a good one, not back then. Next to the book is a bunch of white roses, the tips tinged dark green just where the petals begin to curve slightly away from each other. They are still in their plastic sleeve. The place looks poised for a party.

Ah, yes. This is the day Adeela's long-lost friend is coming from South Africa, Sue something. Crystal makes a mental note to put the roses in water as soon as she has a moment.

September 23, 15h00

Pulse rate low. Temperature 103.1. Breathing shallow. Patient required oxygen to stabilise. Severe pain in lower back and abdomen. Circulation poor. Urine: smoky. No bowel action.

Fluid intake: +/- 75 ml

Solid foods: 1 small piece of watermelon

Crystal flips back to the previous entries ... that's less than yesterday, less than the day before too. Actually it's the least she's eaten in a week. She will have to let Dr Wilson know.

Medication administered

60 mg oxycodone (oral) + 30 mg oral soln-Roxanol (injection)

And she will have to speak to Lilly. Though the poor girl can probably tell.

Crystal can hear Lilly in the bathroom. Toilet flushing, the rush of water as she turns on the shower, groans from the old plumbing. She sits a moment, her back to her friend, and stares out the big sash window, past the tree with its wizened leaves to the slice of wall with half a window opposite. She wonders who lives there and what they are doing. She hopes they are thirty-something, having wild Saturday-afternoon sex, or cooking a meal together. That there are bright mango-coloured tulips in a vase, music playing ... jazz maybe, or something more upbeat.

Crystal wants to be invited over for dinner. She wants to go into the home of the healthy, the virile, the rosy-cheeked. She wants to suck marrow from big meaty bones, lick her fingers before wiping them on linen napkins. She wants to pick the olives out of a bowl of glossy green leaves. She wants to be offered a third helping of crushed potatoes with lashings of butter and cracked black pepper just so she can laugh and shake her head – No, I couldn't possibly manage another mouthful, thank you. She imagines licking a smear of chocolate mousse from the side of her lover's mouth. Yes, she imagines having a lover. Brazilian. Or French.

But Crystal is fifty-seven years old and newly divorced. She is shapeless the way rising dough is shapeless. Her hair is beautiful, though, long and thick. Crystal never colours it, is proud of how dark it still is. She keeps her hair coiled up in a twist at the back of her head and secures it with a large hair grip. This she does often during the day, letting it down and coiling it back up. Fastening it with the hair grip. She wears men's shirts, good quality and well cut, buttoned to her throat. Sometimes she adds a silk scarf or a long rope of heavy beads, sometimes an antique brooch. She is particular about wearing natural fibres close to her skin. She has two pairs of Levi's jeans which she wears on alternate days. She likes the old 501s because she doesn't have to wrestle them over her hips.

Crystal sighs. She knows having a lover is as likely as Adeela seeing snow fall again.

They met, Crystal and Adeela, only three years ago, on the stairs outside the centre. Adeela had been standing face turned up to the falling snow. They were going to the same case-meeting, had

coffee together afterwards across the road where Crystal had noticed Adeela often before. She was always alone, always reading. Crystal did not read much. And certainly not poetry. Adeela had been gentle with her.

Later, they had cried and laughed over the poems in that book with the pendulous breasts. They had cried for the ranting poet who refused to keep silent about being a woman caught between ageing and death. They had sobbed for Adeela, who had a one-in-a-hundred chance of seeing old age. They had cried for the soon-to-be-orphaned Lilly, sleeping in her room. And in among those tears, Crystal sobbed for herself.

Of all the poems they had read out loud to each other that night after Adeela came home from her double mastectomy, she remembers only two lines off by heart:

“... this she knows: nobody will ever again breathlessly  
peel desire from her shoulders.”

Adeela is fast asleep, a deep morphine bliss. Crystal gets up and walks across to the kitchen table, picks up the book. She leafs through the pages, watching the familiar titles flip past till she reaches the inside front cover. She reads the note that she wrote:

Never give up!

Thanksgiving - 22 November 2012



Below it, a new inscription, in Adeela's handwriting, reads:

For Crystal

May you live long enough for the tight to become loose, and may you  
revel in all those who are breathless in your company.

A.

22 September 2013.

Crystal guiltily lays the book back on the table, feels she is trespassing. Tears claw up her throat, scald her sockets. She hears Lilly turn off the shower. She cannot cry now. Really, she should have known better than to nurse a friend. Crystal unwraps the cellophane from the flowers, picks out those already drooping and drops them into the stainless-steel trash-can. This is it. The very limit. She's going to quit, just as soon as Adeela goes. She can't do it any more.

Crystal fills a tall glass vase with water, adds the long-life mix and stirs, gathers up the roses and places them one by one into place, shifts them around a little. There. She lets out a little sigh of satisfaction.

What I'd really like to be, she thinks, is a florist.



### ***un-set-tled***

*adj.*

1. *Lacking order or stability*
2. *Worried and uneasy*
3. *Liable to change; unpredictable*
4. *Not yet resolved*
5. *Having no settlers or inhabitants*

*oxforddictionaries.com*

When Sue wakes up, she's not sure if it's night or morning. Nor is she entirely sure where she is. The smell is familiar, the feel of the bed linen, the heft of the duvet. Even the dark (no street lights) and the lack of noise suggest she is waking in the same place she went to bed. These things are familiar, yet she gropes about for clues to anchor herself by. She feels beneath her body the rim of the depression she has worn in the mattress. She feels the heat from Dominic's body curled away from her. She knows she is in her own bed. In her own home. But she knows too, that she has been away. Far away.

For a moment or two she lingers in that other place where there are always cars; always lights; people on the street. She sees them bundled up in coats, scarves and hats, heads bent against the wind. She sees herself, one of them, waiting to cross the street. She is wearing a cream wool coat, very stylish. It covers the top of her long boots. She recognises the boots. The light changes and she moves, walking between a man with a small dog snarled up in its leash, two young women, a group of teenagers with wires coming out of their ears, and another man who towers over the others. It is this man she notices most. She wants to be with him. There is something compelling, something that presses at her to follow him. She wants to see where he is going. She thinks maybe she is supposed to go there too. Perhaps they have a mutual friend, a mutual engagement? There is a look about him.

The man is carrying a huge bunch of vark lilies, their thick juicy stems leave silvery tracks on

the black of his coat. The white of the flowers is the white of snow under a bright sun. It hurts her eyes. Hang on. There is something wrong in this scene. You cannot buy vark lilies at a city florist. No. You pick them yourself in swampy areas or buy them from bergies at street corners. But only for funerals. They are unlucky otherwise. Like opals. Sue wants to ask him whose funeral he is going to, and where-ever did he find those vark lilies? She calls to him. Her voice comes out a mangled, dry mouthed gargle;

'Aarrck.'

He is walking fast now, he is getting away. She remembers a name, his name perhaps. She calls again, frantic she will lose sight of him.

'AARRRCK.'

'Hey,' mumbles Dominic, 'hey now. Sssh. You're dreaming again.'

He puts an arm over her and curls around her body. It's how they liked to sleep, pressed up against one another like two spoons. She'd noticed lately, they don't sleep much like that any more.

Sue eases out from under his arm, gets up and soft foots across the floor in her sheepskin slippers, through the tiny lounge, the kitchen and into the bathroom. She really ought to drink less tea. The kitchen clock says six thirty. She might as well set off now. She knows the way. She'll take the dog. It will be light in half an hour and she can be home before the kids wake. They like her to be home when they wake. And when they go to sleep.

There are birds calling now, a cape robin, a batis, still tentative, but awake. The pale gravel crunches beneath her running shoes. Maybe she'll see an owl? Sue shakes out her arms and rolls her shoulders. She feels displaced, oddly bodiless. In the dark, she knows the mountains are waiting. She knows their exact position, their orientation, their expression. She knows which peak will be touched first, and how the mantle of sun will trail down its slopes lighting up the dark green of row upon row of pine. But all of this is hidden now.

She turns off the forestry road and onto a seldom used Jeep track. The long grass between the wheel-tracks is thick with dew. It *thwaks* against her bare legs and soaks her shoes. The dog sets the pace and chooses the route. Or that's how it seems to Sue. She sees nothing, feels nothing, only vaguely conscious of the heaviness dissolving in her thighs and the ease of her breathing as she reaches a long contour. She is not aware of the change from plantation into fynbos. Nor of the light which now, ever so tentatively, trickles into the valley. She is somewhere

else. Her body runs on past the rooi-els grove with a stream she picks her way across, while the dog stops to drink. Her body feels the jar of a sharp descent. Sue is too busy trying to name a location, the place far away she has just come back from, and a person; who was it she'd gone to see? And who was the man she tried to call?

The sun has not yet reached her garden by the time she gets back to her own front gate. She must remember to feed Rosie's rabbit or it will surely die. Die. Somebody has died. Sue pulls the dark shadow of her dream behind her and into the house. Dominic is up. In the kitchen. Making tea. She stands on one leg, stretching, and watches him.

'Nice run?' he asks.

'Not much of a welcome home,' Sue says.

'You've only been gone an hour or two. What do you want, flowers? A kiss?' He plants one on the top of her bent head. Dominic generally wakes up cheerful.

'Is that all? Haven't I been away for weeks and just come back? It feels like I've been away. Far away.'

'You should eat before you go, a banana at least. You're probably a bit hypoglycaemic.' Dominic pushes a mug of tea across the table in her direction. 'Or maybe it's your dream. You were shouting in your sleep again.' But no, he couldn't decipher the words. Didn't catch a name.

'I was somewhere cold. Somewhere I didn't go out much. A big city, much bigger than Cape Town, and colder. Somewhere like London, or Paris, or Amsterdam maybe.' Sue used to travel to London, Paris and Amsterdam for work before she gave up all that to take her writing more seriously. 'And someone was dying. I can't figure out who. There was a man. A really tall, black man. He was carrying a bunch of vark lilies. Of all things.'

Dominic smiles fondly at her and picks up the *Weekend Argus*. 'Write a story about it. You were complaining you didn't have any inspiration for your next piece.'

But Sue isn't listening. She has taken her tea and a roll of toilet paper with her into the garden. She is blowing her nose savagely. The lawn needs mowing and the lavender needs cutting back. She wanders over to the stone bird bath and looks among the bushes at its base for the first sign of a spring bulb. Nothing. Of course not, it's not yet mid winter.

Sue makes for the back of the garden where a pre-cast cement bench stands beneath a pompom tree. There are three metal hearts hanging on thin beaded strings in the tree. She's hung them there each year without saying anything to Dominic. It's her own private memorial for baby.

They had fought terribly, Dominic and her, while trying to plant that tree. Sue taps the hearts gently with her forefinger and watches the glass beads glint as they spin.

The children find her there, sloughing sleep from their small shoulders as they wander over the wet lawn in their pyjamas. They have always, thank God, been good sleepers. Benjamin holds his sister by one hand, a book in the other.

'Mama,' he calls, 'read us a story.'

The children snuggle up onto her lap and lean into her body.

'You've been crying,' says Rosie. She doesn't ask why. That's how it is with Rosie, even at five. She sees things.

Sue contemplates asking her daughter if she knows anyone who died in the night. But she knows it would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? She ruffles Rosie's mop of fair curls.

'I had a bad dream,' she says, 'that's all.'

'Me too,' Rosie says.

'Poor baby. What about?'

'I dreamt you went away and didn't come back.'

Sue squeezes Rosie tight. 'I went for a run early, but I'm here now.'

'Saskia's mother went away and didn't come back. That's why she has to go to after-care every day. Teacher Lorraine told us,' says Rosie.

'Read.' says Benjy.

The book Benjamin has chosen is one she has read a hundred times, *Elephant and Crocodile*, it's called. While she reads the story of the violin playing croc, her mind drifts back to her dream. There had been someone else there. Someone who knew the place well. Someone who could give directions when unpacking the dishwasher. Someone who knew where to find the coffee plunger, the spaghetti spoon. Someone young, who looked just like...

'Mom, you're not reading p-r-o-p-e-r-l-y.'

"Elephant and Crocodile are never parted again. They became famous musicians and played concerts all over the world. The two live happily as friends for ever after."

'The end,' says Benjamin.

'Yes Benjy, the end.' Best not to leave anything out.

Rosie sits on the little wooden stool and watches Sue while she showers. Sue wishes she would go



away. She makes the water as hot as she can bear, trying to scald the shadow that has attached itself to her heels, to burn it off. She will not carry it around on such a beautiful day.

'Now your bum is red too,' Rosie says, as Sue towels dry.

They eat a breakfast of raw oats, almonds and grated apples. The kids eat Oatees, the standard Saturday concession to an otherwise healthy diet.

'I'll be back by three, three-thirty,' Sue says. 'I'll pick up some milk and bread on my way home. Maybe a DVD?'

But Dominic says he has a proposal to finish for Monday and will need to work through the night, seeing as he's looking after the kids all day. He says it sweetly, but Sue feels the accusation.

'Remember to come back, Mommy,' says Rosie waving, as Sue reverses down the drive way.

There are only twelve people in the room, mostly white, middle-aged woman like herself. Two so-called Coloured women and two Muslim men. And Andile. Andile catches her eye and winks. They've worked together in many platforms over the years – and called it many things. Diversity Dialogues is the current favoured phrase. People generally find it a lot less threatening than Racism. Or Sexism. But it would seem, not a whole lot more interesting. Today Sue is not a facilitator, she is just one of the twelve, a parent at Oakdale Primary.

'It's June sixteen,' Andile says.

Some people nod knowingly. Others look around the room as if seeking a clue to the significance of the date.

'Youth Day. Thirty seventh anniversary of the student uprising in Soweto. It seems an auspicious date for the parent body to begin working on issues of diversity. Let's begin with introductions. I am Andile Sithole, from the Institute of Peace and Reconciliation.'

Does he ever question the value of all this? Whether it really makes any difference, Sue wonders.

'Please choose an object from the tray in the middle of the circle,' Andile says, 'any object that appeals to you in some way, and use it to introduce yourself, say why you are here, perhaps a little about what you were doing this day in 1976.'

Sue shakes herself. Tries to call her attention from that cold, far away place back into the room. She tries to concentrate on what the woman on the other side of the circle is saying about growing up blissfully unaware of anything untoward going on in the country. The woman has chosen a box of matches from the pile of objects and is waving it about like a kid with a rattle.

'And I don't even know any Blacks or Coloureds,' she concludes.

The next person in the circle has an old photo album on her lap. It is not from the pile on the floor, but something she has brought with her. She opens it and turns the pages, not looking up. It bulges with newspaper clippings.

'My sisters and I started compiling this album in 1976. I was seventeen at the time, in standard nine, that's grade eleven, right? We kept every article or picture we could find on Sharpeville, and when it spread down here, about the local school boycotts too.' She looks up and hands the album to the man next to her.

'Yes,' he says, turning a page as if it were a holy book. 'Yes.'

'Every year, my sisters, brothers and me, we get together, on June sixteen, to look at the album. And to remember. We've tried explaining it to our kids. We try explain what it was like being at school in the seventies. What it was like being a Coloured person then. But it's so foreign to them. We could just as well be talking about the ancient Greeks and Romans. But it still lives in us. It...haunts us.' The woman with the album has tears sliding down her face. The man sitting next to her, puts a hand on her shoulder.

'Sorry,' she says, 'I'm feeling a bit emotional. Oh and my name is Merel. Merel Brown. Once, by the way, I sent out a group email at work and by mistake, added a 'y' at the end of my name. That's how I feel in this country sometimes you know, Merely Brown.'

Only Merely Brown laughs. Some of the others have odd looks on their faces, like dogs caught at something. They are all quiet for a while. Then the next person goes. And the next.

'I must have just started primary school in '76,' says Sue. It is her turn to speak, though she doesn't yet know what to say. 'I knew nothing about Sharpeville.'

She holds a miniature Paddington Bear in her hands. Paddington Bear holds a suitcase in his. 'I chose this bear because he reminds me of a university friend, a very close friend, though I lost touch with her after we graduated. I heard many years later, that she had emigrated.' Sue has not thought of Adi for ages. Why now? 'In the white community, everybody knows somebody who has emigrated, so the news just kind of washed over me at the time. But after a while it really got to me, *really* got to me. She was passionate about this country, she sacrificed so much. Why would she go? Just when Mandela was finally about to become president?'

Sue feels a rising fury. Why, she thinks, did Adi have to leave? And what the hell am I still doing here? She swallows hard.

'She was like a sister to me for the short time we knew each other, like a twin. We were

born on the same day of the same year. We started school in the same year, reached high school in the same year. In 1985 I wrote my Matric exams under military protection – there had been bomb threats, school kids were rioting in other parts of town. Adi was part of those riots. While I wrote my final papers in my nice, whites only, government high school, she was arrested and detained. They kept her inside, detention without trial, for six months. We only lived thirteen kilometres apart, but really, we lived in different worlds.'

Merely Brown nods, so does the man next to her. The woman with sinus problems passes a tissue along the circle to Sue. Andile clears his throat, spreads his hands. Somebody gets up and puts the kettle on. Time for a break.

Sue gets home to an empty house. There is a note from Dominic. He has taken the children to visit his dad. They'll be home at six. She has two and a half unexpected hours to herself. Sue goes into the study and lifts down an old photo album. The cover has a picture of wild horses galloping along an orange beach. A few photos slide out of the pages where the glue no longer has any stick to it. They are not the ones she is looking for. At the back of the album are her graduation photographs. There is the one of her in her white dress and black graduation gown with its purple hood, standing with her parents. Her father, in suit and tie, is grinning madly and holding her certificate in a victory salute, as if it were his own. And there is the one of her with Mary and Adi. She and Adi are arm in arm, laughing. Mary is slightly to one side, holding her graduation gown open to show what's underneath: a yellow, black and green striped tunic and a sign pinned to the inside of her gown which reads, Free Nelson Mandela. Mary stood on stage, just after being capped and opened her gown to the audience. The polite clapping had gone wild, at least in the front of Jameson Hall, where the graduates sat.

Sue peels the photo from its place and carries it to her desk. She switches on her laptop and waits for it to warm up, watches all the little icons flicker ever so slightly as if waking up. She logs on to Facebook and types in Adi's full name under search-for-friend. She scrolls through the options Facebook offers, but can't find anyone like her Adi. Maybe she's changed names? She adds the University of Cape Town, but has no other way of limiting the field. After Pete's death, Adeela went underground. Sue knows nothing more recent about her, nothing that will help trace her in cyberspace.

She tries again, this time typing in Mary Taylor. She adds UCT and Women's Legal Centre, the last place Mary worked before leaving for Canada as far as she can remember. It has been

more than ten years since they'd last had contact. Sue scrolls through the Mary Taylors with Facebook accounts. There is one living in Toronto that catches her eye. The photograph is of a child building a snowman, her daughter perhaps? Sue had heard that Mary had had a daughter. Who would've told her ? She clicks on that Mary Taylor. Yes it's her, it must be.

There are only a few photos, mostly of snow scenes, and one of her, half facing the camera, at a distance. It's hard to make a positive identification, but the page has links to the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa, and The Women's Legal Centre. It gives her occupation as professor at the University of Toronto, Faculty of Law.

Sue sends a friend request. Then she tries Google. She finds nothing for Adi, but a slew of links for Mary, mostly academic journals, and one with her University contact details.

**From:** Sue Key  
**To:** Mary Taylor  
**Subject:** making contact  
**Date:** June 15<sup>th</sup> 2013  
**Time:** 16h35

Dear Mary

Today is Youth Day. June 16. I have been thinking of you and Adi all day, wondering where you both are, how you are and what you are doing. How it is that we are so out of touch? I saw a photo on Facebook of a woman who looks like you, with a little girl? Is that you, is she yours? If I have the right Mary, I would love to hear from you.

Sue

**From:** Mary Taylor  
**To:** Sue Key  
**Subject:** RE: making contact  
**Date:** June 16<sup>th</sup> 2013  
**Time:** 17h03

Darling Sukey hello.

Is it really you? I could hardly believe it when I saw your name pop into my in-box. I have been thinking of you a lot recently, not least

because Adi's daughter contacted me out of the blue just last week, asking after you.

I am living in Toronto and yes, I have a nine year old daughter, Wanda. Do you remember Roberto? From Mozambique? Well he's Wanda's dad and we still have an on/off thing going, which is pretty much all you can have when living on two separate continents. Roberto hates Canada. And I just can't live in Africa any more.

Adi lives in New York. I met up with her again at a conference on, wait for it, Women Rights and HIV/Aids a few years back, and we've stayed in contact since then. She was one of the keynote speakers, and so was I. So neither of us has totally abandoned the cause, you see.

Totally weird to see each other again. We spent a wonderful evening together, and I got to meet her daughter, a really amazing kid. She has her mother's eyes. As you ask, how is it possible we have grown so far apart?

I see from your email address that you are still in South Africa. You always said you would stay. And so you have. Despite everything. Are you still with Dominic? How about kids, do you have any? Do write back and tell me everything. What a wonderful way this has been to start my day.

Love

Mary xx

ps: I am emailing your details to Adi's daughter right now.



**From:** Lilly Khan  
**To:** Sue Key  
**Subject:** RE:RE: making contact  
**Date:** June 16<sup>th</sup> 2013  
**Time:** 17h50

Dear Sue

This is Lilly, Adeela's daughter. I got your email address from Mary Taylor. My mom has been talking a lot about you and Mary in the last few months. I know you three were really close friends in the years

before she left South Africa. I know that was a long time ago and that she hasn't had any contact with you since then, though she is in touch occasionally with Mary. She says you are probably angry with her for leaving the way she did and not ever contacting you. She says you were like sisters back then, and that she misses you more than anything. My mom is dying of cancer – she probably doesn't have all that long left. I don't know how to put it except straight like that. I'm sorry if it's a shock. My mom really wants to see you and Mary again. She wants to have you both in the same room, at the same time. And she wants me to meet you. I know it is just a fantasy she has, and that it's a lot to ask, but I'd like to make it real. So I am writing to ask if you would consider making the trip to New York, say in September, if that suits you? We are able to pay your fare and would have you stay here with us in our apartment. We live in Brooklyn. I hope you are not too shocked or offended by this request. I know you will have to think about it before replying, but please Sukey, please think about it, even if you are still hurt or mad with my Mom.

Got to go now

Lilly

PS: Mom doesn't know I am emailing you. I don't want to disappoint her if things don't work out.



It's dark outside. The dog will want feeding. And the rabbit – she mustn't forget the rabbit again. There is still laundry hanging on the line. Sue knows she should light a fire before it gets any colder. She should start on the supper – the kids will be hungry when they get back.

When Dominic arrives home, the house is all dark. The dog leaps up at him, runs circles around his legs. He opens the door and goes into the house (the kids are asleep in the car). There are no lights on, no fire. No smell of cooking. He finds her at her desk, in a blue pool of light. She turns to look at him as he comes into the room.

'What's going on?' he says. 'You okay?'

'It's Adeela,' she says, 'She's dying. That's what my dream is about.'