

# **Imprints of memories, shadows and silences: shaping the Jewish South African story**

**Phyllis Celia Sakinofsky BA MA (Comms)**

Department of Media, Music, and Cultural Studies,  
Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University

20 February 2009

*This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy.*



## **Abstract**

This is a non-traditional thesis which comprises a work of fiction and a dissertation.

The novel is set in South Africa and provides an account of events that took place among three families, Jewish, Coloured and Afrikaans, over three generations.

The dissertation is constructed in three sections. The first section describes the settlement of South Africa's Jewish community, its divergent responses to apartheid and how this is mirrored in its literary output.

In the second section, the relationship between history and fiction since the advent of postmodernism is discussed, how there has been a demand for historical truthfulness through multiple points of view and how consequently there has been an upsurge in memories and memorials for those previously denigrated as the defeated or victims.

Fiction has been re-valued because it is through the novel that these once-submerged stories are being told. The novel has the capacity to explore uncomfortable or silenced episodes in our history, tell important truths and record stories and losses in a meaningful and relevant way. A novel might be shaped by history but it is through the writer's insights and interpretations that messages or meanings can reach many.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is an example of how the written word can expose the relationship between the re-telling of history and finding an alternate truth. By recording the many conflicting stories of its peoples, it has linked truth and literature, ensuring an indelible imprint on the country's future writing. The past cannot be changed, but how the nation deals with it in the future will be determined by language and narrative.

The final section is self-reflexive and illustrates the symbiotic bond between the research and creative components, citing examples from the dissertation of how the two streams influenced one another.

### Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled **“Imprints of memories, shadows and silences: shaping the Jewish South African story”** has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

*[total word count 99,829 excluding glossary]*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phyllis Sakinofsky".

**Phyllis Sakinofsky (40535789)**

20 February 2009

# Part One



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## Introduction

The creative component of the thesis is a novel set in South Africa, a few hours north of Cape Town, and recounts events that took place among and between three families – Jewish, Coloured and Afrikaans – over three generations. It is a story about how their lives became knowingly and unwittingly intertwined.

The protagonist returns to her grandparents' homestead, after many years' absence, to be confronted by an unresolved traumatic event from her past. She realises she cannot put it behind her unless and until she acknowledges her complicity.

The accompanying dissertation is not an analysis of the novel but examines the relationship between history and narrative, located within the context of the Jewish South African community. Strong underlying links between the dissertation and the fiction are revealed, highlighting practical applications of the theory.

The dissertation is divided into three sections: **Section One** explores the unique nature of the Jewish community, 70 per cent of whom arrived from Lithuania between the 1880s and 1930s. The South African Jewish community is an interesting one to observe because of three triggers – antisemitism, the holocaust and apartheid – which had major ramifications on its identity and behaviour.

Ironically, the new migrants believed that in their quest for economic stability they had left antisemitism, marginalisation and poverty behind, but instead they found themselves enmeshed in legitimised racism, but on the side of the oppressor.

The section shows how these factors influenced the community and caused a geological split in its response to apartheid. The complicit majority felt a sense of entitlement, believing their significant achievements were based on hard work and enterprise, and not merely as a consequence of government policies. While many Jews opposed the system from within, a small number actively engaged in the armed struggle. The radicals were labelled “non-Jewish Jews” because although their ethics were based on Jewish values and they came from the same homogenous group, they did not share the identity of the mainstream community, resulting in mutual resentment and hostility.

Jewish writing in South Africa has mirrored the psyche of the community. A chapter in this section contains a brief review of some major Jewish writers and looks

at how the new socio-political culture and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) may influence writing in the future. It also points to the works of animated filmmaker William Kentridge as an artistic response to apartheid.

The TRC was commissioned to assist the state in reconciling its peoples and facilitating the healing process. An unanticipated outcome of the final report was how it recorded for the first time the untold version of the country's history, by uncovering lost voices and exposing different truths. It opened up the society to reveal previously hidden stories, thereby granting all groups permission to explore their pasts and identities.

The relationship between history, memory and narrative is examined in **Section Two**, within the context of postmodernism, the search for historic truthfulness and the inclusion of memory.

Hayden White's view of history is that it is a story which re-presents and interprets the past, whereby history is transferred from the hands of the historians to those who were there. With the overthrow of the idea of a single master narrative there is now space for post-colonial versions that acknowledge the groups that were almost lost from history. Using existing historic records, survivors' accounts, collective memory and stories, these hidden stories, or alternate truths, can now be told. It is especially valid that the historic record includes the silenced voices and the victims of war and trauma, having finally been granted legitimacy and the right to be heard.

Another premise of White's is that these re-presentations of history actually repeated the processes of fiction, legitimising narrative as a form for sharing meaning. According to White, history, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable.

The thesis thus argues that literary fiction is a legitimate way of re-writing history, because it allows the reader to gain insight into, and understanding of, events, and at the same time allows the writer and the group to work through their trauma. This is what Ashraf Rushdy calls palimpsest narrative: through fiction, submerged traces and shadows can be explored, and hidden and transmitted memories exposed, brought to the surface and made conscious.

This section also examines memorials and James Young's concept of counter-memorials as a way to record the past, which can be extrapolated to include

literature. It has also been argued that the TRC report is a counter-memorial because it provides a voice for the victims and perpetrators. Although literature was not discussed within the report, it became almost a literary work in itself because it captured personal, or narrative, truth.

Writing the novel and accompanying dissertation was personally enriching and enlightening. **Section Three** deals with the difficulty in producing two very different pieces of work simultaneously – telling a story and analysing story-telling. On review it was evident that cross-fertilisation had taken place between the creative and academic processes. A number of examples are proffered to illustrate how the reading and research stimulated memories and stories, thereby enhancing the creative writing. The thesis shows how scholarly ideas may be endorsed and re-inforced by personal experience.

## SECTION ONE

### Chapter One

#### Early history

As Jews we may have been newly arrived at the foot of the African continent, but we were not newly arrived in the world; in fact we had arrived in the world long before almost any other group anywhere that could make a plausible show of possessing a continuous historical identity. (Jacobson 2000, p.19)

What was it the Jews crossed oceans, language groups and religions to find? Why did they leave Eastern Europe in their thousands to go to a primitive country on a dark continent, so alien to their culture? What pushed them away from Eastern Europe so that they would spend weeks in discomfort on rough seas, eating *unkosher* food and encountering people and cultures they had never seen before?

Each of my four grandparents travelled this way, separately, in search of a new life of safety and opportunity. In early years of the twentieth century they left their *shtetls*, villages, in Lithuania and headed for a peninsula at the southern tip of Africa. An alien land in every way. They had no idea that the antisemitism, pogroms and poverty they had fled would be replaced by another form of oppression, but this time they would find themselves siding with the oppressor.

They were part of the largest wave of Jewish migration, but not the earliest. The first Jews arrived in South Africa soon after Dutch settlement began in the seventeenth century but the main surge occurred between the 1890s and the 1930s when over 40,000 Jews migrated, predominantly from Lithuania. The community settled and expanded, reaching a total of 119,000 people in the early 1970s (Weiner 2006).

The South African Jewish community was unique in that around 70 per cent of the population came from within a 20 kilometre radius of Kovno province in Lithuania, making it more homogenous than any other Jewish diasporan community in the world (Adler 2000). The remainder originated from Britain, Poland, Latvia and elsewhere in Russia and from Germany just prior to World War Two (Feldberg 1965).

This chapter covers a brief history of South Africa after European invasion, providing detail on the Jewish settlement, focussing on the fears of antisemitism and the resulting quest for conformity.

The Jewish community had established itself and thrived in what was regarded as a land of opportunity. They secured good educations for their children and made inroads into an economy open to development. By the mid-1950s it was clear these immigrants faced a growing dilemma: by leaving Europe they had managed to escape the holocaust but they now found themselves participating in a society that had marginalised the Africans and built its power base on the backs of their labour. Many believed they had to comply with the status quo in order to avoid antisemitic legislation by a government whose policies were arguably based on those of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, the Nazis (Tatz 2003). Because they felt vulnerable, they conformed to the mores of this society, with its blatantly antisemitic history and whose leaders were intent on implementing an unjust policy of separate development (Hayes 1998; Sarkin 1999; Tatz 2003). For others, the circumstances in which they found themselves conflicted with their moral and ethical beliefs as Jews, or socialists or victims of previous terrors in Europe. The complex conundrum they faced was what they could do to oppose the tyranny they encountered, how much they were prepared to sacrifice and how they could deal with their personal feelings of guilt and discontent.

### **Brief history of South Africa after European invasion**

Dutch settlement began at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 under the command of Jan van Riebeeck. Already inhabiting southern Africa were Bantu-speaking Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Pedi and Tswana farmers in the north and east, and indigenous Khoisan hunter-gatherers and KhoiKhoi (Hottentot) pastoralists in the south. At that time it is estimated there were 4,000 to 8,000 KhoiKhoi living on the Cape peninsula (Thompson 2001, p.37). The majority of the indigenous peoples were decimated by miscegenation, disease, starvation and skirmishes with the European settlers. European control of the colony shifted between the Dutch and the English (1795–1803 and 1806–1910). The descendants of

these two major settler groups formed an unhappy alliance to fight their mutual enemy, the Africans.

The early Dutch settlers, brought out by the Dutch East India Company, grew disgruntled over taxes imposed on them and so moved away from the settlement. When, in the 1806, the colony was occupied by Great Britain for the second time, a wave of intrepid nomadic pastoralists, *trekboere*, headed north to escape British rule. From this core grew the Afrikaner nation, with its own language, Afrikaans, and Calvinist church, the Dutch Reformed Church. They fervently believed natives to be alien and uncivilised heathens who could never be true Christians and thus should remain under their Christian *boer* trusteeship (Tatz 2003). The Eastern Cape was the first of many frontiers where the Boers clashed with the Bantu. "Its landscape provided a dramatic backdrop for the moral struggles around colonialism, expansionism, race and freedom" (Krog 2000, p.46). Toward the end of the nineteenth century the Jewish trek followed, looking for opportunities in the hinterland as traders, and, as settlement became more permanent, as innkeepers and businessmen.

The antagonism between the British and the Boers culminated in warfare in 1881 and 1899. The battles were known as the Boer Wars, or South African Wars. The final battle in 1902 ended with the defeat of the Boers by the British. The four provinces were unified into one British Commonwealth nation in 1910, the Union of South Africa.

Jews were only one group among many seeking their fortune in the colony. Over the centuries settlers came from Europe and China, and slaves and indentured labour were brought in from Indonesia, India, Ceylon, Madagascar and Mozambique. Malays (Indonesians), Indians and Asiatics (Chinese) were classed as non-whites while Europeans like the French (Huguenot refugees of the late seventeenth century), Portuguese, Germans and Greeks joined the white community. Classification of the Eastern European Jews was slightly more complicated; they were rejected by the Europeans for being not entirely white or Western European.

**Table 1 Important dates in South Africa history**

1913	Native Land Act forbids Africans to purchase land
1927	Immorality Act prevents sex across colour lines
1929	Suppression of Communism Act and other forms of oppression, censorship and intimidation introduced
1930	Immigration Quota Act is introduced
1948	National Party wins government and apartheid is legislated
1950s	Bantustans are set up under tribal law to restrict African working class moving to cities
1960	Sharpeville massacre: 69 are killed and 180 injured at protest against pass (migratory labour) laws
1960	South Africa declares itself an independent republic and withdraws from British Commonwealth
1963	Nelson Mandela is arrested at Rivonia farm
1973	UN General Assembly declares apartheid a crime in itself and a crime against humanity
1976	360 school children are killed in Soweto riots after protesting against Afrikaans as teaching language at black schools
1977	Steve Biko, black rights leader, dies in police detention
1990	Pres. FW de Klerk announces the release of political prisoners and unbanning of proscribed political organisations
1990	Nelson Mandela is released from prison
1994	First democratic elections are held and the African National Congress wins government under President Mandela
1995	Announcement of Truth and Reconciliation Commission
1996	Bill of Rights is approved
1999	Thabo Mbeki succeeds Mandela as president

From the outset, the indigenous, Bantu, slave and indentured populations were badly treated by European colonists, with no consideration given to their existing social structures, even though the colonists were utterly dependent upon them (Thompson 2001, p.51). They considered the natives to be untameable and so never contemplated their rights or needs for social or political inclusion. It was only in 1948 when the National Party won power that the policy of apartheid was formally legislated but it was by no means a new strategy.

Apartheid means separateness, but not equality. There was no equality in the distribution of services: wages, pensions, employment, political rights, prisons, administration of justice, health, education, religion or sport. Successive governments

encouraged the maintenance of distinctive social groupings. Between 1903 and 1905 the South African Native Affairs Commission had sought the territorial segregation of the races whereby Africans were disenfranchised and removed to rural areas – Bantustans – that were separately governed by tribal leaders, overseen by the Europeans. The 1913 *Native Land Act* forbade Africans to purchase land. As early as 1926 Prime Minister JBM Hertzog introduced the concept of separate development. The *Immorality Act* was passed in 1927, prohibiting sex between whites and non-whites. The *Suppression of Communism Act* was introduced two years later, along with other forms of oppression, censorship and intimidation. This forced government opponents to either leave the country or go underground, supporting the African National Congress (ANC) if they were African and the South African Communist Party if they were white (Tatz 2003).

In 1936 the government promised to hand over 13 per cent of the land to Africans, a target only met in the 1980s. The government wanted to restrict the growth of an emerging African working class and so intentionally handed titular power to tribal leaders, because they correctly predicted this would cause inter-tribal competition and conflict (Tatz 2003).

By formalising apartheid legislation in 1948, South Africa set the standards for racism in the twentieth century, second only to Nazi Germany (Tatz 2003). Traces of Nazi ideology, such as the illegality of interracial sex and marriage, ran through apartheid laws. Another tranche of the apartheid policy was the migratory labour, or pass, system which controlled the flow of labour and access to work, as well as attempting population control by keeping men isolated in the towns and cities, with their wives forced to remain unemployed in rural reserves or Bantustans. Colin Tatz (2003) describes the system as exploitative, manipulative, destructive and oppressive. It was originally set up in the 1870s for Africans working at the Kimberley diamond mines and was replicated in the Transvaal when, in 1886, gold was discovered there. In 1902, High Commissioner Milner tightened the pass controls (Thompson 2001). The laws were gradually refined until Africans were only allowed into white areas if they carried a pass, signed by their employer. African males were only permitted to move to areas requiring cheap labour. Arrests for violations of pass infringements peaked at 381,858 in the years 1975–76



(Thompson 2001, p.193). Neighbouring states and Bantustans were treated as recruiting grounds for mine, agriculture and manufacturing workers.

Conditions for mine workers were appalling; they earned 10 per cent of the equivalent white wage, were restricted in what labour they could perform and were forced to live in single men's hostels. The regular inter-tribal riots in the cramped barracks invariably resulted in the police and army being called to maintain law and order; they would quash the fighting with excessive violence, inflaming existing tensions.

However, over the decades women moved to the cities and lived with their husbands and children in illegal squatter camps, which rapidly grew. On 21 March 1960 a large protest organised by the Pan African Congress (PAC) was held near Johannesburg against the pass laws, resulting in the infamous Sharpeville massacre. Police opened fire, killing 69 and injuring 180. Tension mounted and visible opposition grew against the inhuman treatment by the government. Some were dismayed by the action of the government and police and left the country; others formalised their commitment to the liberation struggle. Members of the leadership were forced into exile, and both the Communist Party and the ANC went underground to their headquarters at a farm *Rivonia*, where the militant wing of the ANC, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Spear of the Nation, was founded. It was here in 1963 that Nelson Mandela, head of the ANC, was arrested, along with sixteen other leaders. The following year he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Soon thereafter the government declared South Africa a republic, withdrawing from the British Commonwealth. This period was both the climax and the nadir of the struggle.

Living standards for Africans worsened as the government introduced more and more draconian measures to control the anti-government activism among the growing, highly politicised population in the townships. In June 1976 the Soweto Riots grabbed the international headlines, when 360 Africans, predominantly school children, were killed after protesting against the introduction of Afrikaans as the main teaching language. The following year, Steve Biko, founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, died in police detention. The impact of an ideological shift toward black power had been predicted by Prof. ID McCrone, Vice-Chancellor of Witwatersrand University in the 1940s, when he wrote that when this occurred, it would see the start of a new South Africa (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007, p.174). His words proved to be prescient; the nature

of the conflict between the Africans and the apartheid government worsened until the leaders of the white nation were finally forced to accept the untenable nature of the situation. On 2 February 1990, President FW de Klerk announced the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of proscribed political organisations. Nine days later Mandela was released from prison, signalling the cessation of apartheid in South Africa.

In 1994 the ANC was elected to power, in the first democratic election in the nation's history. In May, Mandela was inaugurated as president. He was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki in 1999. That year a Bill of Rights was formulated to enable the new South Africa to come to terms with its history, evolving from a traumatised past to a reconstructed future.

### **Jewish settlement in South Africa**

According to South African academic Shula Marks (2004), the history of Jews in South Africa is framed by three triumphalist meta-narratives: the rags to riches story, based on the entrepreneurial drive and quest for knowledge; the legend of the cohesive community comprising of close-knit families; and the utopian myth that Jews did not experience antisemitism in South Africa, “an enviable haven” in Jewish scholar Gideon Shimoni's words (Shimoni 2003). A fourth meta-narrative was added during the 1980s and '90s, around the mythical belief that the disproportionately large number of Jewish radicals had joined the struggle because of their Jewish values.

Samuel Jacobson and David Hijlbron, the first recorded Jews to arrive in South Africa with the earliest white settlers, were converted to Christianity by baptism on Christmas Day, 1669. While the Cape was under the control of the Dutch East India Company (1652 to 1795) only Protestant Christians were permitted to reside there, despite a significant number of Jewish shareholders in the company (Issroff 2001). Thus there were no practising Jews at the Cape until 1806, the start of the second British occupation; by the 1880s the Jewish population had grown to around 4,000 – these were mainly British, Dutch and German immigrants (Issroff 2001).

Following the discoveries of diamonds (1869) and gold (1886) mass arrivals from Lithuania began, ending in the 1930s when legislation terminated access to South

Africa by Jews escaping Europe. During this time a total of 40,000 Jews arrived from Lithuania.

**Table 2 Jewish migration to South Africa**

1652	First European settlement
1820	± 20 Jewish settlers
1869	discovery of diamonds
1800s	4,000 Jews
1886	discovery of gold
1870s	antisemitic depictions in the South African media
1900	40,000 Jews have migrated from Europe; more than half are Lithuanian, 3,000 German and the remainder English
1904	38,000 Jews (25,864 males)
1910	Jews are granted equal status to the other whites in all states
1911	Jewish population under 47,000 (27,880 males) (3.7% of the 1.25 million white population)
1920–1930	20,000 Jewish immigrants arrive
1929	72,000 Jews
1931–1936	6,000 Jews flee from Germany to South Africa
1946	Jewish population reaches 104,156 (4.4% of 2,372,690 whites)
1951	National Party opened membership to Jews for the first time
1965	116,000 Jews
1969	Cape Town's Jewish population: approx 25,000 (out of a total white population of 750,000 – Cape Town is second largest centre after Johannesburg)
1970s	Number of Jews in South Africa peaks at 119,000
1974	12.5% of Jewish voters support National Party
1977	31.3% of Jewish voters support National Party
1970 –1992	more than 39,000 Jews emigrate from South Africa
1997	Cape Town Jewish population: 21,000; Johannesburg: 59,000
2000–01	85,000 Jews
2002	80,000 Jews, with 55,000 in Johannesburg
Current	Migration figures from South Africa are approximately 1,800 per year

Sources: Adler 2000; Braude 2001; Marks 2004; Issroff 2001; Pogrand 1997; Saron 1965; Shimoni 2003; Tatz 2003; Museum of the Jewish People 2006

## **Lithuania, from whence they came**

Saron describes Lithuania as an economically poor, culturally backward and neglected country with a history of shifting occupiers and borders. Yet throughout its turbulent political history its poor Jewish community maintained a distinctive character and “spiritual hegemony” (Saron 1965, p.33) and managed to exert an influence over the larger and richer surrounding Jewish communities.

Jews had lived in Lithuania since the eighth century. In the fourteenth century the Grand Duke Gediminas encouraged Jewish people to settle during his conquests of surrounding Belarus and Ukraine and granted them extensive rights and privileges when the grand duchy formed a union with Poland. By the 1790s, 250,000 Jews lived in Lithuanian lands (Gruber 2007, p.65). With the partition of Poland, they fell under the Russian Tsars, part of the Pale of Settlement imposed in 1790s.

Vilnius, the capital, was known as the ‘the Jerusalem of Lithuania’ because it was a major Jewish centre for rabbis, but was also renowned for its social, political and cultural movements that spread well beyond Lithuania’s borders. The Jews of Lithuania (known as the Litvaks) prided themselves on their intellectualism, having been strongly influenced by Rabbi Eliyahu Kremer, the venerated Gaon of Vilna (1720–1797), the foremost enlightened scholar-sage of Lithuanian Jewry of the eighteenth century. In addition to studying the *talmud* and *kabbalah*, he also mastered astronomy, philosophy, mathematics and music. He embraced a studious intellectual approach to Judaism and was part of the *Mitnagdim* movement which was bitterly opposed to the spiritual, charismatic *Hasidic* movement. The Litvaks were known for being clever, shrewd and sharp (Saron 1965, p.33); Saron refers to their respect for scholarship while Gruber talks of their reputation for being more austere and intellectual than southern Eastern European Jews (Gruber 2007).

In 1882 Tsar Alexander III introduced the May Laws in Russian-controlled Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. He blamed Jews for being “the seedbeds of liberalism” (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007, p.137). By then some Litvak Jews had joined the Jewish Enlightenment, or *Haskalah*, which promoted integration into the secular world by developing an extensive education and publishing network in Hebrew. Other

Lithuanian Jews, partly in response to antisemitic violence, joined the highly politicised Jewish Labor Bund, so that the region became a hotbed of activity. Zionism too was growing in popularity and Vilnius became the cultural centre for Zionist writers, artists and musicians.

A high point for the Bundist Jewish socialist movement in Lithuania and Latvia occurred in 1897, when the General Jewish Labour Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia Bund was formed in Vilnius. The Bund aimed to unite all Jewish workers in the Russian Empire into one socialist party. It strongly opposed Zionism and promoted the use of Yiddish, rather than Hebrew. Bund membership initially comprised of artisans and workers but as more Jewish intelligentsia became involved, the Bund functioned as both a trade union and a political party. It promoted an increase in secular education and there was a surge in membership of writers, musicians, actors and doctors and farmers (Saron 1965, p.29). Together with the Labor Zionists they formed self-defence organisations to protect Jewish communities from pogroms and government troops. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, Lithuania had become the centre of the struggle for Jewish emancipation and the birthplace of new Jewish political movements.

Simultaneously, tens of thousands of Litvak Jews were seeking their fortunes by migrating to the North America and South Africa. The construction of the railway line in 1899 connecting Ponivezh, Utyan and Shventsian had affected the livelihoods of many Jews, who ran inns and worked in trades that serviced the highways. This economic dislocation, together with cholera epidemics, punitive legislation, conscription into the Russian army and the increase in pogroms, was the impetus for many young men to leave (Tatz 2004). According to Chaim Gershater, Lithuania was not as industrialised as Poland so its citizens were not used to the tradition of wage-earning, and thus preferred the independence which life in South Africa offered (Saron 1965, p.29). By the beginning of the twentieth century children of respectable, educated Jewish families were also being sent abroad as it became increasingly difficult to study at home.

The era after World War One and the subsequent Russian Revolution was a difficult time for the Jews. The Litvaks were split between the independent state of Lithuania, independent Poland (where Vilnius was now located) and Russia. By the start of World War Two, 240,000 Jews lived in the area previously known as the Pale. After

the German invasion of 1941, 95 per cent of the Jewish population was killed, aided by Lithuanian collaborators; many were shot in forests and buried in mass graves. After the war Lithuania became a Soviet republic with Vilnius as capital, gained independence in 1991 and was granted membership of the European Union in 2004, the fundamental recognition of its status as a European state.

There has never been a definitive answer to the question why so many Lithuanians migrated to South Africa. One myth is they followed Sammy Marks, a Lithuanian Jew, who found success as one of the earliest gold mining magnates and industrialists in South Africa. He arrived in the Cape in 1868 at the age of 24, worked as a *smous* (peddler), followed the diamond rush to Kimberley and then headed to the goldfields in the Transvaal, where he consolidated his fortune. The story goes that when Jews back home heard how well he was doing they believed the pavements of the colony must be lined with gold. For Marks, they were.

Another attraction was the pull of *landsleit*, fellow townsmen from the old country, who believed if observant Jews were able to not only survive but also thrive in a heathen country, then so could they. They saw how the fortunate settlers sent money back home so their wives, children, siblings and parents could join them.

### **Early days in the Cape Colony**

The community began taking root during the middle of the 1800s. The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1841, a week after 17 Jewish males conducted the first orthodox service in South Africa at a private home. Eight years later, a synagogue was consecrated next to the Houses of Parliament and the first spiritual leader, Reverend Isaac Pulver, was appointed. By 1863 the congregation had outgrown its premises and a new venue was constructed at the location of what is now the South African Jewish Museum. The congregation continued to flourish; in 1904 the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies was established (following its establishment in Johannesburg and Durban the previous year). In 1905 the Great Synagogue was constructed alongside the old synagogue. Rev. Alfred Bender had arrived in 1895 from Ireland to lead the congregation, which he did for 42 years.

Data shows that between 1890 and 1906, of the 1237 Jews who sought naturalisation in the Cape Colony, more than one third were traders and merchants, clothing workers, builders, clerks and shop assistants. Seventeen declared their occupations as being related to religion. Twenty-three per cent were between 14 and 19 years old and 48 per cent were under 30. In 1905 the president of the Congregation, Hyman Liberman, was elected as the first Jewish mayor of Cape Town (Saron 1965), underlining the expanding role Jews were playing in civic society.

The rate of growth in Cape Town declined after 1886 when gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand, Transvaal. Most Jews headed straight from the docks north to seek their fortunes in the impending gold rush.

Notwithstanding the migration northwards, the community thrived. By 1969 in Cape Town and surrounds there were twelve orthodox congregations and two progressive congregations. Among the welfare institutions were a school, an orphanage and old peoples' home.

The early 1970s saw South African Jewish population peak at nearly 119,000. Then, between 1970 and 1992, more than 39,000 Jews emigrated to the United States, Canada, Australia/New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Israel. By 1997 the Jewish population had declined to 106,000, with 21,000 in Cape Town and 59,000 in Johannesburg (*Beit Hatefutsoth Museum of the Jewish People* 2006). Interestingly, between 1992 and 2000 a further 10,000 left South Africa, with 40 per cent of these coming to Australia/New Zealand (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007, p.211).

### **Jews in the rural Cape**

Richard Mendelsohn (2000) refers to a Jewish rural network that was established beyond the major urban centres. At the turn of the twentieth century the Litvak migrants were struggling to survive and integrate: they had no skills, no English and were confronted by vicious antisemitism. The people, vegetation and climate of southern Africa were alien to them and they felt dislocated and isolated, being thousands of miles from home and the familiar.

Before the discovery of diamonds and gold, unemployment in Cape Town forced many men to head for the hinterland, to work as itinerant peddlers. They followed the intrepid *boere*, selling their wares and applying their trades as outfitters, shoe makers and builders to the equally poor Afrikaner *bywoners*, squatter tenant farmers, who scraped a living from the land. They travelled by cart, drawn by an ox or donkey. According to Mendelsohn, they brought farmers news and gossip from the outside world. Some farmers welcomed them as an addition to society and identified with them as figures of respect and religious deference, the people of the book, who believed in the same bible that was intrinsic to the life of the *boer*.

Gradually Jews settled permanently in the interior, opening trading stores and inns, offering havens where fellow Jews could stay, speak Yiddish and eat *kosher* food. But the results of their enterprises led to resentment among the struggling *bywoners*, who accused them of profiteering. These *Boere Jode* (Afrikaans Jews), became objects of suspicion; they were blamed for corrupting the rustic world of innocence and harmony and their shops symbolised greed and dishonesty.

Yet some of the early Jewish settlers relished the opportunity to make a home in the harsh *bushveld*. Hotz (1965) writes that by 1905 the majority of Jews lived in and around Cape Town, but hundreds of others were dispersed across 70 villages and farms across the Cape Colony, living as single families or in tiny communities. At last they were free to be men of the land, live as the new Jews, subjects rather than resigned recipients of history. They were able to live out part of their Zionist dream – their *chalutzic* or pioneering spirit of tilling the earth, sustaining the parallel dream of their Afrikaner neighbours.

Deeply rooted to the land, they identified strongly with the Afrikaners. They played an important role in their small towns, and many young men joined the army to fight the Germans in Europe and North Africa. Some fought in the Israeli war of independence that followed in 1948. After the wars, they returned to their farms, stores and hotels in the countryside. Some became very successful farmers producing wool, sugar, deciduous and citrus fruit, and maize. They spoke Afrikaans and became strong supporters of the National Party so that by 1977, 31.3 per cent of the Jewish community voted for the National Party.



Writer Dan Jacobson (2000) expresses positive feelings about growing up Jewish in a small town in the 1930s and 1940s. He refers to the strength of feeling within the family about family, kinship and commonality of background.

... for us to have found ourselves in a small town in South Africa was not the random happening it might have appeared to be, but was part of a history of dispersion and suffering that had been going on for many centuries and might well go on for many more. (2000, p.19)

He also describes the negative side, the antisemitism and marginalisation which resulted in moral and psychological pressures and feelings of “self-division, self-doubt, self-rejection, anxiety, weariness, conflicting loyalties, envy, shame, the longing to be shot of the whole business” (2000, p.24). By 1965 numbers of what had once been “vigorous centres of Jewish life” had dwindled (Feldberg 1965, p.8) with many families moving to the cities so their children could get a good (Jewish) education.

### **Antisemitism and conformity – the settled community**

In the 1930s South Africa was a “society already overtly, actively and deleteriously antisemitic in thought, word and deed”.  
(Tatz 2007, p.107)

In *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (1994) Jewish studies professor Milton Shain discusses the insidiousness of antisemitism in South Africa since early Dutch settlement. He shows how toward the end of the nineteenth century Europeans in South Africa treated ‘Eastern’ Litvak Jews as non-whites. The British viewed both Jews and Muslims as Oriental intruders in white South Africa and it was only in 1902 that the ‘Western’ Jews persuaded the British colonial government to exempt Jews from the *Aliens Act*. Under this Act, immigrants not literate in a Western language, which up to that point did not include Yiddish, were barred from entry. Thus in 1903 Yiddish became a formally accepted European language and Yiddish-speakers were eligible for migration.

There is evidence of antisemitic stories and cartoons in both English and Afrikaans newspapers from the 1870s, depicting the ‘Eastern’ or Russian Jew as the dishonest, cunning and devious knave (Shain 1994). These people were placed only one level higher on the social scale than Africans, Indians and Coloureds, who were feared

and loathed by all. Shain quotes references in the press to their dirtiness, conniving natures and 'non-Europeanness'. There were at the time two competing nationalist movements in the country – African and Afrikaner – and as they could not identify with either, Jews felt socially excluded but it wasn't long before social stratification permeated the Lithuanian community itself.

Loren Kruger raises the issue of whether Jews could be classified as white or whether they are a bastard race. She picks up on the contentious debate which has been raging for centuries, citing Sander Gilman (*The Jew's Body* (1991)) and Sigmund Freud who refer to the image of half-breed, and looks at the fiction of South African writer Achmat Dangor. He links 'brown' Muslims and 'white' Jews, thus adding a new piquancy to South African racial interplay, "stirring up currents submerged by mainstream Jewish South Africa history and self-representation" (Kruger 2001, p.129).

Antisemitism was then both legally and socially entrenched in South Africa. It was not until the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 that Jews in all states were granted equal status to the other white citizens. The English Jews aligned themselves as British rather than Jews and ignored the new arrivals. Riva Krut points to the Anglophone Jews' disdain and embarrassment for the Yiddish-speakers, whom they called 'Peruvians'. Joseph Sherman (2000a) debunks the myth of the overall cohesiveness, classlessness and cultural superiority of the Jewish community. He calls the harmony a chimera and claims the memories of collectivity were constructed to protect and preserve the interests of the dominant group. Historian Louis Herrman writes in 1935 that the Russian Jews were looked down upon as heathenish and ignorant and that the English Jews despised Yiddish "as a debased jargon" (cited in Saron 1965, p.19). According to Saron, "they forgot the tolerance which a people that so long suffered intolerance ought to remember" (1965, p.19).

For many, their experience of migration had been wrenching, shameful and angering: "parents and children grappled with an alien tongue, a changed racial landscape, an entire world that mocked inherited assumptions of value and status" (Campbell 2000, p.106) but life did improve. The Lithuanian *griene* (greenhorn) Jews soon developed their own cohesive individual identity and followed the tradition set by the Anglo Jews "of rapid adaptation to the South African way of life in language, in

social aspiration, in economic and civil integration” (Saron 1965, p.23) and became strongly Zionist, with a network of schools, youth movements, cultural organisations, publications and welfare organisations (Adler 2000). Saron cites characteristics of concern for the community, philanthropy and charity as part of this ethic. According to Tatz (2004) another Lithuanian tradition strongly maintained in South Africa was the individual’s responsibility to contribute to society. The community always responded to pleas for aid from victims of pogroms and wars, and to Zionist appeals. Religion was also a fundamental tenant of their society, with the synagogue being at its core.

Due to their insecure status, the Jews became almost obsessed with gaining a foothold of respectability and worthiness. Their tight formation in the new land helped them counter the perception, and the early reality, of their marginal status as outsiders and protected them from antisemitism.

In his memoirs (2003), Ben Turok, ANC exile and now Member of Parliament, writes about his parents. “Their ‘togetherness’ was rooted in their foreignness, but there was also a measure of common ground – cultural and political” (2003, p.22).

The 1930s saw undercurrents of formalised antisemitism growing. The Jews were fearful of the popularity of the Afrikaner National Party with its Nazi policies, engendering a lingering vulnerability among the community. Dr DF Malan, future National Party Prime Minister, is quoted as saying that the Jewish problem hung like a black cloud over the country and posed a threat to Afrikaner nationalism (Braude 2001). He was, according to Tatz, Arnold & Heller, “the arch antisemite, the racial demagogue, the doctrinaire theologian” (2007, p.111). The Afrikaners considered the Jews to be an economic threat to the white working class, which was further reinforced as the Jews aligned themselves overwhelmingly with the English-speaking community, the Afrikaners’ traditional enemy. It was only the small villages where Jewish children spoke Afrikaans.

The *Immigration Quota Act* was introduced in 1930, a tacit antisemitic ploy to stop Jewish migration to South Africa. Through a loophole in the Act, German Jews were still able to migrate, but this too ceased with the introduction of another anti-immigration law, the *Aliens Act* 1937. Malan referred to the Jews as the “fifth national group”, after the Europeans, Coloureds, Indians and Africans (Braude 2001, p.xxxiii), because they

were different to Western Europeans and would affect the purity of South African civilisation.

The *Ossewabrandwag*, ox wagon sentinel, a new paramilitary authoritarian movement, was also set up in 1930. This 300,000-strong organisation attacked British imperialism, capitalism and Jews. It was followed three years later by the Greyshirts, the South African Christian National Socialist Movement. These uniformed guards were responsible for maintaining order at political meetings and for protecting their leader, Louis T Weichardt. According to Shain (1994), their thuggery and propaganda were inspired by Hitler whom they supported at the outbreak of World War Two. Neither the *Ossewabrandwag* nor the Greyshirts survived after the war, but they engendered a deep-seated fear among the Jews that remained with them for decades thereafter.

The *SS Stuttgart*, the last ship to arrive with Jews fleeing Europe, docked in Cape Town in 1936 with 600 refugees on board. It was greeted with local protests because Jews were perceived to be aligned with communism and were seen as a threat to the country.

When war was declared in 1939, Smuts' United Party government narrowly beat the National Party in the vote to join Britain against Germany. In 1948 the National Party came to power and the roll-out of the apartheid system began.

By then, the Jewish community was firmly established, fully participating in European society, taking on their values and standards. But, after observing the rise of antisemitism, the ascendancy of the National Party and their tacit support of the Nazis, for Jews the climate remained one of anxiety. At this point too, they were still unaware of the fate of the millions of European Jews, and Lithuanians in particular.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The apartheid years – two realities**

This chapter begins by looking at the notion of the Other, and its implications for the Jews in South Africa. I then look at how the Jewish community settled and how it responded to apartheid. The first years after its introduction were tense ones, as the community tried to ascertain its safety in the prevailing climate, fearing a possible resurgence of antisemitism. The majority complied, thus benefiting from the system but there was an active minority which opposed the system. I examine the actions of the activists who fought apartheid, looking at reasons why the community was so deeply cleaved. The immigrants were a diverse group, even though they migrated from one small region. They brought with them a range of views on religion, traditionalism and politics, from individualism and capitalism through to socialist, Zionist, Zionist Socialist and communist ideologies. Throughout the twentieth century a battle between stability and social conscience raged.

#### **The Other: the double marginality of the Jews**

The idea of Otherness and outsiderhood runs through this thesis: the irony of Jews located in Africa, surrounded by Africans in a colonial society, cannot be overlooked. Throughout history Jews have been the victims of stereotyping, defined by Michael Pickering as the means of evaluating other people or cultures from a particular and privileged perspective (2001, p48). The Jew has frequently been stereotyped as the archetypal form of the stranger, maintaining a presence on the margins, never part of the mainstream and almost taking on a mythical aura.

The concept of the Other is somewhat more complex than stereotyping; it grounds stereotypical misrepresentations more firmly in the structures and relations of power (Pickering 2001, p.69). Otherness is seen as the denial of belonging, a notion that Pickering prefers to stereotyping because it brings into critical view the relational force-field between those who stereotype and those who are the objects of stereotyping.

The notion of the Other was introduced in the philosophical writings of Georg Hegel (1770–1831) and then later by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) but it was French psycho-analyst Jacques Lacan and Emmanuel Levinas, a Jewish Lithuanian-French philosopher, who brought the Other into contemporary usage, referring to societies and groups who excluded or subordinated Others whom they deemed did not fit into their society. Pickering says “in the figure of the Other there arises, like a vengeful ghost, that which is not permitted in the culture which produces it” (2001, p.157). A positive self-identity is attained through the denigration, disempowerment and marginalisation of another or other groups; groups secure their own identity by stigmatising other groups on racial, geographic, ethnic, economic or ideological grounds. The Other was seen as ‘the primitive’ and in colonial European society, based on class consciousness and conditioned to having social inferiors, the African played this role. Edward Said referred to the idea of ‘Orientalism’ in the 1970s to demonstrate how Britain and France in particular used ‘Othering’ to control their colonial peoples. As Curtin puts it, “the golden age of racism was the golden age of the Imperial idea” (cited in Pickering 2001, p.135).

Africa was ‘othered’ more than any other colonial continent because of the imperialists’ sense of superiority and the depth of ignorance about those they stereotyped: the imperialist aim was to civilise, as well to meet economic and military interests. In his introduction to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1910 edition), Henty wrote the colonials were turning “howling wildernesses into regions of prosperity and plenty” (cited in Pickering 2001, p.132).

As far back as 1934 Mordecai Kaplan made reference to the ‘otherness’ of Jews (Tatz 2003). In the South African context, Marks talks of Jewish ‘outsiderhood’, as being outlanders, interlopers and arrivistes who never belonged to white society (Tatz 2007, p.131). Even though they had escaped the antisemitism of the 1930s and 1940s in Europe, there was nonetheless a fear of being collapsed into the outsiderhood of the non-dominant black class (Leveson 2000, p.70). Yet at the same time, they formed part of the white colonial power, suppressing Africans, the primitive Other. Tatz expands on Kaplan’s premise of the otherness that grows when a community is under threat:

Otherness, not ‘Chosenness’, is a more comprehensive and embracing essence of Jewishness than formal religion. It encompasses history,

literature, language, social organisation, folkways, sanctions, standards of conduct, aesthetic values and social ideals. (2003, pp.177–8)

### **The paradise time**

The vast majority of South African Jews did not participate in the struggle against apartheid and often ostracised those who did. (Shimoni 2003, p.98)

In the first part of the twentieth century, South Africa began its transformation from a rural to an industrial nation, relying on its wealth of natural resources and cheap labour, with strong support from the Jewish community. WB Humphreys MP addressed Parliament in 1930: “I maintain that the Jews are an asset to the country. ... if it were not for that section of the community, this country today would still be cattle farming on the site where Johannesburg stands” (cited in Shain 1994, p.139). By working hard the Jewish community had taken advantage of the economic opportunities and claimed as their just reward places at the forefront of commerce, trade and manufacturing, as well as professions like medicine, accounting and law, and in civic, cultural and intellectual circles.

Chaim Gersharter wrote in 1965 how the Jews had succeeded in striking roots and making great contributions to the development of the country, while at the same time managing to transplant their religious and cultural heritage, adapting and flourishing in the new conditions. The story he doesn’t tell, however, is how the Jewish community ignored or denied the tenets of separate development upon which the nation was built, because they did not align, morally and ethically, with their religious and cultural values.

When in 1948 the National Party won the general election, there was shock, consternation and panic in the Jewish community (Kessler 1995). Journalist Benjamin Pogrand (1997) recalls the “tremor of fear” the victory sent down the spines of the Jewish adults around him. They remembered the veiled threats and their escape from pogroms, and sought safety through silence, connivance and cordial relations with the new government, submerging their residual terror of the antisemitism they had experienced at the hands of the *Ossewabrandwag* and Greyshirts.

They were led by the conservative South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), which had chosen a modus operandi of compliance in its fervent desire to be accepted by the status quo. It worked hard to demonstrate its loyalty to the new government while simultaneously trying to remain invisible. Turning inward, the community relied on the Board to protect its rights and interests “in a hostile environment” (Kessler 1995, p.31). Commentator Claudia Braude expands this notion, writing that this subservient stance may have “resulted in distortion, or even loss, of memory of Afrikaans nationalist pro-Nazism and ultimately the internalisation of apartheid discourse within mainstream Jewish identity” (2001, p.x).

Surprisingly, the new government acted in an unforeseen manner: in a world still reeling from the shock of the holocaust and in its desire to unite all whites in their fight against the perceived African threat, the National government exhibited a shift away from blatant antisemitism. Conscious of world opinion and attempting to align Jews with his party, Prime Minister DF Malan met with the SAJBD soon after the 1948 election and promised there would be no antisemitic legislation or behaviour on the part of his government.

The elections had been held a few weeks after the declaration of the State of Israel and in that same year Malan visited the infant country. In 1951 the government, now secure in its political domination and sympathetic towards Jewish nationalism, citing similarities between the struggles of the Jews and Arabs with those of the Afrikaners and natives, began courting the Jews and permitted them to join the National Party. Jewish membership grew steadily: in 1974, 12.5 per cent of Jewish voters supported the National Party, increasing to 31.3 per cent by 1977, after the Soweto riots (Adler 2000).

The 1950s and 1960s in South Africa were characterised by “quiescence and accommodation”, generated by fear and vulnerability (Frankental & Shain 1993, p.7). Tatz, Arnold & Heller claim that the ever-menacing antisemitism contributed to “Jewish cloistered-ness, Jewish solidarity, and a Jewish sense of uncertainty, hesitancy and awkwardness when dealing with non-Jews” (2007, p.131). On the other hand, at that time Hotz describes the success of the Jewish community as being “out of all proportion to its numerical size” (Hotz 1965, p.53). He lists their contributions in retailing, garment-



making and textiles, furniture manufacture, food processing, mining, iron and steel and agriculture. Hotz puts it thus:

South African Jews are pulling their weight in the challenging task of making and sustaining a prosperous and economically progressive South African nation on this sub-continent.  
... The Jewish community can be proud of the part it has played, and will continue to play, in keeping South Africa strong and secure.  
(1965, p.69)

Yet Robert Weisbord was quite prophetic in his 1967 article 'The Dilemma of South African Jewry'. He attacked the acquiescence of the Jewish leaders and their community and posited that only a disproportionately small minority of Jews, true to their tradition of social justice, would actively challenge the nefarious apartheid system.

The Jews will not, of course, be part of the Afrikaner power structure oppressing the black masses. They certainly will not support such oppression with great enthusiasm and energy. Rather, they will play the role of non-political, law abiding, patriotic bystanders silent in the face of evil. (1967)

Shimoni describes the SAJBD's role as uninspiring (2003). Its support of the status quo became blatant when, in 1955, it refrained from intervening after the government withdrew the residency visa of young Hungarian rabbi, Dr Andre Ungar. Ungar had been appointed as Rabbi in the provincial city of Port Elizabeth, but as an outspoken critic of the government, soon lost the support of his congregation. When the government threatened to withdraw his visa, the Board responded by saying he had spoken as an individual, not on behalf of his congregation, and that the Jewish community could neither accept the credit nor take blame for an individual's utterances. This reflected poorly on the community and the deportation did not raise the outcry it deserved, although it was debated in letters to the Jewish press.

Another example of withdrawal of support occurred in 1964. Prof. Julius Lewin had made comments at a public event in Johannesburg, suggesting Jews should oppose racial discrimination even when it was directed against others (South African Jewish Times, 1964, p.2) and that the tendency to try to appease the Nationalists by keeping silent was deplorable. Again, the SAJBD distanced itself, reiterating that these comments

were his personal opinion, not those of the community. Once more this precipitated letters of outrage in the Jewish media, arguing freedom of expression was being withheld. The Board did not speak out against apartheid until 1985.

Shimoni (2003) justifies the behaviour of those Jews who remained politically uninvolved, citing sociological factors, like their desire for self-preservation, rather than ideology as a function of their Judaism. Silence and self-concern were not only a matter of moral abdication but also self-preservation. By choosing a communal leadership that pledged loyalty to the state, they avoided confrontation on race matters: “Jews, forever visible, believed that silence on ‘political’ matters would make them invisible” (Tatz 2007, p.108). Another reason for the silence was that they were comfortable with the stratified and privileged racial system.

According to Pogrund, a causal factor for the timidity of the community was the holocaust: most of South Africa’s Jews had left Europe before it occurred but were devastated when they learnt what had taken place. Yet, he says, that did not drive the majority to fight apartheid. Rather, he maintains, most collaborated with intent, while others benefited from government policy as bystanders.

Braude concurs, arguing that the absolute need for the community to be seen as white required a profound suppression of memory. “Jews did not want to remember their fear or to be reminded of their vulnerability, and in a post-Nuremberg world, the NP [National Party] wanted its links with the Third Reich forgotten” (2001, p.xliv). The apartheid era gave Jews the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves as part of the ruling white class. They were no longer overtly stigmatised but were still conscious of – and on the alert for – antisemitism. Braude claims that “this ambivalent racial in-betweenness produced anxieties about Jewish racial status and belonging within the white power base” (2001, p.ix) and resulted in loyalty to the white minority and a justification to take up roles as leaders of industry and commerce. As she sees it, ambivalence may have been a factor for forgetting or repressing recent Jewish history, both in Europe and in South Africa, but the discomfort this caused may still have been running through the collective psyche, sending murmurs of guilt and ambivalence for participating in apartheid.

Activist Max Coleman, explains it this way:

They became white South Africans rather than Jews, who had been close to discrimination and persecution. ... Of course, they were on the right side of the fence and it was a comfortable life.  
(Suttner 1997, p.204)

Adler writes that their experiences should have made Jews sensitive to the consequences of indifference, humiliation, degradation and exclusion.

In retrospect, it is clear that those charged with communal leadership, in an imperfect world, tried to balance one against the other; never totally abandoning a commitment towards the oppressed, while never forgetting that their primary responsibility was towards defending Jewish interests, interests that in South Africa clearly needed defending, interests that would have been defended by no one else.  
(2000, p.32)

### **The religious leadership vacuum**

The spiritual leadership of the community rested with the rabbinate. Miriam Stein blames the inactivity and complacency of the Jewish community on a religious leadership vacuum (1997) but it appears the community sought the leadership it desired to ensure its ends were met and forced out those who opposed apartheid, like Rabbi Ungar. According to Shimoni, the more religious the Jew, the less likely she was to oppose it and Jews who identified most strongly as Jews openly disapproved of those Jews who opposed apartheid because their goal was survival, not challenging evil (Frankel 2000, p.194).

Various Biblical and rabbinical references supported the duty of Jews to protest against apartheid, but in the main, rabbis were reluctant to preach politics from the pulpit and kept an extremely low profile. In his article 'The South African Rabbinate in the Apartheid Era' (1995), Solly Kessler maintains that those rabbis who protested in the name of their congregations were in the minority and Braude notes that Jewish theology became articulated through the prism of apartheid theology, increasingly interpreted as ahistorical and apolitical (Braude 2001, p.xlix), which correlated with the SAJBD's denial that there could be a communal response to apartheid.

After his deportation, Rabbi Ungar wrote an article 'What's Ahead for the Jews of South Africa?' (1961) in which he claimed the doctrine of racial inequality and separateness was upheld by white Jew and gentile alike and that Jews were prosperous,

completely emancipated, well educated and that antisemitism was almost nowhere manifest (1961, p.1). Nonetheless he feared that if the Afrikaners were ever to attain security in their stranglehold over the blacks, they would institute discriminatory measures against white minorities. He wrote that “the community’s official organs, the Board of Deputies and the press, proclaim a political neutrality which in fact spells out full connivance” (1961, p.1–2), a reflection on the treatment he received leading up to his deportation. He berated the Jewish religious leadership who remained silent, with the exception of one or two rabbis who were fiercely opposed by their colleagues and congregations, and prophesied that it would be business leaders, “motivated more by profits than by the prophets” who would force the government to reform its policies because apartheid was not economically efficient or of overall benefit to the nation’s economy. Self-determination was taking place across the continent at that time and he believed the alternative would be a violent struggle. If this occurred, then Ungar envisaged Jews fleeing to the United States, as a result of “South African Jewry’s own shortsightedness and moral betrayal” (1961, p.3).

Ungar entreated Jewish South Africans to wake up to the truth of their predicament and to face up to the moral dangers as well as the moral opportunities of their position. If they took their place alongside blacks in the struggle for a free and non-racist South Africa, he said, then they would earn “not merely the shining medal of a clear and honorable conscience, but a respected and leading place in the free Africa of tomorrow” (1961, p.3).

Kessler quotes Rabbi Ben Isaacson: “... Religious leaders who tolerated the shootings of children in silence had blood on their hands” (1995, pp.33-34) and Franklin Adler cites Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg from 1945 to 1961, who, from his pulpit, was fiercely critical of the lack of standards:

...the most lamentable failure of Judaism ... lies in ... the almost complete absence of any specific Jewish ethical standards which mark us out from the community in which we live. ...there are some Jews in the community who do attempt to do something ... and when, as a result, they fall foul of the powers that be, the defense put up by the Jewish community is to prove that these are Jews only by name, that they do not belong to any synagogue ... Have Jewish ethics ever descended to a more shameful nadir?

...The power of fear and of the possibility of our security being affected is too strong ... Do not think that I am proud of my record in this matter, that I do not squirm inwardly at the thought that on many occasions I have been infected with that same fear and that same cowardice and have failed to rise to the level which my calling demands of me. (Adler 2000, p.25)

There has been little progress among the rabbinate. In 1995, after delivering a eulogy at the funeral of Joe Slovo, Minister for Housing and national chairperson of the South African Communist Party, Chief Rabbi Harris acknowledged he had received hate mail from members of the Jewish community. Two years later Harris was the only rabbi to make a submission to the TRC in which he declared the Jewish community should have spoken out sooner (see Chapter Three).

### **Jews in opposition**

...We were not fighting to free someone else, we were in fact fighting for ourselves, we were struggling for our own rights, the right to be free citizens of a free country, ... and the only way we could achieve our own true freedom was by helping to destroy the system of white domination that was crushing the whole country and denying us all our humanity, black and white. (Sachs cited in Braude 2001, pp.149–150)

Not everyone accepted or supported the apartheid system and Jews in particular were perceived as notable because of their disproportionate representation among whites in the opposition movement. Literary critic George Steiner sees Jewishness in values that have been a light to the nations, ranging from the works of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to Claude Levi-Strauss. David Zeffert extends this argument, saying that Judaism consists of the pursuit of universal truth and justice and believes Jewish activists “share an ineluctable common characteristic inherited by birth, fostered by *Yiddishkayt* and the atavistic folk memory of the *shtetl* and the Pale that causes them (or should make them) champions of freedom and humanity” (Zeffert 1997, p.49).

Adler divides opponents into two types: those who attempted to reform from within – liberals and civil libertarians – and those who sought a non-racial solution by joining the African struggle.

Jewish liberals worked within the system, openly opposing the National Party and supporting the Progressive Party. Dame Helen Suzman, Member of Parliament from 1953 to 1989, was based in an electorate in Johannesburg with a strong Jewish constituency. In 1959 she became a founding member of the Progressive Party and remained its sole MP until 1974, when she was joined by six colleagues.

Large numbers left the country: between 1970 and 1992, more than 39,000 Jews migrated (see Table 2 on p.11). Some found the circumstances intolerable: they were convinced the National Party would remain in power indefinitely and, while that situation prevailed, even if they voted against the government, they would remain beneficiaries of an unjust system. Others were unwilling to be conscripted into the army and others sought a more secure life elsewhere.

When Colin Tatz (2003) completed his studies in 1960 in Durban, he acknowledged he didn't have the guts to sacrifice his life and potential family for a cause he believed may not have been fully his own (2003, p.7). He chose to emigrate to Australia. He writes:

One mechanism for escaping culpability, and subsequent guilt, was to leave the arena of complicity.

... Did I participate in the ugly reality of South African apartheid while being a speaker-researcher opposing that ideology? Yes. I wrote critically, yet I employed servants, people disbarred from conjugal rights and the company of their children, at the 'ruling gates' of pay. Was I morally, metaphysically, guilty? Yes. (2003, p.30)

A tiny minority of Jews dedicated themselves to fighting racism by whatever means necessary, which often resulted in exile, torture, jail and death. Today many are leaders in the South African government and legislature.

In the end, we have to ask a different and very difficult question: *not* why were there so many of these radicals, but why – in spite of what looks like a large body of activity and writing – were there so few? (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007, p.132)

Even though the overall number was small, it is important to understand why Jews were so over-represented and why they have become mythologised not only by the larger Jewish community but also within South Africa as a whole. Mandela writes in his

autobiography *The Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) that he found Jews politically broadminded because they had been victims of prejudice (Frankel 2000, p.192). Prof. Kadar Asmal, a former ANC MP, also speaks in defence of the Jewish community and its rabbis, stating that “the Jewish community produced arguably more heroes and saints than any other so-called white group – including a good few battling rabbis, some of whom were not tolerated in South Africa” (cited in Saks 2000, p.18).

The figures reinforce the significant role of the Jewish community in opposing apartheid: in addition to the five Jews arrested at Rivonia with Mandela, at the Treason Trial (1956–1961) 156 activists were found not guilty of plotting to overthrow the government; of the 23 whites, 15 were Jewish, as was the leader of their defence team, Issie Maisels. Yet the Jewish population never exceeded much more than 4 per cent of the white population (Shimoni 2003, p.2).

Shimoni suggests two reasons for the over-representation of Jews in the anti-apartheid movement: his ‘Jewish values’ theory draws on the Jewish predisposition for radical social consciousness, stemming from the search for social perfection in this world, mutual responsibility, social justice and the wellbeing of others, respect for knowledge and learning, and the resultant rationality in human affairs. This radicalism stems from both a humanistic Jewish ethos and the history of Jewish suffering.

His other theory is that radicalism was a response to the marginalisation some migrants experienced: being outsiders in relation to the vested interests of society’s established state authorities, social classes, and dominant ethnic groups or groups (Shimoni 2000, p.166). He refers to the harshness of early settlement and the oppression and dislocation the Jews had experienced and how this resulted in two divergent responses. The majority of migrants responded by “fleeing isolation and the stigma of difference by conspicuously embracing the political and racial assumptions of white South Africa” (Campbell 2000, p.160). But other Jews maintained their involvement with the labour movement because it offered community, human contact, the warmth and solidarity otherwise absent in their daily lives (2000, p.158). Sherman’s analysis of Yiddish in Chapter Four pertains to this sector of the Jewish population which remained poor, primarily because these migrants were unskilled and did not gain fluency in English. Migration has been nostalgically connoted as a time of hope and opportunity but

for many, it was fraught with trauma and loss. In most cases, men had come out ahead of their families to establish a new life; family reunions were often disappointing because wives and children encountered problems reconnecting with their 'new' husbands/fathers. They arrived with high hopes, only to find the men humiliated, disillusioned and unable to provide for them. Migration had changed the men's lives, reshaped personalities and transformed pre-existing social structures.

Veronica Belling (2002) describes the black liberation struggle as emerging from the union of black nationalism and communism, which reached South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century through British anarchists and the Bundists. Interviews and memoirs of the Jewish activists clearly indicate how their Lithuanian roots strongly influenced them. Immanuel Suttner interviewed many radicals for his book *Cutting Through the Mountain* (1997). The overwhelming majority were either born in Lithuania or arrived in South Africa as young children to working-class Bundist parents in the first thirty years of the century. Others had grown up in more traditional households but were disillusioned with Zionism and by the lack of opposition to racism and sought alternatives in socialism and communism.

In 1918 the Yiddish-speaking branch of the International Socialist League was formed, a forerunner to the South African Communist Party. By the 1920s, a number of Bundists had emigrated to South Africa where they formed organisations to perpetuate their ideals and actively preserved Yiddish-speaking and literature. The Jewish Workers' Club was founded in 1928 in Johannesburg to provide a social meeting place, where members were able to challenge the norms of South African society and Zionism, the pre-eminent Jewish ideology, and the exploitation of blacks.

According to Saks, around 50 per cent of the Communist Party's membership was Jewish. Founded in 1921, it was the first non-racial party in South Africa. It was banned in 1950, went underground and was re-formed as the South African Communist Party in 1953 (Saks 2000). In 1952 the South African People's Congress was formed by whites because they, along with Coloureds and Indians, were ineligible to join the ANC, established in 1912 for Africans only. But in 1953 the ANC joined forces with the South African People's Congress, members of the banned Communist Party and the South African Indian Congress with the view of forming the Congress of Democrats. The ANC



recognised the importance of white involvement in the struggle, thus finally allowing the inclusion of other races. Together, in 1955, they produced the Freedom Charter, a declaration of a non-racial South African state which would belong to all who lived in it.

Paradoxically, when they joined the resistance movement few identified themselves as Jews, partly because they felt antipathy towards the community but also because the anti-apartheid movement was non-racial and tried to reinforce commonality and underplay differences.

Shimoni notes it was these non-observant non-believers who called upon Jews to obey their own moral precepts. He contends that their values may be described as Jewish, but not from Judaism as a religion, nor from the values of the dominant Jewish group. Belling defines them as Jewish by their common origins in Eastern Europe and by their collective memory of persecution, particularly of the holocaust.

Suttner (1997) calls them “non-Jewish Jews” because while they acted as Jews and had their activism rooted in perspectives and qualities that were uniquely Jewish, they rejected the Jewish community and its values. Belling notes the irony of how this small group of disaffected Jews, spurned by the mainstream community and the SAJBD, “... took it upon themselves to act upon the ethical tenets of Judaism in a way that their identifying brethren, wary of the Nationalist Government’s pro-Nazi past, would not” (2002, pp.1–2).

Jewish-born activists have spoken about their Jewish identities. Turok (2003) believes that he broke with many Jewish conventions but still his activities were shaped by his personal origins and environment: “Anti-racism is part of my history and my legacy as a Jew” (Israel & Adams 2000, p.154). Dame Helen Suzman acknowledges it was antisemitism that had formed her attitude to racial discrimination, not Judaism (Belling 2002).

For me, the meaning and impact of my Jewishness emerges from the humanistic ethic of Judaism, the appeal to justice and tolerance, and the Holocaust. (Kasrils cited in Suttner 1997, p.270)

ANC member Pauline Podbery, born in Lithuania to a Bundist father, spoke of her childhood memories of religion. She recalled being taught of the morality and ethics of Judaism, the history of the Jews, and the need to remember and identify. She saw this as

the roots of her communist sympathies and remarked that it was this sense of fairness and justice that led to her socialist response to apartheid (Robins 1998b).

Jacobson (2000) was conscious of antisemitism and marginalisation and moral and psychological pressures. He recalls an almost instinctive sympathy with the non-whites who were despised and unjustly treated by the majority of the white population in his rural childhood.

... anyone who has been the object of racial hatred knows that it is so wounding to its victims – more wounding than abuse directed against them as individuals – precisely because it denies them their individuality. (2000, p.25)

Activist David Bruce equated the racism of the apartheid system with antisemitism: “I saw the comparison between what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany and what was happening to blacks in South Africa. For me to be able to condemn what happened in Germany, I had to be able to say that in the same circumstances I wouldn’t do the same thing” (cited in Suttner 1997, p.177). During a debate on the Middle East in Parliament in October 2001, Ronnie Kasrils, then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, stated that the holocaust had compelled Jews to support justice and freedom from persecution for all people, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion (Shain 2002, p.205).

### **Written off and written out**

The majority of South African Jews went along with the apartheid system, prospered by it, and not only voted for it but often enough condemned their sons, daughters and relatives who opposed it. If there was any moral indignation at the many barbarisms of apartheid in practice, it was not spoken of aloud. (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007, p.116)

The distrust and animosity between the activists and the conservatives was intense. The National Party used the disproportionately large number of dissident Jews as an overt threat to the mainstream community. They subsequently hated and feared the extremists, because they believed they were putting the community at risk. According to Braude (2001), during the apartheid years, the activists had been written off and written out of Jewish consciousness. Conversely, the activists resented their complicity and denial.

Shimoni explains the huge rift between the anti-apartheid activists and the mainstream Jewish community in terms of marginality, or outsider status. The activist out-group was alienated from the normative life of the Jewish community, its established elites and the Jewish religion (2000). He speaks of the double marginality whereby this underclass, which had maintained its labour movement allegiances, was marginalised by the Jewish community itself: by denying, rejecting or ridiculing their Jewishness, they had further alienated themselves from the community. Israel and Adams cite Peter Medding's argument that the conservative Jews felt their vulnerability as an identifiable, conspicuous and permanent political minority group (Israel & Adams 2000, p.155). They were concerned with ensuring their survival, political and economic rights and free expression of religious values. When any perceived threat emerged, they immediately bunkered down – their strategy for survival. The radical Jews rejected this community, which in turn marginalised them and so were forced to find their identity beyond their compatriots.

The Treason Trial represents the two diametrically opposing traditional Jewish responses to tyranny. Percy Yutar, the senior public prosecutor who sentenced Nelson Mandela to life imprisonment in 1963, was an example of a Jew who tried to deflect Afrikaner antisemitism by conspicuous displays of loyalty to the apartheid regime (Shain 2000, p.97). Yutar described the years 1934 to 1939 as “a time when anti-Semitism had reared its head in the worst possible form” and said he was deeply concerned that the five Jews arrested with Mandela at Rivonia would bring the entire community into disrepute (Braude 1997). The Jewish press at the time of the trial hailed Yutar as a leading member of the community: “I doubt anybody would criticise Yutar for overcoming Antisemitism. It is, however, the route he and the mainstream Jewish community chose to do so that leaves the bitter taste” (Braude 1997).

In 1997 Braude wrote an essay on Yutar for ‘Jews and Apartheid’, a special issue of *Jewish Affairs*, the mouthpiece of the SAJBD, which was rejected. Instead, it appeared in the 27 March 1997 edition of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper. In it, Braude reminded the Jewish community of its complicity in apartheid. The SAJBD's response was a statement that the role of Jewish communal leadership was, and had been, to protect, not to advocate or prescribe. At this time the community was seeking absolution

and justification for their communal behaviour so this response unwittingly reinforced Braude's point that the Jewish community could not justifiably take any credit for the actions of the minority.

It seems the overriding paradox for South African Jewry in the twentieth century was how one community was split into two factions, both ultimately seeking the same end – a society that would be a safe one for Jews. The difference is that one group was looking out for Jews only while the other was concerned for all South Africans.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Post-apartheid South Africa**

In this chapter I look at the response of the Jewish community to the new ANC government, how it turns inwards and becomes even more conservative but at the same time develops a revisionist outlook toward the Jewish leadership in the ANC.

I examine the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1995–1998), government expectations and achievements, and how the Jewish community contributed and responded to its findings. I explore the idea of the beneficiaries of apartheid and what this could mean for the Jewish community in terms of reparation and moving forward.

#### **The immediate aftermath**

The first casualty of conflict is identity and ... redefining it is a fundamental step toward reconciliation. ... A group that neglects this essential stage is likely to become frozen in a permanent quest for identity that often expresses itself in rigid and aggressive forms of ethnicism or nationalism. (Krog 2000, p.385)

During apartheid the government of South Africa encouraged the maintenance of distinctive social groupings as part of its policy of separate development. The white population was split (English- and Afrikaans-speakers), as were the non-whites (Coloureds, Indians, Malays and Chinese) and the Africans (along tribal lines). During the struggle, the ANC sought to de-emphasise issues of separate identity so as to create a non-racial, or anti-racial, environment; thus all members consciously underplayed their own backgrounds. After winning government in 1994, the ANC's goal was to unify the people as one, simultaneously acknowledging the individual groupings from which the 'rainbow nation' is composed.

In 1990, Albie Sachs, now Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, published a paper, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' in which he elucidated the role of culture through the years of opposition and into the future. Written at the cusp of change, he was looking forward to a new future for South Africa. In it he supported a model of non-racial democracy against a background of cultural and linguistic diversity. He stated

that identity related to personality, culture, tastes and beliefs and argued that a homogenised nation should acknowledge the cultural variety of its people. “Each cultural tributary contributes towards and increases the majesty of the river of South African-ness” (cited in Braude 2001, p.xiv). This paper marked a new position that was both post-apartheid and postmodern in that it acknowledged the diversity of cultural heritages (Braude 2001). Four years later, the National government was defeated and the reconstruction of the nation began.

After 2 February 1990, when President FW de Klerk unbanned the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Pan African Congress, the SAJBD showed its support for change. There was concern, however, that Jews might become scapegoats should the process and the economy collapse, because historically Jews have been especially vulnerable during periods of transition and uncertainty. They were also fearful that they would lose their freedom to preach Zionism, which was almost the civil religion of South African Jewry (Frankental & Shain 1993, p.11), because of the ANC’s support for Yasser Arafat and its identification with the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

At the same time, some sections of the community turned inward, became more orthodox and engaged with specifically Jewish communal matters. This may have been the result of political uncertainty and alienation. However, other Jews were optimistic, stating that they had a role to play because of their much-needed expertise, as well as “a heightened sensitivity to the minority psyche and a proven talent for survival” (1993, p.12).

Some became interested in finding out about the once-ostracised Jewish radicals. They read early works and the newer writings and discovered acknowledgments of the influence of their Jewish background and took pride in the actions and beliefs of the previously discredited activists (Belling 2002). During the apartheid years these works had been censored and the authors banned but they had also been avoided for the shame they brought on the community and the potential risk they posed. New literature, including the many memoirs, may allow the Jewish community to revise – and perhaps reclaim – its previously held negative beliefs by gaining insights into the lives and aspirations of the radicals. Jews in South Africa may yet be instilled with pride in the achievements of their compatriots.

Saks acknowledges the comfortable position revisionism has allowed South African Jews, who may be benefiting from the courage and self-sacrifice of others just because of a shared Jewish birthright. He emphasises it was the Jewish left that first turned its back on the Jewish mainstream and not the other way round. Yet,

The painful fact is that it took a handful of non-identifying, internationalist Jews to show the rest of the community how to behave Jewishly in the light of Judaism's moral ethical teachings. Moreover, since most of these were at best marginally Jewish in their affiliations, to what extent can other Jews honestly claim them as their own? (2000, p.2)

### **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

By 1994, South Africa had transformed itself from an apartheid state into a constitutional democracy. President Mandela's priority was to build a united nation while respecting the different racial and ethnic elements embedded in its composition. To allow the country to come to terms with its past and as the impetus to build a new society, he convened a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

A truth commission is the term generally used for the process of undertaking reconciliation between factions or groups in previously conflicting nations. Similar commissions have been held by a number of new democratic countries as a form of restorative justice to deal with gross human rights violations in their pasts – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Chile, Columbia, Greece, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

Michael Scharf (1997) has outlined four primary purposes for which they are held, namely: to establish a historic record; to obtain justice for the victims; to facilitate national reconciliation; and to deter further violations and abuses. He goes on to say that an effective truth commission prevents history from being lost or rewritten, and allows society to learn from its past in order to prevent a repetition of similar violence in the future. Justice is promoted by imposing moral condemnation and laying the groundwork for other sanctions. He claims that both national reconciliation and individual rehabilitation are facilitated by acknowledging the suffering of victims and their families, helping to resolve complex cases, and allowing victims to tell their story, thus serving a

therapeutic purpose for the entire country, and imparting to the citizens a sense of dignity and empowerment that could help them move beyond the power of the past.

It has been strongly argued however (Borer 2004; Hayes 1998; Ignatieff 1997; Sanders 2000), that there is still no evidence to show that exposing the truth necessarily opens the way to reconciliation. Nor, in the South African case, was there a clear enough definition of reconciliation to endorse the Commission's success in achieving this goal. Because the National government had relinquished power without a military defeat, a political settlement based on compromise was sought, allowing the previous government to play a role in the negotiation process.

In 1995, the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* was passed by the ANC government. Dullah Omar, then Minister for Justice, provided the rationale for a TRC: "a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation" (cited in Weintraub 2003, p.161). Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC dealt with human rights abuses committed following the Sharpeville massacre, from 1 March 1960 until 10 May 1994. It limited the Commission's investigation criteria to gross violations of human rights – killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment of any person, or any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit any of these acts. Detention without trial (as had happened to at least 78,000 people over the previous 30 years), the jailing of about 18 million for pass law offences and the forced removal of millions of people, did not fall within the remit (Sarkin 1999). Significantly, the TRC was given the power to grant amnesty. After victims of violations told their stories at public hearings, the Commission would make recommendations on reparation and rehabilitation, to be outlined in a final report. Seventeen commissioners were appointed to listen to public testimony. There were three committees: gross human violations; amnesty; and victims' reparations. The process began in December 1995 and for over two years the commissioners travelled across the country, listening to the victims of human rights abuses. As well, they considered 7,000 requests for amnesty for crimes committed, including from senior police and military officers.

The overall response to the TRC was not one of overwhelming success, as had been anticipated. It had provided a platform for the victims to tell their stories and get



them heard, as a start to a healing process, but victims received very little financial compensation from the reparation committee. Many of the perpetrators, black and white, walked free; in the main they had sought amnesty, not forgiveness. Underlying the commission was the belief that public truth-telling would form a part of the recovery process; healing was a consistent theme running through the hearings, particularly from commissioners who were church leaders. But to date there has been no evaluation as to whether healing actually occurred.

It had also been hoped that a TRC would allow people to reinvent themselves through a sharing of narratives but in fact what may have occurred was loss or denial of memory. Tutu recognised this in his foreword to the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report: “the other reason amnesia simply will not do is that the past refuses to lie down quietly. It has an uncanny habit of returning to haunt one” (cited in Grunebaum-Ralph 2001, p.202). Tutu’s reference to amnesia has been repeated frequently in the public discourse concerning history, memory and reconciliation.

### **Jewish submissions to the TRC**

The faith community hearings of the TRC provided religious groups in South Africa the opportunity to participate in the reconciliation process. There were only two submissions from the Jewish community: from Gesher and Chief Rabbi CK Harris; the SAJBD, true to form, declined to contribute.

Gesher, a movement formed in Johannesburg in 1996 to serve as an independent lobby to enlighten the Jewish community in the new South Africa, produced a submission outlining a Jewish perspective on reconciliation (Sifrin 1997). It argued that everyone bore some responsibility to participate in the reconciliation process as all South Africans had been part of the society that committed apartheid atrocities, including those who saw themselves as innocent bystanders. No Jew could consider herself such, the Gesher submission maintained, because apartheid was an evil system and Judaism teaches that those who do evil must seek forgiveness from those they have wronged.

The submission further discussed the concept of *teshuvah*, meaning repentance or turning/returning. This demands people examine themselves to discover where they

have erred, however ethical they may believe their behaviour to have been. It requires a return to the real self. The Jewish tradition also views the giving of reparations for wrongs suffered as intrinsic to the process of reconciliation. But these reparations should be oriented towards empowerment, training and human development rather than on relieving immediate distress, it was suggested. Gesher's submission drew a comparison between the holocaust and apartheid, looked at the roles of perpetrators, victims and bystanders, and how they variously attempted to deal with the aftermath.

The second submission, from Chief Rabbi CK Harris of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of SA, was entitled 'The Violations of the Past' (1998). He justified the caution of the Jewish community in terms of their reaction to their migration from Eastern Europe. These people had escaped economic and political persecution based on discrimination against their faith and felt the threat of antisemitism by the National Party, particularly in the 1930s, when entry of Jews from Europe was halted. They were later wrenched by the trauma of the holocaust and the death camps they had only narrowly escaped. Harris also pointed out the community was a small one, never more than 4 per cent of the white population. But, he argued, they should have spoken out sooner to condemn the violations of human rights.

### **The legacy of beneficiaries**

Both submissions shared the view that Jews had clearly understood the evils of the system and had not merely been bystanders and, as beneficiaries, should participate in the reconciliation process. It is beyond doubt that apartheid was advantageous to whites at the expense of black South Africans. The white population that lived through those times has to recognise its responsibilities and come to terms with the past in its own personal, and communal, way. At the business hearings of the TRC Afrikaans business leader Anton Rupert revealed the contents of a letter he had written in 1986 to the then Prime Minister, PW Botha, expressing his concerns about the devastating long-term consequences of perpetuating apartheid. He sought change because that would be the only way to "remove the burden of the curse of a transgression against mankind from the backs of our children and grandchildren" (Krog 2000, p.348).

Adler (2000) argues Jews may not have needed apartheid as the impetus for them to flourish in South Africa but this position implies that Afrikaners alone were responsible for the outcomes of apartheid, and that if the Jews blamed the governing powers instead of taking responsibility for their own actions, or inaction, to end the system, then this could be perceived to be unethical and tantamount to blaming the perpetrator while sharing in the fruits of his transgressions. To put it bluntly, the Jewish community saw itself as the reluctant or unwilling bystander, as merely temporary sojourners in Africa (Freed 2006; Pogrud 1997; Tatz 2007). Regardless of their partially self-imposed exclusion and exclusivity, they benefited greatly from the system. They maintained their own identity and remained an isolated community by choice, through the construction of religious, cultural and social barriers; this, together with their zealous support of Zionism, protected them from becoming fully integrated into white South African society.

### **Economic beneficiaries**

An important distinction between perpetrators of apartheid and victims on one hand and beneficiaries and victims on the other has been made (Tutu 1997). Prof. Sampie Terreblanche raised the notion of the economic beneficiary in the Business Sector Hearings of the TRC in November 1998. He stated that reconciliation through reparations was within the powers and capabilities of beneficiaries and outlined why political supremacy and racial capitalism had impoverished Africans and undeservedly enriched whites. Black farmers had been deprived of their land and for decades, millions of Africans had been paid exploitative wages, particularly in mining and agriculture. This was reinforced by discriminative legislation which allowed workers to undertake only unskilled, badly paid work, thereby stopping them from acquiring skills. By preventing them from accumulating human capital, namely education, Africans were unable to improve their lives. As well, the legal right to own property and to conduct a business was heavily restricted, depriving Africans of the opportunity to accumulate property and to develop entrepreneurial and professional capabilities. The liberation struggle had a devastating effect on the income of the poorer 60 per cent of the African population.

Already very low in 1975, income decreased by around 35 per cent in the period 1975–1991. Social spending on the white population was eight to ten times greater than for Africans. Thus not only were individuals impoverished and destroyed by the racist system, but African groups were prevented from forming a cohesive, functioning society.

The perpetrators and victims who participated in the TRC were a small number of individuals, and Grahame Hayes' view was that the TRC was a social process focused only on this minority, and that the majority of victims and beneficiaries still needed to be accommodated in the process of healing and reconciliation (1998).

Tutu discusses the notion of the beneficiaries of apartheid in the final report: “Reconciliation requires a commitment, especially by those who have benefited and continue to benefit from past discrimination, to the transformation of unjust inequalities and dehumanising poverty” (cited in Verwoerd 2000, p.1). That the beneficiaries of apartheid owed something to their victims was also reinforced in the Gesher submission. Social justice demands that those who benefited from the power structures of white political supremacy and racial capitalism have a responsibility to make a substantial sacrifice towards those who were the victims of those power structures. Although white political supremacy in South Africa has ceased, most of the structures of racial capitalism are still in place and the concentration of huge economic power and privileges remains by and large in the hands of white corporations and businesses. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2005) uses the term historical beneficiaries to define groups like this – later generations who are connected to the past because they benefited from historical acts of violence or oppression, even though they were not responsible for those actions. She cites the example of Japan which used Korean and Chinese forced labour during the Pacific War and considers how this contributed to the nation's post-war economic boom. Likewise, large German enterprises were built on Jewish and slave labour during World War Two. And similarly, the land European-Australians live on was forcibly seized from Aboriginal occupants whose descendants continue to suffer the material and psychological consequences of that dispossession. Morris-Suzuki calls Australians and others “accessories after the fact” (2005, p.26).

Wilhelm Verwoerd, a researcher at the TRC (and grandson of apartheid's architect Hendrik Verwoerd), has written that the “the silence of the apartheid

beneficiaries are (sic) deafening” (2000). His research shows that young white South Africans still measure their high levels of human capital as a result of their hard work and enterprise, not as a consequence of the policies of apartheid. He believes they lack any motivation to be involved in transforming the country and moving from their state of entitlement. He points out that beneficiaries are not necessarily in that position because of a personal choice nor intentional action but as a result of group privilege. It was a systemic progression, advantageous even to those who opposed apartheid. As Krog says: “Privilege is in the bones. It goes from generation to generation. When you’ve had it you actually don’t lose it that quickly” (Clough 2004). Verwoerd goes on to say that white South Africans have a choice about what they do with the benefits they attained and in some way could alleviate the ongoing suffering of the previously disadvantaged. He uses the term ‘response-ability’ as the means by which beneficiaries may control their response to their past. He ties identity with the acceptance or rejection of the burden of being an apartheid beneficiary. “It is not only about money, land, education, it is about who I am and who we want to be in the new dispensation” (Verwoerd 2000, p.4).

## **Moving forward**

South African anthropologist Steve Robins believes the TRC could have provided the momentum for the reconstruction of the survivors’ personal lives, by allowing them to delve into suppressed or unresolved elements. He argues that beneficiaries could also have used the TRC as a valid starting point for them to examine their personal apartheid narrative and to use it as the constructive impetus for moving forward. For Verwoerd, this notion has the potential to “be a doorway to one’s homecoming in post-apartheid South Africa” (2000, p.4). It also implies integrity and accepting obligation and ‘response-ability’ as a beneficiary as much as a commitment to redressing the ongoing effects of past systemic injustices. Personal resolution as the first stage of societal resolution aligns with Rushdy’s notion of palimpsest narrative, as a way of exploring and exposing hidden and transmitted memories (see Chapter Six).

The structural traces of racial capitalism in South Africa are explored in John Pilger’s television documentary *Apartheid Did Not Die* (1998). Pilger’s thesis is that

without social transformation, the truths revealed by the TRC may not be sufficient on their own to engender the national reconciliation sought. If the link between truth and reconciliation is only an assumption, then the only mechanism for the country to move forward would be through genuine social transformation. 'Response-ability' and the necessity for reparations may be the mechanisms for social transformation.

Thus it can be shown that one of the outcomes of the TRC is that it has provided the beneficiaries of apartheid, including the Jewish community, with a structure within which they can move ahead in the new dispensation. It has also created the impetus for the community to re-evaluate its memory of this period (Braude 2001).

Robins, however, expresses concern that the "everyday realities of the apartheid period ... will once again have merely been 'normalized' and thus rendered invisible" (Robins 1998a, p.5). Too much emphasis on gross violations and extraordinary violence has allowed white South Africans to escape moral and political responsibility for the apartheid they endorsed by voting for the National Party. This has allowed for the socio-economic legacies of apartheid to recede from public discourse, which in turn has important implications in terms of contemporary public debate on social transformation and economic policy.

Taking a slightly different slant on the issue, Braude (2001) and D'Aeth (2003) argue that it is only now that South African Jews can contribute fully to the nation's historical memory and, subsequently, the future of Africa – that is, since elements of the Jewish South African narrative that had previously been lost or neglected have been restored (D'Aeth 2003, p.3). This is the time when writers can write about other things.

Some, like Gesher, have endeavoured to locate an identity in the new South Africa. In order to find a common purpose and to allow the Jewish community to find its place in the nation and move forward, there have been efforts to understand why the community behaved the way it did.

Braude (2001) writes that the unrecorded, censored or subverted past must be remembered and reconstructed, so as to contribute towards a more positive and open future. In a climate of searching for unity and cohesion, where separateness and racial classification are deplored, the works and writings of the Jewish anti-apartheid activists should be viewed differently; instead of being perceived as part of a separate community,

they could rather be noted as making a contribution to the future of the nation. This may, however, be Braude's optimistic attempt at finding a place for Jews in the new society.

On the other hand, High Court Judge Denis Davis is concerned that the traditional orthodox values of the community do not reflect broadmindedness or any shift in that direction. He suggests Jewish society has gone further down the path of orthodoxy and conservatism and is doing nothing to set any precedents for an open society. It would appear, then, that the community's goal is still Jewish survival at the expense of national cohesion and reconciliation. It should not be forgotten that it was only a minority of Jews who actively opposed apartheid and that the dominant grouping clearly supported the existing system. For Davis this has resulted in a closure of mind, "the creation of a massive 'Other' within Jewish ranks, a hatred of difference and a consequent rejection of any possible reconciliation between Muslim and Jew, Palestinian and Israeli. (Davis 2000, p.209).

Margaret Lenta (2001) concurs, writing that white South Africans who wish to play a part in the new South Africa would have to choose to be "white Africans", the phrase of Nadine Gordimer. Lenta maintains that Jews would have to abandon the perceived differences they valued in the past, between themselves and the larger South African community. Existing ties with Europe, America and Israel would have to be weakened, and that they would need to accept that their economic and cultural future is bound up with that of their compatriots. This aligns with Mbeki's efforts at 'Africanising' South Africa, unifying it with the rest of the continent.

Not surprisingly, the situation in Israel/Palestine remains a highly controversial issue between the conservatives, Zionists and supporters of the State of Israel, and the Jewish left wing, many of whom are now leaders in the ANC government, which supports a two party state solution for the State of Israel and the Palestinian people. A leading proponent of the antizionist movement is Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils. In an interview published in 1997, Kasrils conceded that "the State of Israel has helped us to get past the tragic stage of Jews as passive objects of history. I regret that this has been at the expense of the Palestinian people and hope that this can now be put right" (Suttner 1997, p.287).

The situation in Israel/Palestine has in itself been compared with apartheid, engendering rigorous discussion among Jewish South Africans and Israelis of South African background. In his 2006 article 'Rage of the Elephant: Israel in Lebanon', Kasrils compares the dispossession of the Palestinians on the West Bank to racial separation and the Bantustan homeland policy. He goes on to say that if Israel is using methods reminiscent of the Nazis then they should be admonished.

May Israelis wake up and see reason, as happened in South Africa, and negotiate peace. And finally, yes, let us learn from what helped open white South African eyes: the combination of a just struggle reinforced by international solidarity utilising the weapons of boycott and sanctions. (2006)

Adam and Moodley's *Seeking Mandela: Peacemaking Between Israelis And Palestinians* (2005) and articles by Chris McGreal (2006; 2007) in the *Guardian Unlimited* have fed into this debate. The *SA Jewish Report* of 3 November 2006 criticised Kasrils for his anti-Israel stance. He responded with the view that the lesson of the holocaust ought to be compassion for the suffering of others and solidarity amongst people of all lands to prevent similar horrors:

My understanding of Rabbi Hillel's teaching is 'to do unto others as you would wish them do unto you'. Although I am without religious faith I understand this as a Jewish heritage – one which I never deny and have often proudly declared and which led me into a lifetime of struggle against Apartheid. What concerns me is that apparently so many Jews, unfortunately misled by militant Zionism, may interpret Hillel's moral teaching as applying only to one's relationship with fellow Jews. Intolerance such as you exhibit serves to reinforce such prejudice. (cited in Jassat 2006)

As stated earlier, the Afrikaners held the State of Israel in high regard, recognising similarities between the imperialist settlement of both nations. This notion is well articulated in South African novelist Mark Behr's 1995 work of fiction *The Smell of Apples*:

And this country was empty before our people arrived. Everything, everything you see, we built up from nothing. This is our place, given to us by God and we will look after it. Whatever the cost. (Behr 1995, p.124)



Nonetheless, the communal Jewish position in contemporary South African society remains a discordant one, and one not overly concerned or interested in social transformation. Those who fought against the system are participating in, and leading, the new society and those who opposed it in a less radical way are also finding a place for themselves. But it would appear that there is still ambivalence on the part of the orthodox, traditional majority about grasping the new order in South Africa. If the community does not try to accept and accommodate the changes, but merely clings on to their current lifestyle, then it risks further exacerbating the marginal status it has been trying to overcome for nearly a century. James Campbell believes the controversy will doubtless continue “as South Africans struggle to build a society on the wreckage of the past, and as South African Jews seek their place within it” (2000, p.99).

A colloquium on the South African Jewish identity was organised by the University of Cape Town in 2000, entitled ‘Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience’. It provided a platform for reflection on the individual and collective political behaviour of the Jewish community under the apartheid regime. Papers by prominent academics (Campbell, Frankel, Leveson, Shain, Sherman, Shimoni) covered the immigration experience, adaptation to a democratic government, construction of a new identity, and attitudes towards racism and apartheid. Another strong element was the examination of social values and morals in the religion that may have predisposed Jews to liberal or radical forms of social consciousness.

James Campbell’s paper discusses how the vast majority of South African Jews acquiesced in apartheid, along with the vast majority of white South Africans, so that

... the ‘Jews and Apartheid’ controversy turns less on issues of fact than on questions of perspective and emphasis – questions that, as so often in historical debates, have less to do with the past *per se* than with the exigencies of the present. (2000, p.98)

Other papers expanded on Shula Marks’ notion of the fourth triumphalist South African Jewish meta-narrative, namely that a disproportionately large number of radicals were Jewish, due to their values. For Marks, the activists’ willingness to act on their beliefs is a Jewish characteristic but may also have been a function of the historically specific processes of dislocation and conflict (2004).

The colloquium is an example of how Jews are endeavouring to locate a new identity for themselves in contemporary South Africa, in order to find a common purpose and a place in the new nation and to understand why the Jewish community behaved the way it did in response to apartheid, splitting into two divergent streams.

## Chapter Four

### The creative response of Jews to apartheid

The Jewish diaspora in South Africa has a political and cultural identity motivated by unique memories and experiences – different to other Jewish communities and different to other South African groups – and is reflected in their creative output. The fiction produced illustrates an identity influenced by migration from antisemitic Europe, the holocaust and apartheid.

In this chapter I look at the stereotyping of Jewish characters as portrayed in early South African literature, how ambiguities of Jewish identity are revealed in literature and the repercussions this had on Jewish writers of the twentieth century.

The apartheid policy reinforced ethnic segmentation, thus allowing the Jewish subgroup to fit neatly into the overarching national structure. As part of the dominant ruling class, the community was very active in the arts and culture. The community was able to conform enough to allow its recent history to become repressed or forgotten. Braude believes that a tremor of discomfort may run through the Jewish psyche and she examines the impact of marginality and angst in Jewish literary output to reveal the repressed heritage, mingled with the guilt of being a beneficiary of apartheid.

At the same time, there was a small number of artists among the critics of the apartheid regime who expressed their opposition through creative media.

An interesting conundrum is revealed: Joseph Sherman, a fellow in Yiddish studies at Oxford University, argues that Yiddish writing, the first language of the migrants at the turn of last century, has been underplayed and undermined by the mainstream community because it represents the creative output of the socialist underdogs of the Jewish community rather than of the high achieving majority (Sherman 2000a, b). Conversely, the two most famous Jewish South African women writers of the twentieth century have both been accused by Marcia Leveson (1996) of sublimating their Jewish identities and projecting quasi-antisemitic views in a form of self-hatred. Leveson proposes that this was their strategy for coping with the dilemma of being Jewish and

fitting into their chosen social group, and yet paradoxically having their Jewishness brought into the public domain by virtue of being well known.

I consider the fiction of three Jewish writers – Gertrude Millin, Nadine Gordimer and Dan Jacobson – from the perspective of how they perceived themselves as Jews and how they were viewed by society, looking at how their Jewish background influenced the style and content of their writing. In addition, I discuss visual artist William Kentridge whose work exemplifies a creative response to apartheid and sets future directions for creative arts in a post-apartheid framework.

### **Fiction as the mirror of history**

The evaluation of literature is an important element of historical research because it mirrors social history. Two books that examine the role of creative writing as it pertains to the history of Jews in South Africa are Leveson's *People of the Book: Images of the Jew in South African English Fiction 1880–1992* (1996) and Claudia Braude's *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa: an Anthology* (2001). They both examine the perceptions, works and contributions of Jewish writers in South Africa. The books were published five years apart, over which time one can clearly observe the shift in national ideology. Leveson's retrospective approach ends at the start of the post-apartheid period, and explores the notion of Jewish marginalisation within the context of the state. Braude's book, on the other hand, is forward-looking and generally optimistic in tone, emphasising the need for Jews to belong, either as participants of the national movement towards an inclusive society or as part of the traditional Jewish community. She also covers aspects of commemoration and revisionism in her book, concepts that are currently being debated among post-apartheid writers.

Braude's anthology articulates the changes in the community's perceptions of itself as Jewish within the South African context, paying attention to the political landscape in which it evolved, focussing particularly on memory and forgetting. Her review of fiction is useful in that it neatly plots the changes in South Africa and how the values of the Jewish community are reflected through writing across time. The anthology is structured in chronological order, beginning with stories about the early settlers, some

speaking to the time, others nostalgically contemplating the past, their own childhoods or those of their parents. This nostalgia contrasts with Sherman's view of the harshness of the times, as recorded in Yiddish literature of the period. Braude's book contains post-apartheid writing which she describes as a shift towards adapting to the broader life of a new nation, and a move away from the anxieties of the Jews trying to survive in a white supremacist environment.

Dora Sowden's 1965 essay 'Jewish Participation in the Arts in South Africa' provides some insights into the Jewish community's participation in the arts at that time. Sowden does not mention Yiddish writing at all, which reinforces Sherman's argument that it was conveniently forgotten, and her closing comment on writing is salient: "The political climate in South Africa has been more conducive to polemic than creative writing" (1965, p.127). She argues it was the multilingualism of the total population and the bilingualism of the white community that restricted the quantity, and possibly the quality, of literary effort.

### **The death of Yiddish**

Yiddish is the language of Europe, of the Old Country; its moist rich sounds curl around my memories, familiar yet mysterious, the way that Hebrew letters undulate on a piece of paper or stone. (David Mendelsohn 2007, p.318)

The status of Yiddish literature in South Africa provides a good example of how community leaders maintained control over their community. According to Sherman, the creative work of the Yiddish-speakers was concealed by community leaders who wished to secrete the output of a group they held in low regard. They had little understanding of the value of this work. Sowden mentions Yiddish theatre and journalism at the time of the development of the goldfields, but does not discuss Yiddish writing as an ongoing creative pursuit (1965, p.123). The elements of nostalgia and romanticism evident in some of the stories written in later years about the early migrants and the glowing picture of Jewish settlement promoted by the community, in particular the SAJBD, are at odds with Sherman's assessment of the times, based on the Yiddish writing.

Sherman (2000a, 2000b) and Campbell (2000) have studied the Yiddish literature of those migrants who used their cultural heritage to produce a proliferation of

romantic stories and plays that reflected their isolation, struggles and desires. Their creativity was an unexpected by-product of their suffering in the new land. Yiddish writing in South Africa blossomed between 1947 and 1975 when eight collections of essays and short stories, ten volumes of poetry, two novels, four historical pamphlets, one history and many articles were produced (Sherman 2000a, pp.29-30).

Sherman has bewailed the destruction of Yiddish and pleads for what remains of the works written in Yiddish to be translated and evaluated as part of the reforming and restructuring of the nation's identity. This would provide a unique insight into the historical, political and socio-cultural forces that shaped the lives of Jews in South Africa (2000a, p.48).

Much of the work was written by working class men, and unsparingly portrayed the hardships and moral dilemmas they faced in a country predicated on institutionalised racial discrimination (2000a, p.31). Sherman is scathing in his attack on what he refers to as the commonly held notion that Jews were more ethically sensitive than their gentile counterparts. He uses this early literature to show how the Jews, along with other white settlers, exploited the scope for self-advancement at the expense of Africans and expresses his remorse that Yiddish has not been allowed to leave its mark. This lack of record is no accident: "it was the inevitable casualty of conflicting ideologies, a desire for rapid acculturation, and an insidious communal indifference abetted, if not overtly encouraged, by the communal leadership" (2000a, p.32). Another factor against the survival of Yiddish was that after World War Two, it was abhorred by some Jews as the utterance of passivity in the face of genocide (Shain 2000, p.32).

... Yiddish is a language of history, of uprooting, of trembling and trauma and the laughter eked from trauma. It is a language of invisible history, though it has an earthy, almost visible sound. (Hirson 2006, p.63)

In 1936 over 17,000 out of a population of over 90,000 Jews in South Africa spoke Yiddish. Ten years later, the population had increased to 103,500, but Yiddish-speakers had declined to 14,000 and five years later, in 1951, the figure had dropped to 10,000 out of 108,500 (Saron 1965).

Prior to the Jewish migration to South Africa, conflict had existed in Lithuania between three groups of Litvaks: the Bundists, the Zionists (who also spoke Yiddish but sought the revival of modern Hebrew) and the enlightened assimilationists. The pattern was maintained in the early years of migration with the socialist working class migrants denigrated and marginalised not only by South African society but also by their upwardly mobile bourgeois *landsleit* or compatriots. The ambitious Jews were strong supporters of capitalism and Zionism, further wedging the socialists, delegating them to the bottom rung of the social hierarchy and discarding them as social outcasts. Sherman tells the story of those Jews who were forced to take on the lowest form of employment, that is as *kaffireatniks*, cooking and serving in mine workers' dining halls owned by Jews (Sherman 2000b). Serving natives was the most denigrating job a white person could do, but these men found it hard to integrate and find employment, due to their strong socialist values and lack of skills and English. As well, they would not work alongside working class white antisemites.

Sherman has examined what remains of the Yiddish writings of the *kaffireatniks*, whose narrative he believes has been deliberately deleted from the records of South African Jewish history. He argues the most germane, first-hand archival documents relating to the *eatnik* trade and the dominant part played in it by Jews have been lost or deliberately destroyed as part of both a personal and communal revisionist project to construct a more respectable South African Jewish identity. He notes that social historians assert that the everyday and commonplace are as important as the institutional and political in the writing of history, but in this instance these people's stories have been totally excluded. "The issue here is how can one write the history of a people who have left no 'written record'?" (Sherman 2000b, p.508). The only written records of the *eatniks* are their works of fiction and poetry in Yiddish.

Sherman argues fiction should be used as a permissible form of evidence for investigating a social construct. A growing raft of arguments supports his case (see Chapter Five). He claims that historians require periodisation – exact placing and dating – but he questions how much of what they claim as factual or documentary corroboration is indeed fact and argues more fiction could justifiably be used as archival material by historians. Sherman has created a trans-historical evaluation by examining the promotion

of typology in the construction of the immigrant Jewish identity – reflected, constructed and perpetuated in South African Yiddish literature. He attacks the keepers of South African Jewish history whom he believes almost entirely disregarded this body of writing not only because they didn't know or like the Yiddish language but – primarily – because many of the Yiddish writers worked in undesirable jobs, not adhering to Marks's meta-narratives of 'rags to riches' (Marks 2004).

It is in equal, if not greater, measure due to a total recoil from the picture of the development of a South African Jewish identity that is presented here, a picture totally abhorrent to those who for various reasons of self-protection or self-promotion have attempted to display South African Jewry in the most flattering light. (Sherman 2000b, pp.208-209)

Further evidence of the efforts of the community to show off its most positive features is Feldberg's directory, *South African Jewry – 1965*, with its strong emphasis on members' achievements in trade and industry and professional, academic and cultural spheres.

Yet there is a nostalgia around Yiddish, this secret language of the past, inaccessible to younger generations. South African writer Denis Hirson describes how he grew up surrounded by languages he couldn't speak, including Yiddish. But, he says, although Yiddish was different to the African languages around him, it wasn't entirely foreign because Yiddish and Afrikaans share a common German root.

[Yiddish] was part of my past, of which I have been told next to nothing by anyone in my family, the past is still a foreign country to me and this language is its echo, a vibration I know while the words remain outside my reach.

It sounds comfortably chewy, like someone consuming chocolates with a rich, honey-sweet, walnut-bitter filling, in the company of friends, all of them chuckling over their luck.

The luck is not just because of the chocolates, it is because the chucklers are still alive. ... this is the language of survivors, what I am listening to is the music of survival. (2006, pp.62–63)



## Marginality, belonging and antisemitism in literature

In her book, Leveson writes about the uncanny way literature has of keeping a finger on the pulse of perception (Leveson 2000). She traces some of the issues of marginality and insider–outsiderhood that runs through fiction. She refers to Antony Sher, gay actor and writer, who wrote that being Jewish and gay made him feel like an outsider and so he identified on a subconscious level with the black and Coloured experience: “knowing what it was like to be the disliked group, the disapproved of group” (2000, p.66). She notes how South African-born writer Gillian Slovo also draws parallels between Jewish and black outsiderhood. In her anthology, Braude suggests that the selection of pieces she includes illuminate a specific convergence of issues surrounding race, identity, memory and history.

Leveson writes about the ‘African Other’, the prevalent malevolent force in South African English-language fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Another strong negative image in the literature of this period is that of the wandering Jewish peddler, or *smous*. This Jewish stereotype was an obvious candidate to take up the role of the outsider in the cultural imagination of Western European Christian settlers in South Africa; Jews were alien to the society into which they arrived with their strange language and swarthy Levantine appearance (Leveson 1996, p.3). All this reinforced the generally held belief that the Russian Jews were low on the pecking order, beneath European Jews. Leveson finds it unsurprising that they were regarded as an outgroup, and treated with fear and hatred, as this supported the antisemitic sensibilities of the time. She and Shain (1994) cite examples of how Jews were caricatured in newspapers and cartoons and handled derogatively in South African literature, by both Jewish and non-Jewish writers.

Since language is both a means of communication and a bearer of a nation’s culture and history, the importance of language as a measure of control and power cannot be overestimated. (1996, p.43)

However, Leveson also offers examples of a sentimental prejudice in favour of the Jewish character; even though the relationship between the *bywoners*, the poor Afrikaans tenant farmers, and the Yiddish-speaking *smous* who visited their farms to sell goods was

frequently hostile, there was a degree of linguistic affinity between them. However, in the main, the image used for the *smous* was of someone evil, tragic and doomed to perpetual suffering.

Early South African writer Pauline Smith (1883–1959) included the character of a Jewish *smous* in her book *The Beadle* (1926) which, in a largely sympathetic account, provides a contemporaneous view of the Jewish peddler. However, the language she uses is negative, both insulting to and denigrating of Jews. Leveson refers to this as an antisemitic tactic used to create a stereotypical Jewish identity, with the aim of directing the reader beyond the character in the story to Jews in general. Hence, while Jews may have been guilty of displaying some of the characteristics they were accused of possessing, this form of stereotyping had the effect of dehumanising them.

Leveson also identifies some of the physical features used to describe Jews in the antisemitic literature which was prevalent in the 1930s. She cites examples of their physical degeneration: prominent noses, dark skin, low foreheads, shifty, beady or piercing eyes, full lips, greasy hair, small, weak stature, cunning or sly expression. She explains how these features are used to affiliate Jews with Africans, as racial outsiders and as a perceived threat to the white race. She has discovered descriptions of licentiousness and sexually threatening behaviours which reinforce the menace, fear and prejudice of the sexuality of the Other. At that time, stereotyping of physiognomy was rampant – negroes, Irish and Poles – were also subject to vicious representations – and the Nazis used it to determine who was Aryan.

### **The shadow of the holocaust**

The writings in Braude's anthology reflect the enormous anxieties of a community that, despite its own history of oppression, was complicit in the oppression of the country's majority (Reef 2004). The Jewish migrants in South Africa at the time of the rise of fascism had fled from pogroms in Eastern Europe, so their dread of antisemitism was very real and, during the 1930s particularly, the growth of antisemitism in South Africa was palpable. Braude says that it was out of a deep-seated fear that they sought cordial relations with the National Party government which came in to power in 1948.

The ramifications of the holocaust on the South African Jewish community cannot be underestimated; 90 per cent of Lithuanian Jews were killed by the Nazis and their supporters, and while the community acknowledged its good fortune at having escaped and survived, the destruction of their families and towns had left an indelible imprint. For many, the guilt and pain of survival was such that the subject was never discussed. Additionally, because few new immigrants were allowed into the country after 1930, and only 160 adult holocaust survivors were admitted in post-war years (Tatz, Arnold & Heller 2007), they didn't hear directly about survivor experiences. Shain (2002) writes their fears and feelings of guilt at having survived the holocaust reinforced their need to meld quietly into mainstream society and block out their differences. According to Braude, the Jewish writers in the post-holocaust period used literature to submerge their Jewish identity, which is why some of the characters and themes appear to be antisemitic. But all Jews were influenced by their identity to some degree. She illustrates this in her anthology through an excerpt of story by Dov Fedler titled 'Gagman'. "It reflects," she writes, "the unique paradoxes and contradictions of post-Holocaust South African Jewish consciousness evolving in a white supremacist environment in which Jews did not bear the brunt of racism" (2002, pp.xlvi–xlvi). Fiction is important because it can be used to grapple with the complexities accompanying Jewish involvement in white South African society when previously Jews had been victims of a related form of racism (2002, p.xlvii).

Feelings, observations and reflections permeate Jewish writing across the twentieth century. These are exemplified in the works of Nadine Gordimer and Dan Jacobson. And perhaps not unexpectedly, the paradox that Jews were able to identify with African subordination because of their history and yet react to their discomfort by perpetuating similar crimes on those they had power over, namely the Africans, is one of the themes that runs through their writing.

One of the first women to write Afrikaans poetry during this era was Olga Kirsch (1924–1997), a Jewish woman who lived in a farming community. Andries Wessels (2007) describes Kirsch as holding a position of liminality within the tradition of Afrikaans poetry, where she is on the threshold, "part of a particular cultural space yet not entirely within this space, outside, yet not entirely excluded". Wessels says Kirsch is

in an anomalous position and this shifting identity is reflected in her poetry. This reinforces Homi Bhabha's theory that artists are marginal and that when two cultures conflict, a third, fluid space is constructed for creative enunciation. "Her work ... becomes the nodal intersection of, on the one hand, the condition of the outsider, the exile, Jewish, and on the other, the insider, the young woman from rural South Africa who can only express her soul in Afrikaans", the instinctive currency of her soul.

### **Three South African writers**

#### **Self-hatred – Millin and Gordimer**

Leveson questions whether some Jewish writers use their characters to escape "from racial categories in order to free themselves from the burden of outsiderhood, as well as longing to claim acceptance as an insider, belonging to a wider group" (2000, p.73). She has detected in some writing a residual fear of racial discrimination, of Jews being denied the full enjoyment of their lives, and the fullest expression of their political and social inclinations being collapsed into the outsiderhood of the non-dominant black class (2000, p.70). She enquires as to whether creating unsympathetic Jewish characters was a way for the writers to reject their own Jewish background "to exorcise their deeply embedded but hardly consciously acknowledged sense of inferiority by seemingly accepting the norms of the dominant culture" (2000, p.73).

Both Leveson and Braude (2001) discuss this notion of Jewish self-hatred and how the need to assimilate and escape from the stereotypes has resulted in many writers internalising gentile prejudices by either writing about Jews as negative stereotypes or transferring their feelings of ambivalence about being Jewish to another marginalised group in the South African context, namely the Coloureds.

SL Gilman writes that a member of a group stigmatised as the Other, who accepts the reference groups' stereotypes, and recognises in times of anxiety a repressed element of that very Other in himself, may invest this repressed figure with all the qualities which he would normally seek to deny in himself (cited in Leveson 1996, p.196). Leveson calls this the 'Rosa Luxemburg syndrome', a term coined by American feminist Letty Pogrebin. Pogrebin identified this syndrome among Jewish women who

were compassionate and committed to oppressed groups but who had nothing but contempt for their own group. She defined this group as women who had internalised negative Jewish images and felt Jewish shame or lack of ethnic pride. Having chosen to dissociate themselves from the negative stereotypes firmly imprinted in their minds, they tended to ignore what Pogrebin referred to as “our special Jewish sorrows”, because they considered them too self-serving. She stated that they were better at fighting for the rights of others than standing up for themselves.

Rather than identify as Jews, they had preferred to count themselves as feminists, anarchists, leftists, Marxists, civil rights workers, defenders of minorities and oppressed peoples. They did not recognize in their own denial of Jewish oppression proof of the impact of antisemitism. (quoted in Leveson 1996, p.187)

The incidence of Jewish radicals rejecting their Judaism at an unconscious level, even to a level of antisemitism, has been discussed by several Jewish academics (Frankel 2000; Leveson, 1996, 2000; Shimoni 2000). Suttner writes: “The new ideologies offered them something more personal than the collective redemption of humankind, namely, a way of escaping their ‘Jewishness’” (quoted in Leveson 2000, p.73).

In their books, Leveson and Braude discuss in depth two of South Africa’s best known women writers whose writing reflects Pogrebin’s ‘syndrome’, namely Dr Sarah Gertrude Millin (1888–1968) and Nadine Gordimer (1923–). Gordimer, a fierce opponent of apartheid, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, the first South African to do so. In 1965 Sowden called Dr Millin the most important woman writer the country had produced (1965, p.125). However, 36 years later Braude labelled her as the chief apologist for apartheid. These opposing positions provide a clear manifestation of the two conflicting ideologies within the South African Jewish community.

It would appear that for both these women art imitated life, in that they used their work to reflect their inner confusion about their own identities. Braude selected the 1926 novel ‘God’s Stepchildren’ to illustrate how Millin transferred her own anxiety about being Jewish, a dubious racial status, in an environment that was hostile towards Jews, onto the main character, a Coloured woman. By transposing her own fear onto a fictional character she was able to examine issues of identity that reflected her own personal issues. This interpretation permitted a more empathic re-reading of an important

South African writer, according to Reef (2004). Millin used racism to deflect attention from her own status, and by adopting and mimicking in her work prevailing white views on miscegenation, she sought to demonstrate loyalty to – and thereby her unambiguous belonging within – white South African society (Braude 2001, p.xxvi). Braude maintains Millin's desire to be accepted may have influenced her writing and beliefs, which in later life permutated into a public defence of apartheid. This can be seen as the common strategy of the mainstream Jewish community.

Nadine Gordimer's writing may also contain elements of self-hatred but from another perspective. Gordimer promoted anti-Jewishness within a structure of non-racism and in a manner consistent with the approach of the politically active Jews who viewed antisemitism as one of many forms of racial prejudice. Lenta (2001) writes that Gordimer did not have a Jewish upbringing although her mother was an English Jew and her father had fled Lithuania. Even within her own family, her father had been marginalised: they regarded his working class roots as non-European. Gordimer stated that once in South Africa her father avoided any reminder of the antisemitic oppression he had been subjected to in Czarist Russia in order to avoid being conspicuous (Wastberg 2001). However, she condemned other migrants for holding a similar attitude: "They are hardly there three weeks before they adopt all the behavior and prejudices of the white supremacists" (Bazin and Seymour (1990) cited in Lenta 2001, p.2). Lenta claims Gordimer found it problematic that she had never met Jews whose experiences of injustice in Lithuania or Europe had made them compassionate towards blacks.

After her father's death Gordimer wrote the short story 'My Father Leaves Home' (1991) with what appears to be regret about her lack of knowledge and understanding of his early years. Braude posits that Gordimer's internal conflict about her identity, her ambiguity about being Jewish and her anxiety about belonging and finding a place in the social hierarchy of the time were projected onto the characters in her fiction. Braude provides examples of early short stories where representations of Jews are derisory. Like Millin, Gordimer used Coloureds to express her own unease about her identity. Leveson regards Gordimer's work as a reflection of her feelings of difference and writes that a Jew, when stigmatised on racial grounds, can become a racist herself.

Thus, while in the early work, both Jews and blacks are constructed as Others, there is a significant difference in the authorial treatment of these Others. The reasons for Gordimer's idealisation of one out-group – the blacks – and the disparagement of her own out-group – the Jews – may be more complex than has been observed. (1996, p.184)

Leveson further posits that Gordimer's split position may indicate her concerns about her identity as a Jew in a gentile society. It may be that through Gordimer's writing, insight can be garnered as to why she – and perhaps many others in the opposition – felt such strong antipathy towards their Jewish origins.

### **Jacobson's use of humour**

Satire or humour is an alternative device used by writers to deal with negative stereotyping. Dan Jacobson (1929–), a Jewish South African writer who grew up in the diamond mining town of Kimberley, left in 1954 to settle in the United Kingdom. He uses whimsy and humour when writing about his marginal and alienated Jewish characters, as a means of examining his own position as a white person, a Jew and a writer.

In his short story 'A Day in the Country' (in *A Long Way from London* (1958)), he shows empathy toward the persecuted which he believes stems from his experiences of oppression and the persecution that Jews have undergone. Leveson explains how he uses irony and humour as a mechanism to dissect power relationships and explore stereotypes. "Humour evokes enjoyment but, more significantly, reflects deeper levels of meaning" (1996, p.142). Through humour, a member of the out-group can behave aggressively towards a member of a more powerful and hostile in-group yet deny harmful intent. Leveson quotes Jean Paul Sartre's definition of Jewish irony from *Antisemite and Jew* (1948) as "the way in which the Jew 'because he knows he is under observation, takes the initiative and attempts to look at himself through the eyes of others'" (1996, p.142). As members of a stigmatised out-group, Jews have known impotence, rage and despair, and Jacobson has created fiction about the interplay of power, prejudice, humiliation and dignity, using a triangular focus of white, African and Jew.

## **William Kentridge: a visual artist's response to guilt**

William Kentridge, a Jewish South African artist and animated filmmaker, uses his art to raise awareness of the issues surrounding apartheid. Working in drawing, sculpture, film and television, theatre and opera, his output is prolific and multidisciplinary. He has exhibited in major galleries and museums and has received many international art awards. Kentridge grew up in a politically active, privileged Jewish family. His great-grandfather emigrated as reverend to a small Jewish community; his grandfather was a parliamentarian and attorney; and his father was an international barrister and a defence counsel in the 1956 Treason Trial.

“In South Africa, which has always been defined by its rulers as a very Christian country, to be Jewish was to be other,” Kentridge says (quoted in Raitmaa 2001). He felt marginalised in that he was African by birth and European by descent, and was “keenly aware of divergent cultural traditions, neither of which were wholly his own. He felt alienated from the European social patterns and detached from the native culture” (Weintraub 2003, p.158). But he felt enriched by this double perspective and it strongly influenced his creativity and his refusal to close his eyes to the horrors that were present in South Africa.

Curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev describes Kentridge's work as having a local context but resonating worldwide, by way of a universal language to achieve the specific and local (Kentridge 2004). She suggests his navigational system was able to break through language to illuminate political issues. During the apartheid era he attempted to uncover what he believed was hidden by the government and used film to jolt memory and uncover the past, thereby constructing a new vision. He discusses the differences between political truth and psychological reality. “Facts are not simple. They bring a whole train of mud and slime with them, or like a comet, a train of frozen ice ahead of them. Facts are not fixed” (Weintraub 2003, p.159).

Through his work Kentridge reflects on the psychological landscape of South Africa which has experienced great upheaval, violence, racial and social injustice, from the periods of colonialism and apartheid to the years of truth and reconciliation. The influence of German expressionist painters, and also of George Melies' films from the



end of the nineteenth century, is visible in *Shadow Procession* (1999) where he uses the technique of cut-outs to juxtapose light and shadow. The artist has acknowledged this film represents the universal memory of all those who were oppressed and forced to leave their homes (Raitmaa 2001). His filmic device is reminiscent of the Nazi death march at the end of World War Two. Through the use of cut-out figures, Kentridge is revealing what is hidden in the shadows.

Antjie Krog considers the notion of guilt in her work, particularly for those who were bystanders, black and white. Author of *Country of My Skull* (2000), poet and radio journalist, she covered the TRC for the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) Afrikaans service. She identifies four categories of guilt that have come out of holocaust studies: criminal guilt for perpetrators of the crimes; political guilt of politicians and those who voted them into power; moral guilt for those who did not do enough, who did not resist and who were passive; and metaphysical guilt felt by those who survived while others died. Karl Jaspers refers to the metaphysical guilt of Germans who did not act when Jews were taken away but "preferred to stay alive, on the feeble, if logical ground, that our death could not have helped anyone. We are guilty of being alive" (cited in Krog 2000, p.123). Krog writes that the whites who lived through "the paradise time of apartheid" (2000, p.217) have to accept their culpability.

Kentridge expresses the notion of guilt by default, not fault. In his animated film *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), he explores the relationship between history and place and how we construct and interpret these histories. It deals with "the distress that lingers even after the abuses have ceased" (Weintraub 2003, p.156), through the story of a traffic accident, when the character Soho Eckstein kills a pedestrian who runs into the path of his car. While the protagonist did not cause the accident, he was nonetheless complicit because he was part of the event. Kentridge sees this indeterminate position as one typically held by many white South Africans who feel uncomfortable about being neither active participant nor disinterested observer. There are two moments Soho finds terrible to recall: being witness to the incident and being an unintentional murderer; while he is not forensically guilty for the accident, he is complicit as part of the event. This indeterminate position Kentridge sees as typical of that of many white South Africans, including himself, who feel uncomfortable about being neither active

participant nor disinterested observer. In an interview, Kentridge described how, at the age of six, he saw photos of the brutality of South Africa and at that point “understood that the world was not how I had imagined it at all, that these things happened in the world that were inconceivable” (Weintraub 2003, p.158).

South African art historian Michael Godby refers to Michel Foucault’s person reflected in a mirror who is both present and absent, pointing out how photos and mirrors can be levers to the past and how Kentridge uses the rear view mirror device in his film to ‘reflect’ the eyes of both the driver and the spectator of the film (Godby 2002). This allows them to confront their own participation in history, thereby sharing the experience and the responsibility. He suggests that liberation from the burden of responsibility comes only with each individual’s acknowledgement of her complicity in the violent history of South Africa, and implies that the artist is indivisible from the rest of society. In Kentridge’s film the injuries of the victim are transferred to the witness. Godby claims Kentridge’s powerful and suggestive graphic style of drawing in charcoal invites completion by the spectator. Looking at one through the rear view mirror, Kentridge “...demands that each person acknowledge his or her involvement in the violence of the past, not necessarily direct political involvement but complicity through some degree of knowledge upon which the apartheid system depended” (2002, p.111). And in the course of the film he allows each witness gradually to discover the extent of her own hurt.

In post-apartheid South Africa, Kentridge is worried that people are collectively forgetting what happened in their immediate past and so he continues to produce work that remembers and reminds (Raitmaa 2001).

## SECTION TWO

### Chapter Five

## **Our relationship with the past: placing narrative in the context of history**

In this chapter I examine aspects of postmodernity with regard to historiography and narrative. I look at the arguments around definitions of history and historical truthfulness and the importance of transmitted memory; how there is no single truth about a sequence of events, but as many versions as there are participants or observers; and how the novel, as a form of recording a version of history, can influence our perceptions of historic events.

Hayden White, a historian in the tradition of literary criticism, concerned himself with the idea of narrative as a way of sharing meaning, laid out in his 1973 book *Metahistory*. His version of the writing of history is that it tells a story, representing and interpreting the past and utilising language to help people make meaning for their world (White 1980). Fiction writers have embraced his treatment as a means of demythologising history and granting a voice to those who had previously been silenced and suppressed (Woods 1999, p.54). South African English professor and writer Andre Brink summarises how White articulates perfectly the intersection of the three crucial ‘moments’ in story-telling:

... the representations of history repeat, in almost every detail, the processes of fiction. In this activity, in other words, history, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable: the ‘origins’ of history, as recovered through memory, are encoded in language, and each of these three moments becomes a condition for the others. (2002, p.32)

In fiction, history and memory intertwine with language, narrative and imagination, to create a story that can give meaning to, and understanding of, the human condition. A story can take the reader into a different time and place, offering them the writer’s version of the truth and what it might mean, for both the writer and the reader.

Andreas Huyssen, renowned for his work on cultural memory, has written extensively on how memory has become integral to the recording of history and shows

how our notion of history is dependent on memories and stories, incorporating language, narrative, image and sound. Without these stories, we would be left a world where everything is forgotten.

### **Narrative and making meaning**

I've always liked that line of EL Doctorow's – 'There is no fact, there is no fiction. There is only narrative'. (Byng 2001)

Paul Cobley defines narrative as a re-presentation of the world, selecting and articulating some things while leaving others out (2001, p.216). It is a series of events put together and understood in a certain way to provide a means of structuring our account of the world, controlled by the writer. The narrative is the formal apparatus of story-telling, namely who is telling (narrating) the story, how much omniscience the teller (narrator) has and the order in which the events are told.

The word fiction, an imaginative form of narrative, is derived from the Latin *fictia*, to make or shape (Miller 2002, p.7). It is a prejudiced fabrication, a rearrangement of selective materials from the real world – people, places, events – which the writer has selected to fit her argument or story. According to Annie Dillard, all mental activity, language and perception is selective and interpretative and fiction is, by definition, a tissue of lies. "The artist's intention is not to learn what exists but to create what never before existed. ... Art prizes originality more than fidelity" (Dillard 1988, p.149). The value of fiction for readers and writers is that it uses the imagination to tell complex and important truths (Brien 2002). It has the capacity to regulate how we understand experience and how we construct meaning from the past into the present. Through plotting, a chain of causation is revealed, showing how events are linked and depicted in relation to one another.

American sociologist Howard Becker validates story-telling as a means of representing a social reality, just as historical treatises do (Becker 1986). The novel does not claim to be any more than a partial representation and the writer is merely translating the representation into elements in the story so the reader does not deal with reality itself, but with the writer's interpretation. The writer arranges random elements to plot the narrative; conditions and consequences are laid out in sequence to provide evidence of

causality and explain actions. Paul Theroux, in his essay 'Memory and Creation' in *Fresh-Air Fiend* (2001), claims it is often better to look at the past or reality through the window of fiction because "... a nation's literature is a truer repository of thought and experience, or reality and time, than the fickle and forgettable words of politicians" (cited in Miller 2002, p.21).

Everything in a novel or work of fiction comes from the world around its writer. The writer takes meaningful aspects of her world and interprets them and uses the tools of writing to tell a story – combining research, imagination, history, memories, experience and reflection. These aspects remain only as traces over which she has written her own story (Sobchack 1999). A story is a version of the truth, says Brink. Something has to take place, historically or biographically, which is then reconstructed; telling stories, creating myths and fabricating metaphors are the necessary inventions for history. All stories have three characteristics: the outcome of a process of internalisation or personalisation, a construction of a version of the world, and the embodiment of an imagining or complex of imaginings (Brink 2002, p.38).

French literary critic and social theorist Roland Barthes maintains that narrative is international, transhistorical and transcultural (Hughes 2002, p.119). The point about a story is its intentionality: there is nothing random about a narrative, it is a construction that looks at problems of causality. A story explores motivation: why did the character do what she did? It allows the writer to convert supposedly haphazard events into the rationale behind their actions, as a way of transmitting a universal truth. Like White, Louis Mink (1980) claims that narrative is a way of sharing meaning and that by transforming events into stories we give them cognitive meaning. Narrative gives insight into the nature of real events, says White:

...the very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussion of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity. (1980, p.6)

Imagination is the component of the story which cannot be directly attributed to actual events. David Brooks (1991, p.39) explores the social, political and ideological functions of imagination, saying it is effective because of its perceived irrelevance. Through 'wild

imagining' the writer can increase the chance of circumventing the mind's acculturated barricades, of hearing a voice from within, a part of ourselves, that we might not otherwise have heard. But those things which we have forgotten, possibly intentionally, can come out in our imaginings. Altering the details of true events or fabulating the entire story enables the writer to write whatever she wishes to obtain absolution.

As a literary form, the novel is amorphous, and its boundaries are constantly being shifted and tested; it is changed and shaped by contemporary thought and history and by society. Influences on the novel have been wide ranging: the development of psychology in the late nineteenth century has resulted in greater complexity of characters. Also powerful in their effect on writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were developments in sociology, philosophy, economics, political science and evolutionary studies. Imperialism and colonialism greatly influenced the narrative, providing new settings, heroes and villains, as well as the means for promulgating social values and political ideas. And in the second half of the twentieth century philosophy and linguistics have driven postmodern writing and literary theory.

Some understanding of the way in which readers read is vital. Susannah Radstone, British cultural theorist, believes many people read literature because it allows them to find support for their own real or imagined predicaments (2007). A novel demands that the reader use her own experience as a resource for interpretation, and both gender and the range of historical contexts and purposes for reading convey a complexity of meanings derived by the individual reader. Radstone points out that while sociologists should be wary of mistaking novels for information, readers are not so constrained. As French philosopher Paul Ricoeur puts it: "The significance of a story wells up from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader" (cited in Van der Merwe 2006).

Sociologist Marjorie DeVault analyses the perspective of the reader by looking at the divergence of interpretations of a work of fiction. As reading is a socially located activity, shaped by the history, social-organisational context and the social background of the reader, a reader may use fictional portrayals as a basis for their own assertions about society (DeVault 1990, p.888). She discusses how different readers will construct different meanings from the same text, based on their experience and the perspective with

which they began reading; for example, a reader's feminist analysis would influence her interpretation of fiction, so since the 1980s many women have been reading and writing novels as part of the process of feminist consciousness-raising. She argues we read novels to find out about the lives of people different to ourselves and by reading the work of cultural outsiders we expand the possibilities for shared meanings. "The richness of the observation underlying a realistic novel means that it includes information not readily available in other public forms and gives us a sense of seeing into a different world" (1990, p.917). Marcel Proust, on the other hand, suggests the reader is only reading for herself and the function of the author is simply to offer an optical instrument so the reader might appreciate that which she would not otherwise be able to see (Jacobson 2007).

Writing from the margins and the emergent literature of new voices from non-traditional cultures are new and important sources of fiction, informing and broadening our understandings of other cultures. Subaltern studies, based in the Indian sub-continent, are critical of the focus of narrative on the political consciousness of elites instead of the so-called victims of invasion and colonialism. These studies approach history from below, drawing upon what occurred among the oppressed majority at the base levels of society rather than among the elite, from where the grand narrative traditionally has been taken. Woods says while these new works may not have been written with a reflexive voice, they have been responsible for significant interventions in the dominant representations of national cultures and ethnic traditions (1999, p.64). As Brink puts it: "History may remain an enigma, ... but it is only through story that the nature and context of each specific enigma can be approached" (2002, p.39).

Writers like VS Naipaul, Isabel Allende, Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje are new or first generation migrants whose fiction and memoirs on relocation provide powerful insights into different, sometimes exotic, sometimes frightening, worlds. Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories describe the twentieth century migration of Indians to North America and opens up an unknown world for the reader. In discussing the death of the novel in a newspaper article, British literary critic Terry Eagleton notes a great deal of contemporary English fiction is set outside England, indicating the growth of this new field of fiction. He finds this reassuring, having been

concerned that the current decline of post-imperial society is difficult to write about and may have been foreshadowing the end of literary fiction (Eagleton 2006).

### **History and fiction in postmodern terms**

... history is not simply what happened, but a particular view of what happened. (Godby 2002, p.106)

The ancient Greek poet Homer may have been the first person to relay the connectivity between history and story-telling. He used the stories and memories of his characters to make meanings that were relevant then and still are today. According to Dictionary.com (2006), the word *history* comes from the ancient Latin and Greek *historia*, meaning learning or knowing by inquiry, derived from the word *hístōr*, one who knows or sees meaning, a wise man, witness, or judge. In German, Italian and French the word for history and story is the same.

Our notion of history has always been dependent on what stories are told, and the memories upon which they are constructed are dependent on the historian's position and, ultimately, her creative thinking (Schildkrout 1999). As such, story and memory comprise a foundation of moral responsibility, burdening people with the consequences of their history. Victorian historian Thomas Carlyle observed the deeper connections between past and present and was critical of those historians who could not see them (Rushdy 2001). Linda Hutcheon too has questioned how one can know the real past. She says: "Postmodernism does not deny that it existed; it merely questions how we can know real past events today, except through their traces, their texts, the facts we construct and to which we grant meaning" (1988, p.225).

It could be said that the greatest challenge to Western thinking came after the devastation of World War One, resulting in huge changes in expectations, values and meaning. The world had been shattered and rendered senseless and nothing temporal, spatial, perceptual, social or moral remained fixed (Dillard 1988). Postmodernism was but one response to a world where people were no longer able to identify themselves within a rigid social structure. It gained recognition after World War Two in the USA, but only began to flourish in France during the 1960s when philosophers Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Barthes and Ricoeur developed a post-structuralist perspective in



which language was central because they believed knowledge could only be expressed through language. Until the 1980s postmodernism was primarily embraced by design, in art and architecture. According to Lyotard the modern debate on historiography was first brought to the public domain in the 1980s, with the shift of post-industrial society from the manufacture of goods to the production of information, when technology and science became centred on mass communication and a reliance on language.

Since then there has been a significant shift as the ideas of historical truthfulness, multiple points of view and the explosion of memorials for victims of wars and other atrocities have gained academic space. There has been a demand for a truth more truthful than one master narrative which, in order to be achieved, has had to incorporate opposing perspectives, personal experience and individual memory.

### **Historiography and metafiction**

An understanding of the terms historiography, metafiction and historiographic metafiction is essential in any discussion about postmodern writing. The notion of historiography was first brought into the public domain in EH Carr's *What is History?* (1961) but its greatest exponent was Hayden White. Historiography is the study of the practice of history, namely the study of historical method and the historical development of history as an academic discipline, or the way history is and has been written. It focuses on narrative, interpretations, worldview, use of evidence, and the methods of presentation of other historians, and shows how individual historians have different interpretations of an event and how these interpretations are affected by contemporaneous thinking. Historiographic studies consider the source, often by researching the author, her position in society and the paradigm of history that was applied at the time. White argues that the rise of modern historiography is deeply connected to the logic of the written narrative (cited in Morris-Suzuki 2005, p.18) and that history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation (cited in Copley 2001, p.31). His views are supported by many (Brink 2002; Copley 2001; Hutcheon 1988; Orłowski 1996) and provide a solution to the problem of "how to translate *knowing* into *telling*" (White 1980, p.1).

Metafiction is the exploration of the theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction. In her seminal book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Hutcheon defines as historiographic metafiction a cluster of novels by writers including Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, EL Doctorow and John Fowles because they are both self-reflexive and lay claim to historic events and people. These literary works allow the redefinition of reality and truth and open up the possibility of exploring the histories of suppressed people, the vanquished and women, by re-writing history in a way that hasn't been recorded before (Orlowski 1996), at the same time reconnecting their readers to a world outside the page (Hutcheon 1988, p.5). Postmodern history and literature explore, test and create new meanings rather than disclosing meanings already there, rejecting the ideal of representation in favour of Huyssen's notion of re-presentation, or that which is recalled afterwards.

Historiographic metafiction and postmodernism may have destabilised received notions of both history and fiction (Hutcheon 1988, p.120) but they have opened the field widely, in that the conventions of narrative in both historiography and novels are not constraints, but rather enable conditions of possibility and sense-making. Peter Gay claims historical narration without analysis is trivial, and historical analysis without narration is incomplete (cited in White 1980, p.6). White goes further, saying every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications (cited in Hutcheon 1988, p.120). He argues "the historian's work is a force of intellectual activity that is simultaneously poetic, scientific and philosophical" (cited in Le Goff 1992, p.118).

Tessa Morris-Suzuki reviews contemporary approaches to history in her book *The Past Within Us: media, memory, history* (2005). She sees historical truthfulness as an open-ended and evolving relationship between past events and people. What she deems as important is the focus on the processes by which people in the present try to make sense of the past (2005, p.27). She states that any encounter with the past involves feeling and imagination as well as pure knowledge and that, "since our knowledge of the past is something from which we derive personal identity, it also helps to determine how we act in the world" (2005, p.24).

In short, the argument about the sanctity of history and the single grand narrative is yet to be resolved. Scientific historians create interpretations of the past using

traces from documents, material evidence and oral tradition but postmodernists argue their answers are by necessity influenced by their position in the present and, because all narratives are constructed, they are contestable.

White's idea is that history is a re-invention of the past created to match and reinforce current beliefs, a narrative that is politically expedient in that before the historian writes her version of history she has a strategy in place to justify her argument. The difference between history and fiction is that the fiction writer invents her stories while the historian finds hers, but any event could have different roles assigned to it (White 1975). In *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1873), Friedrich Nietzsche writes that history could serve life by becoming an art form and should not be turned into a science because the knowledge of the past is important only for the service of the future and the present, not to weaken the present or undermine a living future.

Historian Jacques Le Goff (1992, p.51), on the other hand, subscribes to the scientific nature of history based on tangible evidence. He does not accept that history is a flexible art form even though he agrees it is interdisciplinary and that there should be dialogue with other social sciences. He sees a clear distinction between history and story because stories may be true or false, derived from 'historical reality' or imagination, but accedes that history does contain paradoxes and ambiguities and that there are creative possibilities within a historical context, especially for societies without writing which used story-tellers to pass on history orally. He argues memory has the potential to manipulate history because while it may be the raw material of history, traumatic memory may be forgotten, resulting in the conservation of only selected or edited information (1992, p.51). He reiterates Ricoeur's notion that history is truly the realm of the inexact and cannot be objective or contemporary because it is imperative that it maintains distance from the events.

Historian Marc Bloch explains the importance of the relationship between past and present and how within history the human being and social history should be incorporated so that the present can be understood by means of the past and, likewise, the past by means of the present. However, Le Goff disputes history can be reduced to a narrative or story, because a narrative is a construction underlaid with a set of implicit choices. It is about how, not why, whereas the *why* is at the foundation of historical

endeavour. Le Goff cites historian Paul Veyne's argument that history is a story of true events that could resemble a novel because it is composed of plots. Plot is crucial to historical representations of events and is not merely a structural component of fiction. But Le Goff counters this, saying the historian does not have the freedom to build her study the same way a novelist builds her story and that this method denies the scientific nature of history. He insists the historian does require imagination to make the past concrete, but scientific imagination must manifest itself in scientific abstraction.

Furthermore, Le Goff allows that subjective histories could be used to enlarge scientific work, to modify images of the past and to allow other voices to be heard. This is what Ralph Samuel calls 'deprofessionalizing history' whereby oral history, autobiographies and subjective histories can be used to enlarge the basis for scientific work and to modify the image of the past and allow other voices to be heard (1992, p.134).

### **Where the truth lies**

We never understand each other ... but people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed. And this is why they often seem more definite than characters in history.

(EM Foster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) cited in Hasluck 2002)

The crux of the argument between historians and novelists about where the truth lies can be seen in the telling of stories of historic events. Historians hold on tightly to their academic, scientific framework, and their reliance upon evidence, documentation and fact. Novelists believe in the interpretation of fact and their capacity to instil a meaning or a 'what if' into their fabulation of the past, reaching beyond the facts, providing insights into the nature of real events.

Australian historian Inga Clendinnen has been strident in her views against historical fiction, particularly in her attack on Kate Grenville's award-winning work of fiction *The Secret River* (2005). This position has shifted significantly since her essay 'Dream Catcher' (1999), where she discusses the case of Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartorn Childhood* (1995). This alleged autobiography of a Jewish boy who escaped the holocaust was later revealed to be a fraud. While Clendinnen

did not condone the forgery, she wrote that artifice has an important role to play in telling an important story and that being there is not an essential component for writing about a period in history. In this essay she writes that popular novels and films are as important as Eli Wiesel's and Primo Levi's witness accounts of Nazi atrocities and that on a political level, "purism sustains ignorance, ignorance is dangerous, therefore purism equals self-indulgence" (1999, p.273). Her conviction was that

...with fiction there is an 'as if' quality which allows an aesthetic response because it simultaneously establishes the moral distancing necessary for such a response. There can be no distancing if we believe we are reading about something which actually happened, and happened to this particular narrator as a child. (1999, p.273)

However, in a later essay 'The History Question: who owns the past?' (2006), Clendinnen refutes the validity of fiction in telling the nation's history, particularly in relation to *The Secret River*. As a historian she is dismayed by story-spinning because historians are committed to notions of accuracy and evidence (2006, p.15).

Notwithstanding her criticism, there is a strong case supporting the function of the novelist as the interpreter of facts, evidence and situations, going beyond the truth into the imaginary. Susannah Radstone, at a conference in Adelaide, talks of the importance of 'faction' – being between fact and fiction, based on literary historic imagination – arguing writers should be able to write about historic events, particularly from the position of the victim or the perpetrator because texts of this kind open up positions for readers which are multiple and flexible. For instance, the reader already knows the historic outcome of early European settlement in Australia, so Grenville can play on this by telling the story through an authoritative, omniscient third person narrator. The story is given power by making what was known become felt, allowing the reader to identify with an unsympathetic character, and bringing the reader to a different outcome – one of shock, regret and sorrow (2007).

Speaking at a conference before her book was published, Grenville (2000) claimed her justification for writing the book was that, in distorting the details of 'real' history, she was serving a larger good, of giving flesh and form to an idea. Story-tellers should pay tribute to history and acknowledge it as the first great story. In an interview with Melissa Lucashenko, she said in *The Secret River* her family history and national

history had come together so that she could represent those voiceless characters who hadn't left a written record (2005). While Aboriginal history was too important to be written as a novel, she had found a real incident – in the historical record – upon which to base a story, so she extrapolated, telescoped and transposed characters. She had thus been able to re-present the one-sided history that had been written down and so “had to be close to the truth”. By writing a fictional account, she enabled the reader to enter the story and read narrative history. She views this as the poetics of history, or fiction as another mode; the novelist is able to stand up on a stepladder and look down and see other ways to understand an event. “The historians are doing their thing, but let me as a novelist come to it in a different way, which is the way of empathising and imaginative understanding of those difficult events,” she said in a radio interview (Koval 2005).

English professor George Hughes argues the novel provides a new method in which history and theory can join together to inform each other, which is contingent, changed and constantly re-shaped by history, by society, by the production and use of books (2002, p.7). Clendinnen refers to Australian writer Kate Jennings in her essay, when she said that her job as a novelist was to “explore human behaviour, the personal and the public, to join intellect with emotion – in a way that non-fiction can't” (2006, p.34). Byng writes that linguistic experimentation is more likely to occur in fiction than non-fiction. He asks: “Has there been a piece of non-fiction this year which is as exciting in the risks it takes as Peter Carey's *True Story of the Kelly Gang*? In my view, no” (2001). Clendinnen disagrees, saying that when real events are used in this way they are simplified and, as such, a great deal can be lost. Australian writer Nicholas Jose is less critical and reminds us of the power of great fiction – Homer, Shakespeare and Tolstoy – which embodies a profound historical understanding of the world (Jose 2002). Clendinnen agrees that collective memories are valuable because they might hold a beleaguered group together in the face of persecution or provide a vision for their future, thus they should be protected to ensure that another story – the victim's – gets heard, in contrast to the ‘first story’. She quotes Milan Kundera: “the struggle of men against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (2006, p.46). There is something of an anomaly here: the loss of living memory is fatal and memories must be kept and

recorded, but still Clendinnen dislikes the reliance upon memory because she finds it unreliable and unfactual.

Historians of whatever culture are at once the custodians of memory – the retrievers and preservers of the stories by which people have imagined their personal and civic lives – and the devoted critics of those stories. (2006, p.43)

Clendinnen concludes that the obligation of historians is to preserve the past in its least corrupted version, to resist opportunistic appropriations and be mindful that the past is too complex to be told in a single story.

The arguments of historian Bernard Bailyn run contrary to Clendinnen's view of the sanctity of the historian. In *On the Teaching and Writing of History* (1994), Bailyn acknowledges postmodernism has been beneficial because it has brought scepticism to the discipline of history, aroused awareness of its flaws and pointed out that history should be placed within a context. Bailyn also recognises that the spirit of postmodernism has introduced new histories of oral, gender, subaltern history from below and the new Social History, as well as self-reflexive historiography. But his definition of a historian has no connection to that of a writer of fiction. He categorises an eminent practitioner of history as one who has a creative effect on historical understanding and who is able to penetrate deeply into the context of past circumstances. These contextualists use new data sources to see connections between people and circumstances not previously perceived so they can put together a new picture, one not familiar to the historical world.

However, Bailyn claims that although the historian must rely on a data source, not just memory or imagination, she may well have a personal involvement with her subject and because of this interest, is almost obliged to think originally and creatively about the subject. However, he stresses the imperative for evidence rather than simply imagination or a reliance on memory, and insists that the historian must be totally objective, regardless of any personal involvement in the subject. A story may encompass history but can focus on the personal, and can only *presume* to be a version of a truth.

South African-born writer JM Coetzee endeavours to demythologise history through the freedom of the novel. "The feel of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility toward something that has not yet emerged"

(Easton 1995). As visual artist Julian LaVerdiere says, all artists must twist the truth to tell a deeper truth (Weintraub 2003). Indeed, truth and its variations play a part in all forms of literature. Two travel writers acknowledge the blurring that takes place: Paul Theroux engages his reader by making “real-life read like fiction” (Miller 2002, p.8), which requires some massaging of the truth; and Jonathan Raban is interested in the boundary between what is non-fiction and fiction.

I always want to remind people that the word fiction doesn't come from some imaginary Latin verb meaning I make things up as I go along. It actually comes from a real Latin verb which means I give shape to. (cited in Miller 2002, p.7)

When asked to prepare a paper on his Jewish rural childhood for a conference, Dan Jacobson observed that what he calls interpretive fiction would probably have been more appropriate, in the form of a memoir or short story or poem. He told the conference:

Imaginative writing is at home with confusion and multifariousness and an absence of clearly defined ‘borders’ on any side; discursive writing, on the other hand, seems to impel one towards a categorising, generalising mode of presenting experience, with strengths and weaknesses, good things and bad, credits and debits, placed side by side in neat bookkeeping columns. (2000, p.16)

Paul Eakin (2004) claims there is too much fiction in autobiography and that as soon as we begin talking about the past we are lying. The autobiographer's allegiance to truth is to their remembered consciousness. Yet writer Alexandra Fuller, in the postscript to her memoir of an African childhood *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001), said that she had chosen the format of a memoir after discarding many attempts at writing a novel. She realised that through a fictional account of her family she was avoiding confronting her identity and the guilt she felt about the injustices she had witnessed in her youth. “... the novels still felt like lies because in them I had tried to soften the voices of the whites I had known” (2001, p.307). But Hughes notes that a biography too is merely an interpretation; it is a speculation based on written documents, interviews and photos, and cannot be deemed to be the truth (2002, p.120).

The debate between truth and imagination, and history versus fiction, is still raging but it is clear that postmodernism has given writers the freedom to explore



previously hidden narratives that tell bigger stories that the writer believes have a right to be heard. Story-telling can reveal truths previously suppressed and bring to the public domain uncomfortable or silenced episodes in our history. A novel might be shaped by history but through the writer's insights or interpretations the message or meaning in the narrative has the potential to reach many.

## Chapter Six

### Rememory and representation

There is a tenuous fissure between past and present that constitutes memory, making it powerfully alive and distinct from an archive or any system of storage (Lobe 2000, p.6). A memory provides the sense of the continuity of the self across time from the past to the future (Nelson 2003, p.126). In this chapter I discuss how memory has become legitimised as an important element of history. How we represent our past and the meanings we derive from our experiences determines our identity and how we understand the present. The past is not simply there in memory, but must be articulated to become memory.

When memories are traumatic, they become interwoven with forgetting and silence. Huyssen claims we are obsessed with the ambiguity surrounding memory and the past, but also caught in a destructive dynamic of forgetting (Lobe 2000).

I also introduce the notion of palimpsest narrative, a means for literature to be used to release memory and trauma, allowing the Silent Other to reclaim its voice.

### Memory

In my photographic work I was always especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long. (Sebald 2001, p.109)

In *On the Soul* (350 BC), Aristotle refers to the workings of memory as a metaphor, making something that is absent present. The metaphor re-emerges in the anonymous Latin work *Ad Herennium* (first century BC) whereby the memories are wax tablets or papyrus and the images are letters. Ofelia Ferran has extended this to her own meta-metaphor (a metaphor made of metaphors) when a metaphor designed to refer to memory starts to refer to itself, so that these metaphors in reality reflect memory: “A sense of

dizziness, a certain vertiginous quality creeps into the whole relation of memory, writing and metaphor” (Ferran 1997, p.16).

Socrates uses the metaphor of the wax tablet for memory. If we want to remember something, we imprint it on the wax. “Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know” (cited in Lobe 2000, p.9). However, this metaphor does not allow for collective, repressed and transmitted memory. Lobe postulates that there are also inscribed traces, or palimpsestic writing, that allow for a range of meanings and interpretations, through what Derrida and others call memory-work. The premise for memory-work is that history cannot rely solely on memory but that the present is re-presented through memory, history and the archives. Re-presentation is the term Huyssen gave for that which is recalled afterwards. Australian academic Chris Healy recognises this: “We are all memory-workers, recalling and forgetting, selecting, ordering and erasing memories” (cited in Taylor 2000, p.28).

Memory stands at the juncture between the objective world of the laboratory and the subjective world of experience, and while scientists can understand circuitry and neural patterns, the “content of my memory will always be coded in the language of my mind. Of that language, poets and novelists, not neuroscientists, must speak, for it is they who have the gift of tongues” (Lobe 2000, p.10).

It is important to touch upon collectivity – both of memory and the unconscious – when looking at memory. The notion of the collective unconscious was developed by Carl Jung early in the twentieth century. Jung’s theory is that all humans have a common psychic heritage passed on from our ancestors (Stevens 2001). According to him, the collective unconscious is composed of functional units called archetypes and these identical psychic structures are common to all people and are the archaic heritage of humanity. Anthony Stevens describes the collective unconscious in terms of there being common behavioural characteristics and typical experiences for all human beings. At appropriate times, archetypes give rise to similar thoughts, feelings and ideas in people irrespective of their class, race, location or historical epoch. The self is made up of a collective unconscious wherein the entire personality is integrated and personal experiences activate the archetypal potential already present in the self. The

predisposition to have certain experiences is inherited and archetypal, not the experience itself. Furthermore, social groups have the means, through oral tradition and folklore, to allow for recollections to reappear so the individual can acquire, localise and recall memories. Cultures need to treasure and store their pasts and communally reflect upon their collective memories, so that the past, in the form of folklore, can be rediscovered in the present to become history (Denholm 1991).

### **Collective memory and trauma**

Maurice Halbwachs, French philosopher and sociologist, developed a theory of collective memory. He writes that all recollections have corresponding words with which we label them even before we identify the emotion or event as it recurs. There is thus a language, with an entire system of social conventions attached to it, that allows us to continuously reconstruct our past (1992, p.173). The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory at any time, but in the act of reconstructing or reflecting on the memory, it is frequently distorted. There may be recollections which have not been thought about for a long time and which are reproduced without change but when reflection operates, when instead of letting the past recur, we reconstruct it instead through an effort of reasoning, then we distort that past, because we wish to introduce greater coherence. Reason or intelligence then select and eliminate from the store of recollections and arrange others according to an order confirming with our ideas of the moment, resulting in many alterations (1992, p.183).

With societies that have undergone trauma there exists a struggle for reliable and trustworthy memory.

Memory is their internal narrative, their chronology, of what befell them. In that important sense, memory is what they need, or want, to commemorate, revere, pass on. Denial, or negation, or disparagement of that memory produces an unbearable hurt. (Tatz 2003, p.15)

Saul Friedlander, a holocaust survivor, has spent his life studying memory. He expresses how, for traumatised communities, hidden memories may be unearthed to represent something lasting.

When crises occur, one searches the depths of one's memory to discover some vestige of the past, not the past of the individual, faltering and ephemeral, but rather that of the community, which, though left behind, nonetheless represents that which is permanent and lasting. (Friedlander 1979, p.69)

When dealing with events where there are no survivors, the subjectivity of the historian may come into question. Historians construct their versions of the truth through archives and traces; they determine what should be stored and preserved. If there are no 'legitimate' survivors or their records then no-one can refute the historian's interpretation of what occurred. Even with events within living memory, where survivors can recall and share mutual events and experiences, a reconstructed collective memory may contradict the 'official' historic version. The children of holocaust survivors and other victims of trauma, for instance, have inherited familial discourses and communal memories within which their own memories are shaped. The communal memory creates social bonding and identity which historians then use to corroborate, correct or refute collective memory. As American professor of humanities David Mendelsohn challenges:

*What is memory? What is memory? Memory is what you remember. No, you change the story, you "remember". A story, not a fact. Where are the facts? There is memory, there is truth – you don't know, never.* (2007, pp.420–1)

Collective memory can be important in the writing process; the split between the past and memory is a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic activity. When writers recover repressed memories they must determine how much fiction is reality and how much perceived reality is actually fictional (Brooks 1991, p.27). Ultimately they need to make fiction appear to be real, and confabulate and distort reality so it appears fictional. They require a keen sense of how their memories are doctored and how forgetting is engineered. Writers of fiction take on the responsibility of remembering and need to be aware of their roles as "makers, knowers, seers, callers of fiction" (1991, p.35).

Australian writer Helen Garner has been accused of calling a true story a work of fiction in relation to her recent novel *The Spare Room* (2008). The protagonist is called Helen, lives in similar circumstances to the author and goes through experiences Garner has publicly acknowledged were hers. She is surprised by the anxiety around the overlap

between fiction and her style of writing. “What difference would it make to the meaning or worth of the story?” she asks, in an interview in *The Age* (Steger 2008). Garner is captivated by the “contract between the writer and the reader”. In non-fiction the writer endeavours to get as close to the truth as she can, but not to pass off as true things that she has to guess or speculate. The writer must say if she can’t find out what really happened. However, with fiction it is quite different, she says. With a novel, it is not supposed to be literally true. The writer can take liberties. “Only a fool reads a novel thinking it’s going to be the ‘unvarnished truth’.” Garner says there are ways for a writer to use her experience “where ... other people can come into the text with their own feelings and be met there”. Steger cites Hilary McPhee, publisher of some of Garner’s books, who says that “fiction and non-fiction are inadequate labels for writing that draws on life and transforms it through the lens of a narrator”. McPhee talks about the transforming power of Garner’s imagination, how she takes events and “reshapes and positions them so the light falls at an angle which pares them to the bone” (2008).

### **The upsurge in the legitimacy of memory**

Memory has taken on a meaning so broad and all-inclusive that it tends to be used purely and simply as a substitute for ‘history’ and to put the study of history at the service of memory. (Nora 2004, p.5)

In his article ‘Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory’ (2000), French historian Pierre Nora provides an excellent overview of the surge of interest in memory and its relationship with history. He considers how memorials have been built to link respect for the past with a sense of belonging, the collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity. (Memorials are discussed further in Chapter Seven.)

Nora identifies two major historical phenomena: the first is Daniel Halevy’s notion of the acceleration of history. This posits that the most continuous or permanent feature of the modern world is not continuity or permanence, but change. As change occurs more rapidly, the past retreats more swiftly. Previously, there existed the unity of historical time, a linearity which bound the present and the future to the past. The future was envisaged by families, groups, societies and nations as what it needed to remember from the past. This has been discarded and society has been left completely uncertain as

to what form the future will take. For this reason, Nora believes memory has been invested with a promise of continuity and so its importance has grown as we acknowledge the obligation to remember.

The effects of the acceleration of history on memory are twofold. First is what Nora calls stockpiling, how the feeling of loss and its exaggerated importance has resulted in a proliferation of institutions and instruments like monuments, museums, archives, libraries and digital inventories; second, because our understanding of science and technology is changing so quickly, the past is losing its relevance for the future because we can no longer guarantee how the future may look and what our descendants will need in order to understand their lives. So we stockpile everything, including traces and materials, to testify to what we are and what we may become. Nora cites Ricoeur: because we have lost the ability to anticipate the future, we have a “duty to remember” and must make the “effort to remember” (2004, p.4).

The acceleration of history also entails a cutting off from the past. In order to recover it, the past is reconstructed in monumental detail with the aid of documents, archives and memory. Previously, this was called history. We are thus shifting the meaning of words which, Nora says, is characteristic with the spirit of the age.

The second historical phenomenon Nora identifies is the democratisation of history. He relates this to the emancipation of minority groups and the rehabilitation of the past as a means of reaffirming identity. Minority memories are due to three types of decolonisation. Firstly, international decolonisation occurs where societies previously stagnated in “the ethnological inertia of colonial oppression” (2004, p.5) now have access to historical consciousness and the rehabilitation (or fabrication) of memories. Secondly, domestic decolonisation occurs when sexual, social, religious and provincial minorities are integrated into the mainstream; they are reaffirming their memory, or their history, in order to have “their ‘particularism’ recognized by a community that had previously refused them that right, while at the same time cultivating their difference and their attachment to an identity threatened with disintegration” (2004, p.5). Finally, ideological decolonisation occurs where liberated peoples are reunited with their long-term memories that had been confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by dictatorial or colonial regimes.

These forms of minority memories have enhanced Halbwachs's notion of collective memory.

Nora analyses the tension between two dimensions of history: the study of history as interpretation, a search for knowledge which will enable an understanding of "the causal relationships between events, the genealogy of ideas and institutions, and the forces which produce change in human societies" (Morris-Suzuki 2005, p.22), and history as identification. Through identification with individuals or spaces in the past one can rethink or reaffirm one's own current identity.

History has always been under the custodianship of scholars and public guardians. However, while history was 'founded' on memory, it was "a discipline that aspired to scientific status" (Nora 2004, p.6) and memory became denigrated as idiosyncratic and misleading, as merely private testimony. History was the sphere of the collective; memory that of the individual. Only now has memory "come to resemble the revenge of the underdog or injured party, the outcast, the history of those denied the right to History" (2004, p.6). This upsurge in memory has also been dependent upon the change in our understanding of identity. It has moved from being individual and subjective to collective, quasi-formal and objective and defines us 'from without'. "Identity, like memory, is a form of duty. ... It is at this level of obligation that the decisive tie is formed between memory and social identity" (2004, p.6). The merging of the two reflects the interaction between history and society.

Morris-Suzuki states that our relationship with the past is forged not only through factual knowledge or an intellectual understanding of cause and effect but also through imagination and empathy. She claims:

Museums, heritage sites, historical novels and films (as well as many academic history texts), invite us to enter into an empathetic relationship with people of the past: to imagine their experiences and feelings, mourn their suffering and deaths and celebrate their triumphs. (2005, pp.22–23)

Art historian Michael Godby maintains that historians have always used narrative, but it was always from their single, authoritative position – the grand narrative. He uses film to support his argument that artists can use multiple narratives or a narrative fragment, or micronarrative, located within the grand narrative, to render the complexity and



contradiction of historical experience. History cannot become the fiction it appears to emulate because it must remain committed to the past, whereas, in an artwork, everything is focussed on the spectator and her interpretation. He points to Gillo Pontecorvo's film *Battle of Algiers* (1966) as a form of the regeneration of history, using flashbacks, cross-cutting and alternating between scene and story, relying on history and recreation. This technique is later repeated in Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Downfall* (2004) which recounts Hitler's final days in his Berlin bunker in 1945, using actual testimonials to recreate this period.

Godby cites Kentridge's *History of the Main Complaint* (1996) as a metaphor for the micronarrative. The spectator becomes part of an event that would not be possible through a historic text.

The idea of truth which, in history, no matter how deconstructed, inevitably remains attached to the object of study, becomes, in *History of the Main Complaint*, the medium of memory that connects the spectator to the past. (2002, p.107)

According to Godby, it is Kentridge's powerful and suggestive graphic style of drawing in charcoal that invites completion by the spectator. This idea can be extended to literary fiction, where the reader is required to extrapolate meaning. Looking at the historical novel, Morris-Suzuki says that for this form to succeed it needs to evoke a sense of connection between the reader and the narrative, supporting Godby's premise. The construction or characterisation must be powerful enough to draw the reader into that time, particularly if the reader has no sense of connection with that historical era. Conversely, people are attracted to fiction about a historical period they have learnt about at school, at a museum, in a film or television program, or through stories or family folklore. As such, an essential part of learning to understand the past is to understand the possibilities, limitations and communicative codes of the media. Morris-Suzuki maintains that postmodernism has made us more sensitive to the complexities of representing the past in words and that the very words we use "carry their own burden of history" (2005, p.234). In other words, the spatial lines we build around national, regional civilisational history and the temporal lines around the middle ages or modern era are in themselves constructions and the past can look very different if these lines are redrawn. She cites

literary critic Alfred Sheppart who said novels should look back about half a century, “at the moment where a particular fragment of the past is slipping over the horizon from memory into history” (2005, p.45). The ideas of living memory and the slippage from memory to history are further explored, together with inherited memory and palimpsest narrative, in Chapter Six.

## **The Silent Other**

Voiceless characters are those who don't leave a written record.  
(Grenville 2005)

An interconnectivity exists between memory, forgetting and silence: memories of trauma can never be erased or buried completely because shadows and remembrances will return to unearth what has been hidden. The notion of the silent Other reclaiming its lost voice and identity is relevant to postcolonial discourse, particularly Edward Said's idea of 'Orientalism' – the Western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. In 1985 Said declared that the Orient was not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other. Pickering defines the silent Other as the Other who cannot speak but who is spoken for. There is a paradox here: Otherness has been deconstructed through Western theoretical models but we still end up speaking *for* the silent Other and there remains the implicit expectation of submission to the authority of the West and its analytical devices. This criticism has been made in subaltern studies and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory. Selden et al write that if the oppressed and silenced cannot, by definition, speak or achieve self-legitimation without ceasing to be that named subject under neo-colonialism, then there can be no non- or anti-colonial discourse (1997, p.227). The dilemma is, are we caught in a Western theoretical construction? Do the labelled groups really exist, so that they can speak for themselves, or is their identity in fact a construction?

In his book *The Literature of Silence* (1968), Ihab Hassan speaks of the inexorable movement towards silence, following the postmodern notion of the 'death of the novel'. This revolves around the abandonment of plot, character, metaphor and meaning because there are no new stories to tell or worth telling. Thus it has become

impossible to write an original work. Eagleton (2001) and DeVault (1990) are more positive about the future of the novel, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Brink argues there is a need for an imagined rewriting of history because imagination is crucial in the dialectic between past and present, individual and society. Because of silences and forgetting, recorded history and memories alone cannot be relied upon to provide the complete story. “My memory is what I use to forget with,” quotes Brink (2002, p.36), referring to the statement made by a child in 1994 at an enquiry into repressed memory in South Africa. Margaret Atwood’s novel *Alias Grace* (1996), for instance, also uses a range of techniques of fiction to modify and remake the public memory. Nonetheless Atwood denies or represses history, in the conventional sense, in favour of story: “We are also... what we forget” (1996, p.406).

South African Jewish studies academic Milton Shain (2000) says that our understanding of the past is forever changing resulting in a substantial discrepancy between memory and historical reality and what things are forgotten. This seems especially pertinent in the South African context and Braude connects this with its literature.

The construction and use of memory and forgetting of specific aspects of South African and European racial history run throughout the development of South African literature and consciousness like a line of gold beneath the city of Johannesburg. (2001, p.x)

For those who have experienced trauma, memories can be blocked, leading to oblivion, denial and the forgetting of sorrows (Ferran 1997). “When knowledge comes, memory comes too, little by little. Knowledge and memory are one and the same thing” (Friedlander 1979, p.20).

The notion of the transgenerational transmission of trauma was developed by psychologists after working with holocaust survivors and their descendants. Yolanda Gampel, a psychoanalyst, refers to Antonius Robben’s label of intergenerational indigestible trauma and quotes Nietzsche: “Modern man drags an immense amount of indigestible knowledge stones around with him which on occasion rattle around in his belly” (Gampel 2000, p.61). Gampel adds that incidents like Auschwitz and Hiroshima have shown that the most intimate and concealed parts of our identity are tied with death

and violence. She says that as time passes, victims of atrocities either act out alien identifications, and/or transmit them to their children, who may act them out and transmit them to the third generation (2000, p.59).

While the children of survivors do not have personal memories of the Shoah, the internal reality of their family's past loss, suffering and humiliation has been deposited in them by intergenerational transmission. (2000, p.61)

Psychotherapy may help these people distinguish between their internal and external realities and thus gain a measure of control over their own lives. However, analysis is not available to most victims of trauma, who are forced to maintain their silence. And the effects may be long-lasting. Psychiatrist Mamik Volkan refers to the transgenerational transmission of trauma among African Americans (2006) and notes internalised aggression is often associated with trauma that occurred over a long duration.

The ancestors of African Americans endured 244 years of slavery and nearly a century of institutionalized terrorism. There are moving descriptions of the continuing presence of shame, humiliation, dehumanization and guilt that lingers within the African American communities after desegregation was enforced in the United States. (2006, pp.30–31)

### **Regaining the voice of the silenced**

“Thaw that long silence round my heart”  
(Kim Scott, Curtin University *Palimpsests: Transforming Communities* conference address, November 2004)

The notion of silence is reminiscent of deep, dark places and spaces locked away that fester and agitate – lava that seeps then bubbles through the cracks, erupting with a seismic burst through a chasm. Silence is withholding, amnesia and forgetting, erasing the slate, but always leaving traces, shadows, a palimpsest.

Since the advent of postmodernism and postcolonialism once-silenced peoples have been granted their voices, which are being heard through literature, a relevant and meaningful way to record their stories and losses. Esteemed Australian novelist Alex Miller explains the novel as being the story of the losers, not the winners, often offering

the only voice of those who, like ghosts and shadows, leave scarcely a trace. It is the novelist's task to search for the traces, the private, the unofficial, the unrecorded and the silences. It is the intimate, not the grand story, being told (Miller 2006). Ivor Indyk touches on this too:

The past insists on being heard in the present, though under the pressure of fear, or denial, or suppression, it may take strange and complicated paths to expression. (1991, p.245)

Silence surrounding trauma is a notion that has been recognised for many years. Robins writes that his "personal memory of the Shoah resides precisely in the silences and fragments of my father's past" (2002, p.126). We refer to "unspeakable experiences" (Kestecher 2008), events which are passed on non-verbally because they are shrouded in pain, shame, anger, degradation, fear. These emotions and actions that cannot be spoken about for fear of others learning what had taken place, or because they cannot identify with them, or understand, or accept in someone they love. Through silence, victims are seeking to escape, to suppress memories rather than recover them. However, while the victim may not be able to find words to adequately describe what took place, some form of expression is preferable to living in silence. Because if one cannot find words, if all there is is silence, then all that remains is the trauma which will be passed on to family and other survivors. In addition, those who have been silenced and forbidden to express themselves will be written out of the historical record.

Historical truthfulness demands an acknowledgement of the fissures and silences that run through all of knowledge, through the shaping and reshaping of our understanding of the past. It is about knowing the past and understanding how essential it is to knowing ourselves and others, and to knowing what it is to be human (Morris-Suzuki 2005, p.238). It must begin with "an attentiveness to the presence of the past within and around us: the recognition that we ourselves are shaped by the past" (2005, p.238). Historic truthfulness acknowledges that language and literature have become the mechanisms for uncovering the secret histories and hidden truths, attempts to undertake what Brink calls the imagined rewriting of history.

## **Palimpsest narrative**

The metaphor of palimpsest or wax tablet in relation to writing, memory and forgetting has been used repeatedly by scholars (Ferran 1997; Lobe 2000; Rushdy 2001; Taylor 2000). Palimpsest refers to the manuscript upon which text or social memory is recorded. The parchment or vellum may be erased or worn out to provide space for a second, or several, writings. Palimpsest or prophetic manuscripts are those which show the continuity and interrelationship between the events transcribed, because even over time, traces, or memories, of the earlier writing cannot be completely removed and are still visible to influence the final work.

Interestingly, horrific events are often referred to in geological terms, like seismic events and the eruption of memory. This supports the idea that highly structured models with codes, rules and systems underlie all human social and cultural practice. Extending this notion further, literary Darwinists apply evolution-based thinking to fiction in the hope of invigorating the study of literature, while simultaneously mining an untapped source of information for the scientific study of human nature (Gottschall 2007). British art historian Simon Schama uses this geological metaphor, referring to the work of the mind as landscape and saying that scenery is built up from the strata of memory, like layers of rock, reinscribed with cultural meaning. “Viewed in this way, place becomes a kind of palimpsest, a cultural manuscript on which meanings are inscribed, erased and over-written” (cited in Taylor 2000, p.28). Affrica Taylor calls “the seismic rupturing of the palimpsest” that historic moment, or break point, when memory breaks through, when forgotten stories are pushed up to the surface, exposing the strata of social memory (2000, p.31). Visible only are the traces of a deeper story; in order to discover the geological strata or the ground plans which provide the true explanations for what is revealed above, the site must be excavated (Widdowson & Brooker 1997, p.28).

Martin Hall claims archaeology – the study of material forms of human expression – is another means of recalling memory. He shows how texts arising from artefacts have an archetypal quality and that archaeologists too try to understand objects through words, whether their purpose is the construction of a narrative, or an enquiry into the ways in which the objects work as culture (Hall 2002). Brink refers to Foucault and

Derrida's use of memory in an archaeological manner by the writer, to excavate the silence (Brink 2002).

Ashraf Rushdy (2001) gives the name 'palimpsest narrative' to the idea of the transmission of the narratives of trauma across generations. He uses the idea of the palimpsest, the reworking of recorded and overwritten social memories, as the means of telling stories and rewriting history. Traces remain as palimpsest narratives, internalised by survivors and passed down through generations; they show the profound relationship between the past and the present, between horrific events in history and the immense impact they had on survivors and their descendants.

Rushdy has associated the transgenerational transmission of trauma with literary theory. According to him, submerged traces and shadows, these silences and erasures, are not forgotten and can be brought to the surface and made conscious through art. By rewriting history through fiction, memories of dark family secrets and unspoken taboos can be exposed and reviewed.

Palimpsest narrative can be employed by a writer of fiction to tell a story and to make meaning from an episode in history, at both the political and personal levels. By exploring hidden memories and stories and developing characters the writer is able to uncover the traumas of the past and provide a deeper understanding of the human condition. There is a simultaneous process of clearing and reworking as the characters, through the writer, re-present themselves, as identities independent of the writer. The writer allows the characters to determine the direction of the story within the boundaries of fixed historical markers.

It could be said that palimpsest narrative itself is a seismic eruption to challenge the canon of literary texts and the voice of the mainstream by liberating the defeated, the colonised, freedom fighters and the vanquished from white male orthodoxy.

Rushdy developed his theory of palimpsest narrative within the context of slavery in America, ascribing the descendants of slaves as voiceless people. He claims that until their stories are brought to the surface and exposed, the trauma suffered by the African Americans will continue to be transmitted transgenerationally. African-American critic Henry Louis Gates Jr developed a critical approach in the 1980s which viewed black literature as 'palimpsestic' and released the 'black voice' to speak for itself, thereby

allowing a return to the 'literariness' of the black text (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker 1997, p.233). However, Rushdy says the ramifications of slavery are still unexposed in America and until these are examined and revised, the American nation will remain haunted and unable to experience historical continuity.

What is at issue here is that American intellectuals have consistently employed terms, narratives, and conceptual devices that hide what they are trying to reveal. ...It is secret in the sense that it haunts the peripheries of the national imaginary ... Slavery functions in American thinking as the partially hidden phantom of a past that needs to be revised in order to be revered. (2001, p.2)

The cultural secrets he alludes to are symptoms of an illness that comes from the inability to comprehend the function of the past and what it means in the formation of the present. Historical continuity is impossible because the occurrence has not ended. Palimpsest narratives, however, can show the profound relationship between the past and the present, between a national history of terror and its impact on the people it has produced. Using this technique, literature rouses the reader to observe the social, psychic and material affects of events like slavery on individuals, families, communities and nations.

The importance of palimpsest narrative is that it provides creative media the opportunity to make strong political statements and to be utilised in the search for meaning. Rushdy shows how the works of Toni Morrison and Claude Lanzmann (director of the film *Shoah* (1985)) explore the traditions of memory and oral history to expose the meaning of the past for a present social order. The filmmaker and the novelist both seek to give voices to the victims of the past that continue to haunt the living. "... Historical events have enduring afterlives. These texts generate different artistic and conceptual devices for making that point artistically" (2001, p.5).

In her novel *Beloved* (1987), Morrison invents the phrase *rememory* as a way to understand how you can share in the prior experiences of others. Geraldine Brooks uses a similar technique in her novels *Year of Wonders* (2001) and *March* (2005). It is the device for understanding the relationship between what happened then with what is happening now. Morrison takes the reader back to the past to learn and understand it.

I used to think it was my rememory ... Some things you forget. Other things you never do. ... Places, places are still there. If a house burns



down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, not just in my rememory but out there, in the world. (1987, p.43)

Rushdy uses the term 'anamnesis' when referring to this idea of things past being recalled to memory. Plato defines the same term as the recollection of ideas known in a previous stage of existence, or remembering what we learned before coming to this world. The Australian Catholic University (2006) refers to it as an objective act, in and by which the person or event commemorated is made present and brought into the realm of the here and now.

Palimpsest narrative is also relevant to the genocides of Armenia, Cambodia and former Yugoslavia, and to events of oppression, victimisation and national shame, like the apartheid regime in South Africa and to the stolen generations in Australia. The TRC was South Africa's attempt to expose and expel the demons of history and deconstruct the master narrative that had been in place since the seventeenth century. Story-telling has been shown to be one way individuals can work through trauma to tell their personal truth. Grenville (2000) refers to Australia's history and talks about what can be shown with pride and what is hidden and says that until we are prepared to look at all those slightly secret places, we cannot progress into the future. This is what Grenville endeavours in *The Secret River* (2005).

Other art forms can also draw on notions of palimpsest narrative, as Kentridge's animated films on apartheid illustrate. Kentridge's approach to cultural practice is to embrace uncertainty, using erasure to show that what remains is a shadow, that nothing is permanent and everything is changeable, ultimately leading you towards the truth (Kentridge 2004). His technique of film animation involves drawing on paper in charcoal, shooting the single image, then reworking the image by smudging out lines and redrawing and then re-shooting the image. This could be seen as a form of palimpsest, when the old has been rubbed out to make room for new. Yet in his films, the rubbed-out lines are still visible as a shadow or tail of movement, leaving a trace. The completed films explore movement through erasure and Kentridge uses this motion to jolt memories, to uncover the past and to construct a new vision.

## Chapter Seven

### Telling the truth through stories

The truth and reconciliation process itself is concerned as much with the present as with the past. (Godby 2002, p.107)

In this chapter I look at one of the unexpected outcomes of the TRC (1995–1998), namely how it assisted the burgeoning of story-telling, expressing alternate truths and embracing the African ethic of *ubuntu*, the African humanist ethic of reciprocity or traditional hospitality. The TRC has been compared to a memorial so I discuss James Young's notion of counter-memorials and how the Commission could be conceived of as a counter-memorial. I also look at how fiction and other creative art forms can be viewed as memorials, especially pertaining to apartheid. Within this framework, I examine emerging trends in post-apartheid literature, including Jewish writing.

#### Truth and the TRC

The TRC was one of the most significant socio-political developments of the transitional period of South Africa's history because it encouraged ordinary citizens to participate as active agents to reconstruct the apartheid past, that which had previously been hidden, actively and passively, from history. The final TRC report documents much of the history of oppression in South Africa. After centuries of colonial rule, such a record is extremely valuable and necessary. At last, their story, so long perceived by the white minority as the Other, has been recorded.

In Chapter Three, the TRC was examined in detail, showing how it broke new ground. It may be useful here to consider if the model achieved its primary goal – that of national reconciliation. From the outset, there had been an implied causal link between truth and reconciliation but, according to the literature (Borer 2004; Ignatieff 1997; Krog 2000; Nora 2004; Robins 1998a), this link is tenuous and has not been proven. The very title of the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* evokes an implication of unity and reconciliation following the public unburdening of grief and guilt. For the

Commission, the quest for truth was paramount. As Villa-Vicencio said: “The underlying principles of the legislation are that imprisonment is not essential. Truth is” (cited in Borer 2004, p.22). Chilean Jose Zalaquett said that when the choice comes between truth and justice, we should choose truth: “Truth does not bring back the dead, but releases them from silence” (cited in Krog 2000, p.32). According to professor of comparative literature Mark Sanders, the commissioners of the TRC believed they had uncovered the nature of truth and were eager to use their final report to impart this knowledge to others. They defined four different manifestations of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social truth; and healing and restorative truth (2000).

Grahame Hayes, South African psychologist, examines truth and its relationship with story and history in his 1998 article ‘We Suffer Our Memories: Thinking About the Past, Healing, and Reconciliation’. He claims the definitive truth is to be found in all the stories told to the Commission and in none of them because the truth is bigger than the stories themselves; it is not in the content so much as in the breach of human conduct that made the stories arise in the first place (1998).

He maintains there is resistance to the truth because South African society was built on a web of lies. How South Africans lived their particular subject positions was immensely important because it informed the TRC hearings. The TRC provided the platform for all South Africans to “read themselves into the history of apartheid or ... continue to ‘live the lie’ of being outside, excluded, not even other!” (1998, p.36). Perpetrators of crimes feared the truth would reveal their guilt; benefactors of apartheid feared the truth because it would reveal the silence of their complicity; for some victims, they feared the truth because they believed if they went through the process of forgiveness they would forget; and for others, the truth was too painful to disclose.

In his paper on the dilemmas facing countries with violent pasts, ‘Articles of Faith’ (1997), Michael Ignatieff also examines truth. He distinguishes between factual truth – why some narratives record what happened – and moral truth – why an event happened and who is responsible. He believes the TRC was effective in telling what happened – factual truth – from a range of perspectives. “All that a truth commission can achieve is to reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse” (1997, p.2). Truth is related to identity, he argues, but because reconciliation

depends on a shared truth about the past, it may never be achieved unless and until all parties can agree on a single truth. Ignatieff questions whether parties can ever agree when nations have engaged for so long in developing separate identities. While parties can acknowledge the pain of others, they may never agree on who is mostly responsible. “Myths of innocence and victimhood are a powerful obstacle in the way of confronting unwelcome facts” (1997, p.3). For nations caught in conflict, the past continues to torment because it is not yet past. “The past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies. ... The crimes of the past live on in the present, crying out for retribution” (1997, p.3).

Tatz (2003) refers to the collective memory of catastrophe for victim peoples and considers how genocide and terror become an indelible part of their history, external and internal. Ignatieff, on the other hand, challenges the notion of national psyches and questions whether a truth commission could assist a nation in coming to terms with its past. According to him, national unity and individual reconciliation are not linked, and he proposes that it could be indulgent to believe that truth-telling would allow the victims and the nation to put the past behind them and this false reconciliation could cause more harm than good. Nations cannot be reconciled to other nations, only individuals to individuals and we should vest our nations with conscience, identities and memories as if they were individuals.

It is problematic enough to vest an individual with a single identity:  
our inner lives are like battlegrounds over which uneasy truces reign;  
the identity of a nation is additionally fissured by region, ethnicity,  
class and education. (Ignatieff cited in Hamber & Wilson 1999)

Whether the TRC engendered lasting national unity and/or reconciliation is yet to be determined, but it did play a pivotal role in allowing South African society to start moving forward. The first stage in rebuilding the nation was to establish the core notions of oneness and unity. The Commission successfully laid the apartheid era bare for all South Africans who were struggling to make individual and collective sense of the past. It also provided a way forward towards fulfilling the promise of reconciliation made to first-time voters in 1994 (Hunter-Gault cited in Krog 2000, p.viii). It allowed ambiguity and complexity to be dealt with in a public manner. Tristan Borer questions whether the

TRC achieved reconciliation but does not give the Commission credit for changing the lives of those who underwent individual reconciliation and started the healing process (2004).

Importantly, the TRC report facilitated the return to the traditional values, in particular the custom of *ubuntu*. The rekindling of the notion that a person is a person through others may have encouraged some to share their stories and reconnect with their African heritage. This also opened the way for the nation to reconnect with the rest of the continent, a priority for former President Mbeki (Sanders 2000).

The upsurge of memory and its influence on history is also relevant here. Nora identifies two effects of the surge of memory. Firstly, he notes how France has entered an age of commemoration, holding events that show how the past has ceased to have a single meaning and that a present overlaid with an awareness of its own history necessarily allows for several possible versions of the past. Secondly, the historian has been deprived of the monopoly she enjoyed as interpreter of the past. Traditionally, the historian had exclusive control over collective history and individual memory and was responsible for establishing the facts, verifying the evidence and delivering the truth. Now that role is shared with “the judge, the witness, the media and the legislator” (2004, p.8). This is exemplified by the TRC.

Nora believes that there is still a strong duty towards history, rather than a duty to remember. He poses a question: when does memory retaliate by becoming a reason for retribution? “To claim the right to memory is, at bottom, a call for justice,” he says, “however, it has often become a call for murder” (2004, p.8). This was one of the intentions of the TRC: to hear the truth, reconcile, then move on, and close.

For the purposes of this discussion, an important outcome of the TRC is the imprint it can make on writing in post-apartheid South Africa, by establishing a pivotal link between truth and literature. Telling was not just therapeutic, the restorer of dignity and *ubuntu*, but it also allowed the ‘South African story’ to be told without the need to verify or corroborate, and has allowed the testimony of the Other to flow into literature and poetry (Sanders 2000, p.34). Furthermore, story-telling has the capacity to provide the momentum for the reconstruction of narratives, through the exploration of suppressed or unresolved elements. As discussed earlier, fiction can tell individual stories, combining

many truths, conjectures and fantasy, and so bring about understanding, healing and reconciliation.

A few years back, South African actor John Kani wrote and performed *Nothing but the Truth* (2002). After each performance, Kani addressed his audience and explained that writing the play was his way of dealing with his past. As a formal mechanism, the TRC may have been valuable to those who had given testimony, but Kani needed to tell in his own voice of the ravages of apartheid on him – his own story, his personal truth.

It is the reflective capacity of narrative, experienced as a shared social consciousness through plays and literature, that will be that lasting legacy of the stories of the TRC, says South African academic and author, Njabulo Ndebele (2002). The search for memory and meaning may trigger more stories and when that happens, the imagination will gain and the resulting narratives may have less to do with facts themselves and their recall than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts. “If and when that happens, the imagination, having been rescued by time, will be the chief beneficiary” (2002, p.21).

Thus fiction can go beyond reality because it is the writer’s bid for the truth, beyond the realms of the individual. A novel offers the canvas to explore conflict and contradiction from a range of perspectives and can stimulate reflection. The writer can be generous and courageous by putting herself out there and exposing herself.

### **Telling the truth through stories**

By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story. ... The Act explicitly recognised the healing potential of telling stories. The stories told to the Commission were not presented as arguments or claims in a court of law. Rather, they provided unique insights into the pain of South Africa’s past, often touching the hearts of all that heard them. (excerpt from the Truth and Reconciliation Report of South Africa, Cape Town 1998 cited in Sanders 2000, p.19)

The TRC was unique in that for the first time at a national commission testimony was heard publicly. The mandate was to provide as complete a picture as possible – through words – of the gross human rights violations that had taken place. Thus the impact of the TRC on storytelling was immense. But after hearing the stories of the victims, South

Africans were stunned into silence, and academics and writers pondered where literature could be located in post-apartheid South Africa. Importantly, what the public may remember most about the TRC process will not be the statements and documents taken prior to the hearings or written in the report but rather the stories they heard broadcast in the media. While Sanders warns this may establish a disequilibrium between the official record and common memory (2000) it is through those representations and subsequent art and literature that the public will remember. Krog's work exemplifies how literature can supplement the historic record through combining reportage, memoir and metafiction, thereby providing a literary context for the report. *Country of My Skull* (2000) reflects upon the stories told and the dynamics between victim and commissioner, skilfully working this into the central narrative (Krog includes elements both true and fictional) about the impact of the TRC on her as an observer/reporter.

In his review of her book, Sanders explains how literature and the hearings abide upon the same basic structures and how the report, telling the South African story, shares such structures as conditions of possibility not just with the hearings, but also with literature. By "dramatizing the scene of being host to the words of the other, [Krog's book] outlines how the Commission and its work can be taken up in literature after apartheid. The traits of wordlessness and self-disappropriation [sic] connect as much to poetry as to the public hearings of the Commission" (Sanders 2000, p.25). By doing this, Sanders says it sets a direction for literature post-apartheid, giving the domain of words over to the other (2000, p.17). So although literature was not discussed per se within the TRC report it is central to the report. It provides a history of gross human rights violations using factual and forensic truth. At the same time the report is almost a literary work in the way it captures personal or narrative truth. The commissioners listened to testimony and the personal accounts of victims as if they were telling stories, and their experiences, perceptions and myths were recorded. This narrative truth may differ from factual truth, taken from textual records, but the process may have assisted in the restoration of human and civil dignity.

Sanders looks at the relationship between the witness and the commissioners, whom he believes may not have been entirely objective and may have used questions to subtly lead the uncertain witness to provide the necessary statement. Sanders sees this is

part of the questioner's role as advocate, an attempt to begin to "put things right", in the words of activist Steve Biko.

In her book, Krog uses the device of an anonymous reader as an allegory for the hearings and the relationship between witness and questioner. In the story is the fictitious figure of a beloved, to whom she speaks as she writes. Krog admits she alters the truth to assume an affective and effective truth:

I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling. I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell. I am busy with the truth ... my truth. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to. In every story, there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn't necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. And all of this together makes up the whole country's truth. So also the lies. And the stories that date from earlier times. (2000, p.225)

Robins recognises the tenuous relationship between truth and reconciliation, and that it may be difficult to establish an accurate narration of the apartheid era due to the inadequacy of traditional historiographical re-presentation. The TRC may have produced an official history with an ANC bias, but it nonetheless provides the juxtaposition to the traditional history from a white perspective. Even if there are accusations the report is skewed, or not deemed accurate or historically truthful, it was timely and necessary. Robins argues the need for an additional official account of the past, written by anti-apartheid activists and intellectuals, although it would inevitably be partial and incomplete. He says there is also the need for alternative histories by academics, journalists, film-makers, artists and writers to "fill the gaps, silences and biases of the TRC's final report" (1998a, p.10) against a backdrop of "apartheid amnesia and moral relativism" (1998a, p.9). Incidents of violence perpetrated during the struggle "will be framed within an overarching narrative of apartheid rather closer to the historical mark than that proffered by ... conservatives" (1998a, p.4).

Brink too hopes the enquiries of the TRC will be extended and intensified through literature so that South African society can come to terms with its past in order to face the future. He says that while fiction is concerned with the real, it presumes a



process through which the real is not merely represented but imagined. He envisages not a reproduction but an imagining (2002, p.30). Again, he emphasises the fundamental part memory plays in both history and the workings of the imagination. The individual constitutes and reinvents herself through the ongoing re-editing of memory. “Facts are forever inaccessible except through our versions of them – and these versions are dependent on memory” (Brink 2002, p.31).

South African writer Ivan Vladislavic considers the dilemma facing South African literature since the TRC:

Writers need to remember ... one of the things writers can do is keep the past alive. Now it's as if writers are being pushed between those two positions, because if you lose sight of apartheid, then people say you've forgotten the past, and you're part of the trend towards 'amnesia'; on the other hand, if you go too deeply into apartheid, they say you're holding onto the past, and it's negative, you should be writing about the future. (Warnes 2000, pp.279-80)

He observes how the TRC focussed on these tensions, underscoring how the past had implications for the future; clinging onto the past with all its incumbent difficulties was not necessarily a good way forward. He discusses the divergent poles of optimism and pessimism, and the importance for writers to pursue their own courses, not merely to respond to perceived social needs or political pressures.

### **The TRC as memorial**

It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember.  
(Young 2000)

The terms monument and memorial are frequently used interchangeably, but while monuments tend to be celebratory historical markers of triumphs, a memorial is something which serves to honour and/or remember the losses, often recording the suffering of victims. Memorials evoke a collective memory and stimulate personal memory, and can be reflective, challenging, contemplative and inviting of interpretation. Often made of stone, they remain fixed to the time they were erected, static rather than sustainable, and require memory to maintain them (Dubow 2004). They commemorate an

event by keeping the memory alive but are also used as a political means to recover the past, cultivating and promoting a specific view (Roudometof 2003).

James Young (2000), professor of English and Judaic Studies and an expert on holocaust memory, speaks of counter-memorials, or alternative memorials, to record and remind. He outlines how memorials have replaced memories by producing a concrete, finite construction so that the actual event and its implications are lost beneath the façade. In contrast, counter-memorials may be almost invisible but demand from the observer a degree of reflection and the possibility of encountering feelings like loss and disturbance. He argues both the monument and its significance are constructed in a particular time and place, contingent on the political, historical and aesthetic realities of that moment and that neither the monument nor its meaning is everlasting, even though its meaning has become fixed in its place in the landscape. Thus the fixed monument cannot evolve over time.

Young endorses Martin Broszat's argument that in their references to history, monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether, beneath layers of national myths and explanations. Nora too warns that the monument displaces rather than preserves public memory, supplanting a community's memory-work. Governments sponsor memorials in an endeavour to recreate their version of history. However, as Huyssen notes, in the contemporary age of mass memory production and consumption, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialisation of the past and its contemplation and study.

Nora argues that the acceleration of history has cut us off from our past, so that we are no longer on very good terms with it (2004). Morris-Suzuki, on the other hand, believes we are "implicated in the past because the past lives in us" (2005, p.235) but there needs to be caution in how the truthfulness of the processes by which people create meaning about the past are assessed. There is a diversity and growth in the accounts and images of the past and a range of responses to the narratives and images that have been created.

This has resulted in the radical transformation of the monument during the twentieth century. Young posits that because it is located at the intersection of public art and political memory, the monument reflects the aesthetic and political revolutions of the

major events and crises of the century. He perceives the monument to be the endorsement of its socio-historical and aesthetic contexts: the artists are accountable to both the needs of contemporary art practices and the official version of history.

The result has been a metamorphosis of the monument from the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the late 19th century celebrating national ideals and triumphs to the anti-heroic, often ironic and self-effacing conceptual installations marking the national ambivalence and uncertainty of late 20th century post-modernism.  
(2000)

Because the past can no longer be the guarantee for the future, Nora writes it is the symbols of memory, like memorials, that have become so important: they have been invested with the promise of continuity. At the same time, it has resulted in a flood of memorial concerns, establishing the link between respect for the past and a sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity.

Counter-monuments or the memorial spaces conceived by contemporary German artists challenge the premise of the over-abundance of politically motivated monuments. “The initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them” (Young 2000). Young would prefer the artist to carve out an empty space in Berlin by which to recall the absence of the Jews because a finished monument may complete the memory itself, putting a cap on memory-work, and drawing a bottom line beneath an era that will always haunt Germany. “Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than any single “final solution” to Germany’s memorial problem” (Young 2000).

The example of a counter-memorial or negative-form monument that Young cites is the fountain that artist Horst Hoheisels constructed at City Hall Square in Kassel, Germany. He recreated Aschrott Fountain as the mirror image of the original 1908 fountain and pyramid which had been funded by Jewish entrepreneur Aschrott but was destroyed by the Nazis in 1939. Instead of a fountain that flows above the ground, the water is below the surface, beneath thick horizontal glass windows. “In this way, the monument’s reconstruction remains as illusory as memory itself, a reflection on dark waters, a phantasmagoric play of light and image” (2000). Young describes the sound of gushing water and how it suggests the depth of an otherwise invisible memorial, what he

refers to as an inverted palimpsest that demands the visitor's reflection. He quotes Hoheisel: "With the running water our thoughts can be drawn into the depths of history, and there perhaps we will encounter feelings of loss, of a disturbed place, of lost form" (2000).

### **South African memorials**

South African professor of art Neville Dubow discusses the dilemmas facing the South African government within the debate on memorials, memory and preserving history. South Africa has not yet reached the status of a mature, self-confident society and needs a past to anchor its identity, he claims. In addition, there exists the need for the victims of apartheid to be memorialised so they are not forgotten, in stark contrast with the intent of the apartheid regime which was to systematically erase its opponents by removal, dispossession and erosion of rights (2004). Dubow refers to Huyssen's definition of the role of memory in this context, how remembrance is a vital human activity because it can shape our links to the past, and suggests that the ways we remember define us in the present. He speaks of the slippery and unreliable nature of personal memory, that we are subject to selective amnesia in order to rationalise, deny, hide and maintain power and that collective memory is also subject to subtle, and not so subtle, reconstruction. We must learn from history, Dubow says, and should use memorials to stimulate memory. He supports Young's concern regarding the tendency of memorials to petrify history and bury the living and opposes the view that history be cast in stone.

An example of a counter-memorial in South Africa was the Western Cape Action Tour Project (WECAT) which Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph describes as a memorial practice which addresses corporeally absent communities. WECAT was a guided bus tour of the townships of the Cape Flats, on Cape Town's fringes, enabling groups to visit landmarks of the social and political heritage. By visiting the home of an ANC military wing member who died in the struggle, Grunebaum-Ralph writes that "his absence is remembered and not replaced, and it is that absence that testifies to a life not lived, and not only for a death" (2001, p.207). She believes that standing outside his home marks the continuity of his absence with that symbol of discontinuity: a minute's silence. The

value of the tour, for her, is the impact it had on white visitors, in whose names land dispossession was enforced, and whom, she claims, still remain by and large unmoved within the urban centres. One visitor responded by expressing her despair of whiteness and the guilt of hindsight. Her experience of the WECAT tour evoked a reaching of political awareness within her own reality that became an encounter with class interest, her childhood and the perceived impossibility of political action.

Volkan has examined the notion of the monument from the perspective of traumatised societies and regards the TRC as a legitimate form of monument or memorial. It is difficult to receive an apology or to forgive before the process of mourning is complete and monuments are produced to create the space, or linking object, necessary to allow nations that have found it hard to mourn, to eventually do so, helping its members accept the reality of their losses (2006).

Societies that have suffered huge losses and experienced shame and dehumanisation behave like individual perennial mourners: “The monuments they build to recall the shared trauma and honor their lost people, lands, dignity and prestige may become shared linking objects” (2006, p.35). Volkan defines a linking object as an item chosen by the mourner because it unconsciously represents a meeting ground for the mental image of the lost person or thing and the corresponding image of the mourners. It is used as a means of externalising and postponing the process of mourning.

Volkan says one of the conditions for creating a useful monument is to find a voice in the affected society for images of both the victim and the victimiser. When the mental representations of both sides are in full view, the possibility of dealing with them in a more realistic fashion increases (2006, p.36). The TRC proceedings could be viewed as an abstract monument, effective for healing societal wounds by absorbing unfinished elements of incomplete mourning. It may help South African society adjust to its current situation without re-experiencing the impact of the past trauma and its disturbing emotions.

## **Fiction as memorial**

If one argues that the TRC final report is a piece of historic writing that forms part of the process of memory-work to develop the nation's collective memory, then it has created a springboard for literature to go beyond the truth, to create memorials which come alive for each new reader. Following this argument, works of fiction may be defined as monuments.

Fiction has the capability to invent empty space and recreate absent people in a timeless way that doesn't disrupt the present or the past and allows it to continue into the future. A work of fiction can leave unanswered questions, thoughts and ideas with the reader, opening up to the interpretation of the reader. As Taylor (2000) puts it, story can be a site marker of the remembering process, not necessarily the truth, but an interpretation of it. Like a memorial, it is a creative form that can take the reader to a time and place in history, but leave them with unanswered questions, thoughts and ideas, to which they can ascribe their personal responses.

Australian writer Deborah Robertson deals precisely with the notion of the story as memorial in her novel *Careless* (2007). Through her characters, Robertson questions whether a memorial can personify truth, how many truths there are and whose version is accurate. She considers how to construct a memorial to grief, loss and sadness and whether one physical memorial can and should embody individual memories and emotions. Ultimately, her novel becomes the memorial, a space for the reader to place herself among characters and their different stories, and to create a unique meaning through the filter of her own experiences.

Alex Miller refers to fiction as an art form which can formalise an incident, memory or story into something permanent, reflecting the time at which it was written. Once it becomes a work of art, it is sacred and can't be challenged, as history can. It can liberate a story, someone's history or truth, from the dialectic of history. He adds truth is not safe with the historian because it becomes revised: it is temporary and contingent upon contemporaneous theories which are challenged and debated (2006). Fiction allows one to hold on to that ethereal concept 'as if'. The reader wasn't there but the fiction recreates that world and takes the reader on a journey of reflection, understanding and

enlightenment. Fiction as memorial allows the past to be honoured and remembered in a way that enables the reader to bring her own interpretation to a historical incident and gain a new understanding, regardless of reference to time.

### **Post-apartheid literature**

With the end of apartheid, a new government and the TRC, South African writers were granted the freedom to review and re-write the past. At the fulcrum of change in 1990, Albie Sachs's paper encouraged writers to stop writing about and for politics and start writing about other things (Kellas 2001). Even though apartheid itself was over, its impact on writers as individuals was permanent and so it would be impossible, and unwise, to remove its influence from their writing.

Hayes (1998) suggests that in the aftermath of apartheid, which had formed and de-formed the nation, the search for the truth began, which could be both elusive and multiple, in the realms of the personal, social, historical and political. History and story, namely the public and the personal account, open up possibilities in South Africa "to explore silences of the past in order to discover or invent the voices subsumed in them" (Brink 2002, pp.37-38).

Aspects of South African society have been dismantled post-apartheid and some of the silences created during colonial times have been exposed. Brink notes that South Africa historiographers have been deconstructing the master narratives of apartheid, offering alternate accounts and introducing new concepts, and South African literature has played with the tension between memory, forgetting and the ambiguities of transition: experiential, ethical and political. Writing is being encouraged as a means of moving forward and telling stories from all sides. It is a cogent manner to examine silent spaces, play with memory and amnesia and find a path for forgiveness, reconciliation and *ubuntu*.

South African writing "emphasizes the imperative of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role – or representation – in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding. (Attwell & Harlow 2000, p.3)

In the decade or so following the end of apartheid future directions for creativity in South Africa have been debated by artists and academics like Brink, Kentridge, Kellas, Ndebele, Sachs and Vladislavic, among others. Post-apartheid literature has produced the opportunity for reflection on what may previously have been buried and silent.

Afrikaans writers and academics like Krog and Chris van der Merwe are aware of how Afrikaans literature can assist in recreating a coherent past, through the therapeutic process of working through guilt. Hennie van Coller asserts the TRC has given many people the opportunity to complete their life stories and render their existences more meaningful. "Firstly by the writers, but also by the readers, who are drawn into the writing of this great narrative. Thus the Afrikaans community is trying to deal with their past and reach for a new future" (Van der Merwe 2006). The same is possible for the Jewish community.

Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee edited a book of essays entitled *Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa* (2002). The contributors scrutinise the significance of memory in evoking and reshaping the recent history in South Africa, look at its importance and consider how to take memories forward. In his essay, Robins writes that with the end of apartheid it "finally became possible to begin to confront ... submerged and repressed identities and memories" (2002, p.126) and Godby suggests that liberation from the burden of responsibility can only take place after each individual acknowledges her complicity in the violent history of South Africa (2002, p.109).

In his essay, Brink anticipates new aesthetic responses to the changed circumstances in South Africa. Early experiences, he argues, have marked everyone who moved from apartheid to the new dispensation and this will affect what they write about the apartheid era. He spells out the connections between memory and history and indicates how they should be used to create works of fiction that illuminate the past and pave a path to the future. Brink discusses at length the relationship between history, memory and fiction and views the exploration of the silent spaces surrounding them, as almost as a prerequisite condition for future flowering, saying that a condition for fiction writers to return to the silent or silenced landscapes of the past is to understand the new perceptions of what constitutes history (2002, p.32). He believes the past cannot merely be corrected because it is not the past that has produced the present and set the conditions



for the future, but how we think about the past now and how we deal with it in language. He uses postmodern narrative techniques in his own fiction to investigate the politics of race and apartheid, compelling the reader to reassess her practices of interpretation and evaluation. In *States of Emergency* (1988), the thread of his love story is a humanist attempt to oppose apartheid and act as an effective transformative narrative structure for a future South Africa (Woods 1999, p.65).

### **Jewish writing post-apartheid**

Within the Jewish community, the works of Jewish activists are now widely available, adding a new dimension to Jewish literature (Belling 2002). Belling notes that early writings had been inaccessible to the public because the authors were banned and their works censored. There is a plethora of memoirs and life stories written by Jewish ANC members: David Saks, researcher for the Jewish Board of Deputies, assesses that a third to half of the post-apartheid life stories are by Jewish political activists (2000). Some acknowledge their Jewish roots and the influence of their families and Jewish political movements in establishing their values while others make no mention of a Jewish background and deny any positive contribution (Suttner 1997).

In 1998, Albie Sachs made a constructive statement about his Jewishness by curating a photographic exhibition. 'Looking Back: Jews in the Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in South Africa' examined the significance of the Jewish identity for his fellow-activists. Sachs installed this public display at the Jewish Museum because he was "irritated" and felt that their contribution during the struggle had been underplayed by the Jewish community. He wanted to reveal the Jews to themselves and to the rest of society, bringing them out of invisibility and the shadows, to be full players in contemporary South Africa (Braude 2001, p.lxv).

Since then, with what commentators like Braude believe is a misplaced revisionist zeal, some members of the Jewish community have appropriated the actions and beliefs of the individuals who opposed apartheid. The influence of Judaism on their decisions has been analysed, and some have been feted as heroes and celebrities. This issue was highlighted in the debate which followed the rejection of Braude's essay on

Yutar in the Jewish media (see Chapter Two). This revisionism reinforces the community's strong desire to be recognised as playing a leading role – politically, culturally and socially – and its ever-present fear of marginalisation.

The outcomes of the TRC may yet provide the momentum for the Jewish South African community to assess its own memory of the apartheid timespan. With the national shift from exclusion to a state policy of cohesion, Jewish writers now have the freedom to express themselves as part of the broad national framework. Their memories and contributions are important to the overall national identity, no longer distinct or separate, but part of the total literary output. This is a huge change since the ominous warning of commentator Dora Sowden who said in 1965 that the Jewish participation in cultural life was important and conspicuous at that time but she doubted whether it would remain so in the longer term (1965, p.139).

Braude is optimistic about the future for Jewish writing. She points to the shift in debates about the nature of post-apartheid culture and identity which was led by Sachs's 1990 paper. She says it was "a decisive point in the body of writing that can be called South African Jewish literature" (2001, p.xv). In the early years of the new dispensation, the emphasis is on cohesiveness, a sense of belonging and acknowledgement of vulnerability. Lenta (2001) seeks a change in perception around Jewish ambivalence towards their difference or Otherness, which she claims is valued as much as it is hated. The Jews saw themselves as unique, not just religiously, so it was easy for them to insist on maintaining their differences alongside the other dominant white groups, because there was no pressure to create a single national identity or embrace multiculturalism. This, however, has changed, and the Jewish community needs to embrace the new if it wishes to participate fully.

Braude recognises that the TRC allowed the Jewish community to re-evaluate its memory of the apartheid timespan, especially through the creative arts like writing. Tony Eprile, a novelist, says being a South African Jew – an insider yet an outsider in white South Africa – is an underlying theme for him and for other Jews in South Africa: how to be Jewish and yet claim one's South African – and Africanness (Egan 2005).

The political landscape of South Africa during the last century was unlike any other Jewish diasporan experience. Writing – across a number of forms and genres – has

mirrored South African society; indeed the unique context for the Jews in South Africa during this time can be traced through its literary output. Braude is hopeful that memory will be restored to Jews in South Africa and their fears of racial in-betweenness overcome (2001, pp.xi–xii). Van der Merwe believes the country needs “new, inclusive stories, synthesising and reconciling the oppositional narratives; and in the search for new narratives, writers are playing a key role” (2006). He is addressing the need for new Afrikaans writers, but his call is relevant for all groups, including Jewish writers. The uncovering of memories, an acceptance of the past and the freedom from censorship opens the way for the next stage in the Jewish canon of work.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **Chapter Eight**

#### **Imprints of memories, shadows and silences: shaping the Jewish South African story**

This final chapter consolidates my research and synthesises all elements of this thesis: writing the novel, preparing the dissertation, visiting and reconnecting with South Africa, returning to my family's past and re-assessing my personal history and memories. Along the way, many synchronous events took place: connections merged through stories, ideas and concepts. Setbacks, questions and quests occurred during the writing process that led to unexpected conclusions. This section also validates the cogent argument of this thesis, that a work of fiction can be a legitimate record of history.

I was born into South Africa's Jewish community, of grandparents who had migrated from Lithuania to make a new start, far away from the antisemitism and poverty of Eastern Europe. Yet they found themselves enmeshed in another form of oppression – apartheid – but this time siding with the oppressor.

In my earlier short stories were a number of recurring themes which I decided to delve into through the format of a novel and companion dissertation. I wished to unearth their source and excavate their nagging persistence. Through the ensuing creative process I gained insight into my identity and my ambivalence toward my Jewish heritage, the shadows of antisemitism and the holocaust that still loom in my own sub-conscious and personal feelings of guilt and remorse for having grown up under apartheid. In the creative space, memories have emerged, not only my own, but also those submerged, transmitted via my grandparents and parents. I gained awareness of how my South African Jewish roots are intrinsic to who I am and my view of the world; how they run deeply from my subconscious into my writing.

A major, and unexpected, outcome of the combination of research and creative writing process has been the ways in which the two parts have nurtured one another,

bringing to the surface stories that were generated by my academic reading and my imagination.

The memory-work undertaken to uncover the complexities of growing up Jewish in South Africa during the years of racial separatism has enabled me to place my personal experience in an academic context. I was interested in how antisemitism, the holocaust and apartheid permeated the psyche and behaviour of all Jews in South Africa; how the shadows and silences presented themselves in two disparate ways, resulting in bipolar responses to apartheid.

I was fascinated by the crucial nexus between history, memory and imagination, how storytelling exposes alternate truths, explores forgotten memories and makes meanings. I was impressed by how the TRC impacted upon storytelling, *ubuntu*, on literature in general and, of course, the re-writing of South Africa's history, including the opportunity to enmesh Jewish history with the history of the nation. I was intrigued to see how my own writing experience has been affected by the events and experiences that surrounded me.

Most importantly, I realised how the ideas I had been exposed to could be valuable to others. In 2007, after concluding the major part of my research, I presented my findings at a conference for Jewish scholars in Sydney to ascertain how they would be received by a Jewish and/or South African audience. Not satisfied that the audience had been entirely appropriate, I emailed my paper to a number of Jewish South Africans. What stunned and perturbed me was how little we had all known about our own history and how much they appreciated my research into our migrant Jewish experience. Without understanding your own history, how can you possibly understand yourself and develop an authentic identity? The TRC has given the nation the opportunity to rewrite its postcolonial history, but, understandably, from an African perspective. It is thus necessary for every group within the country to re-examine its own history. As stated earlier, according to Saks, a third to half of the post-apartheid life stories have been written by Jewish political activists (2000) but there is still the need for others to tell their stories, to delve into their histories, memories and imaginations.

Denis Hirson's book *White Scars* (2006) was valuable to me in this regard. Hirson covers many of the issues I have dealt with in this thesis, writing clearly and

beautifully. He is the son of a Jewish activist who was imprisoned during the apartheid era. In the book, Hirson coins the word 'unsettler' which he defines as one who came, or whose ancestors came, to a new country or place, especially in the colonial era, yet who refuses to settle into colonial comfort, preferring to maintain a restless stance which needles local settlers and more particularly those in power; an uncolonist (2006, p.118). The word settler reverberates in South African history because of three distinct usages: firstly, it was Dutch settlers who arrived at the Cape in the seventeenth century; secondly, the wave of 4000 nineteenth-century British migrants who settled on the eastern frontier were known as the 1820 Settlers; and thirdly, in the 1970s the black militants had a slogan "one settler, one bullet". Hirson says that his family never considered themselves as immigrants or any other category that held the promise of permanence.

Settling was something we did not do. If I try to think of my father's parents in these terms... then I see them as stuck rather than settled. .... My father, deeply committed to the cause of struggle in apartheid South Africa, was about as settled as the sticks of dynamite which his group of saboteurs planted under pylons outside Johannesburg.

...Sensitivity to injustice came to us out of an awareness of what was happening to blacks under apartheid, but also out of our Jewish background, the one we had some difficulty bringing to the foreground. My four grandparents had left behind them the shtetls and pogroms of Russia and Latvia. My mother's mother had lost much of her immediate family to a combination of Germans and antisemitic Russians. Somewhere between the backs and fronts of our minds, the shadows of these events went sliding, all the more substantial since they remained unspoken, dumb heralds of the wider field of Jewish history.

When it came to this history, and the notion of planting ourselves anywhere, could it ultimately be denied that we were of the Hebrews, a word which according to one interpretation means "those who cross over"? Were we not crossers of borders, nomads in the way station of the suburbs? (Hirson 2006, p.119)

Lynn Freed, a South African-born writer, speaks along similar lines about belonging, place and displacement, all common Jewish themes. She sees her Jewish family as temporary sojourners in Africa and says that she had felt displaced there and would always be (Freed 2006).

This thesis proffers a review of the history of South Africa's Jewish community, within a theoretical framework. Postmodernism precipitated an immense shift away from the traditional view of history, with its demand for a truth more 'truthful' than a single view of history, and the need to incorporate the truth of personal experience and individual memory (Nora 2004, p.6). This relates especially to migrant communities, who carry their versions of history and memory with them to their new homes and pass them down through generations.

White's *Metahistory* (1973) changed the way the world viewed history and historiography. His version of history is the telling of a story, representing and interpreting the past, and using language to facilitate the making of meaning (White 1980). Thus, as he sees it, the power to shape history has been removed from the hands of the power-brokers and their historians and given to all those who experienced the event: the silenced victims, the defeated and their descendants. Nora called this 'ideological decolonisation', that is, when liberated peoples have been reunited with their long-term memories which were confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by dictatorial and/or colonial regimes (2004).

This is where Morris-Suzuki's notion of open-ended historical truthfulness comes in. She maintains we are shaped by the past, and says that knowing the past and making sense of it is essential to knowing ourselves (Morris-Suzuki 2005). And this is one of the outcomes of the TRC: it has provided a medium for historical truthfulness to emerge in South Africa.

The deep connections between history and fiction have also been outlined in this thesis. Huyssen claims our notion of history is dependent on what stories are told, how they are told and the memories constructed around them. However, the writer should also never forget the value of David Brooks's "wild imagining" (1991, p.39). The thesis examines how writing – memoirs, articles, essays and creative writing – can be used as a means to expose and explore memories. Through literature the silenced have been able to gain a voice; using the novel, lost, forgotten or buried stories can be revealed and recorded in a relevant and meaningful way.

I have viewed my own novel as a selective interpretation of the world, a fabrication based on my imagination to fit my argument about the characters in my story.

And I hope that the story the novel tells, which is not based on any real place or people I know, will transmit a meaning, which is what readers are seeking in a book. As Hughes writes, fiction provides a new milieu in which history and theory can join together to inform each other (Hughes 2002, p.7).

A fundamental learning from this thesis is how crucial writing is for exploring and exposing forgotten memories. When I started creative writing I became aware of recurring themes around the guilt and shame about growing up in South Africa's Jewish community. I was able to uncover hidden memories and the attached feelings in my early stories. Then I began writing the novel. It started with a basic outline, mainly a series of characters and situations, without a formalised plot, involving a Jewish family, their Afrikaans neighbours and their Coloured servant, set in the Western Cape, between the mountains and the ocean. As I progressed, new characters and events emerged, from my imagination and memories, and the story began forming itself. Through the creative process I moved along my own journey of discovery. At the same time, I read broadly across issues like antisemitism and the holocaust and the evolution of the splintered South African Jewish identities. I researched the postmodern discourse around fiction, history and memory. During this process, the relevance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission emerged, along with issues of identity, truth, marginality and Otherness. While examining Jewish literature in South Africa I also encountered Australian literature and found commonalities between the two.

I discovered that after I had read widely on a subject and absorbed it, the factual content percolated into the creative process, resulting in characters and stories which, while fictional, were grounded in fact and theory. This added layers of depth and understanding, so the resultant work is richer and more realistic than I might have originally anticipated, while still being fictional.

Yet I am left undecided as to what the key driver is – the creative writing process or the theory. During a final review of the thesis while re-reading the section 'Regaining the voice of the silenced', I noted once more the depth of connectivity between what I had written and what I had read. Susan, the main character in the novel, had suppressed a horrific event in her life, burying it in silence. This suppressed trauma had damaged her ability to engage with others. It was only when the character accepted



her complicity that she could heal herself, hopefully find forgiveness and move on. It was only then that I comprehended how compactly my novel fitted within the discourse.

The following are further examples of the cross-over between the research and the novel; where I was able to experience personally the flow between the theory and creative writing practice.

### **Palimpsest narrative**

I have long been interested in the animated films of William Kentridge. I was inspired by his method of drawing in charcoal on sheets of paper, photographing the image and then rubbing out lines and redrawing the next frame, with a shadow remaining where the erasure had occurred. The word which I used to describe the flitting shadows was palimpsest. On reading more about palimpsest, I came across Ashraf Rushdy's notion of palimpsest narrative. Similar to the psychological concept of the transgenerational transmission of trauma, Rushdy justifies how fiction can be a medium to expose and resolve the memories of traumas that have been submerged and passed down through generations, relating this specifically to the descendants of slaves. At the same time I discovered an upcoming conference in Perth entitled *Palimpsests: Transforming Communities* so I presented a paper there on palimpsest narrative in the South African Jewish context.

And then I saw how palimpsest narrative had permeated my creative work. Early in the writing process, I wanted to find out how my Jewish grandfather character might have felt about surviving the holocaust, having emigrated to South Africa long before the war. I began composing a letter from him to a cousin whom he discovered had survived. This letter quickly evolved into a scene and the introduction of Shmuel. This ghostlike man morphed into a major character. His emergence tied in neatly with the concept of marginality and the Other, a recurring theme in much of the literature of and research into South African Jewry. Shmuel's appearance is, I strongly believe, a result of this reading, my study of history of the period, the reawakening of my memories and a possible palimpsest narrative.

I was born well after the holocaust and believed it had bypassed my immediate family, yet the arrival of Shmuel into the story posed the question: is it possible that a palimpsest narrative about the holocaust had been passed on to me? I believe so. Recently, my mother mentioned a similar incident from her young days. No doubt she had told me this story before, but it was long forgotten. As well, in conversation with a cousin, she reminded me of her uncle whom I had known as a child. He too bore traces of Shmuel.

### **Behind the curtain or beyond the hedge**

The second realisation occurred during a creative writing workshop. Participants were asked to write about a childhood home. I was born and grew up in one house. When I emigrated to the UK my parents were still living there. What I realised as I did this ‘trigger’ exercise was how completely safe my childhood had been. My memories are of a secure upbringing. And yet, I grew up in the midst of apartheid, in a state of turmoil. I began to ponder the irony of this: fear and chaos were not reflected in my personal life, but rather in the world that began at the bottom of the driveway.

After that writing class, I spent a while unsuccessfully trying to recall my earliest memories of the apartheid system. I was interested in dissecting my feelings of shame, and why I never felt the same sense of entitlement expressed by others who never questioned the underlying ethics of living in South Africa.

A theme running through a number of extracts in Braude’s 2001 anthology is that of the relationship between master and servant. It is central to my novel and earlier short stories. The nurturing inter-personal relationship between servant and child – or adult in the case of Jacobson’s short story ‘The Zulu and the Zeide’ (1959) – is a strong one, significantly affecting both parties. Reef, in a review of Braude’s book, states “the power relationship of employer/servant is more ethically complex when Jews, who are supposed to be ‘a light unto the nations’, are involved” (2004, p.413). Kentridge also speaks about this irony.

Our Passover ceremony every year commemorates the Jews as slaves in Egypt. ... Yet in the present we are certainly not slaves. This

contradiction does not change the fact that Jews had a historical context to understand the desire to be free of fetters. (Raitmaa 2001)

From the age of two until I was in my twenties, the same domestic worker worked for my family. I remember visiting her friends, tied to her back with a blanket, going into their houses via the back doors. With my mother, we would enter through the front.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, my first successful short story was about a child's awakening to the reality beyond the hedge. The absolute effectiveness of separate development, even in the domestic environment, and its impression on me as a child growing up in a privileged life was deep-seated. Ironically, the story was called 'Behind the Curtain'. I found another reference to curtaining off the past when Grenville referred to it in an interview about *The Secret River*:

There are cupboards in Australian history that we have just drawn a curtain over; we know they're there but we don't want to look at them. Other parts, we've drawn the curtain back with great pride. ... But there are other cupboards that make us uncomfortable, and for 200 years we've just chosen not to look at them too closely. So this is a book about those cupboards, it opens and looks into them in a judgment neutral way, because until we are prepared to look at all those slightly hidden, slightly secret places in our history, we can't actually make much progress into the future. (cited in Koval 2005)

### **The Group Areas Act**

While preparing a paper for a conference in Brisbane entitled *Re-Membering Place, Dis-Membering Home* I tried once more to recall my earliest awareness of apartheid. I decided it had to be the introduction of the *Group Areas Act*. Within my white suburb were pockets of Cape Malay communities. Muslim slaves and political dissidents from the Malay Archipelago had been despatched by the Dutch East India Company to the Cape of Good Hope as early as 1654, two years after the establishment of the refreshment station. We had a mosque on the Main Road and many traders and shopkeepers were Muslim. In the 1960s the *Group Areas Act* was rolled out in the Cape and these long-established communities were moved to distant townships on the windswept, desolate Cape Flats. The houses were sold and renovated or knocked down to make way for a

large shopping centre. I was a young child at the time, but it emerged as one of my earliest recollections of apartheid, so I included it in my paper.

Many months later a friend read through an early draft of my novel and recommended I elaborate on the childhood of my main character. I sat down to write a scene and what emerged, unplanned, was a tale about Susan as a young girl riding her bicycle and encountering the removals. I was delighted because not only did it bring this piece of history into my novel but it was a perfect, genuine, example of the blending of historical research, my memories and my imagination. I was later struck by a comment by Helen Garner in an interview about *The Spare Room* where she refers to an incident in the book, saying: “That scene is completely invented. But although I made it up, I feel that it’s completely true to something in my real life” (Steger 2008).

### **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

In 2007 I discovered to my dismay that I’d missed a conference on memory, narrative and forgiveness that had been hosted by the University of Cape Town in November 2006, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the TRC. I wasn’t surprised when, in his keynote address, Turkish Cypriot psychiatrist Dr Mamik Volkan referred to the TRC as a memorial (2006). A very topical area in historiography, art and architecture, I cover how counter-memorials appear in the South African context in Chapter Seven.

In that chapter I also considered the possibility of the novel as a memorial or a fictional marker because of its capacity to provide a human dimension to recent history. Through creative writing, individual and collective memories can be unlocked to reveal submerged truths that challenge current historical and personal viewpoints. To me, this is fiction as memorial, honouring and remembering the past in a way that allows the reader to bring her own interpretation to a historical incident and gain a new understanding.

What was most exciting in Volkan’s paper was his reference to the notion of shared linking objects. He writes how objects rich in memory are clung onto, so that they become memorials or memorialised. He uses the example of a broken watch a son keeps because it belonged to his late father. He doesn’t repair it, just keeps it and looks at it on the anniversary of his father’s death. Volkan compares this to a melancholic society that

clings to an incident and continues mourning the event, unable to let go and move on. I was fascinated by this idea of shared linking objects for two reasons initially, and then, as I was preparing for a presentation in South Africa, my own shared linking object was revealed to me.

Firstly, I believe the shared linking object may be the thread that runs through a story bringing it together in a unified manner – an object discovered unexpectedly which links characters through time. Penelope Lively wrote her novel *The Photograph* (2004) about the search for the truth based on the image of a dead woman in a photograph. In an interview, Lively said she was interested in how the past has the power to interfere with the present. She went on to say that the pleasure of writing fiction is that you are always spotting some new approach, an alternative way of telling a story: “There is never a single truth about any person, or about any sequence of events, but as many as there were observers or participants” (Lively 2004). And she used the device of a shared linking object – a photo – to tell that story.

Secondly, although Volkan may not know this, the shared linking object is a technique used when trying to stimulate the creative writing process. The writer takes an object, postcard or photo, sometimes random, sometimes something selected for its significance, looks at it, touches it, smells it and writes about it. This is an extremely common approach to generating ideas, because stimulating the senses is a sure way of conjuring memories, conjectures and wild imaginings.

Thirdly, at the time, I was reading *The Lost* (2007) by Daniel Mendelsohn, his account of the story of his grandfather’s brother’s family who had perished in the holocaust. On completing the book, I deliberated on the significance of memorials to me. Then, the proverbial light bulb flashed and the connection was made. Just prior to commencing my studies, the Jewish cemetery where my maternal grandparents are buried had been desecrated. This event became a pivotal element in my story: the novel starts and ends in a cemetery. In the 1990s I had visited a Jewish cemetery in Prague and was deeply moved by the piles of broken tomb stones, a shocking memorial to the holocaust.

The final page of Mendelsohn’s book reads:

Then – since this is the tradition of the strange tribe to which, although parts of that tradition make no sense to me, I know I belong, because

my grandfather once belonged to it – I groped around in the earth for a large stone, and when I found one, I put it in the crook where the branches of the tree met. This is their only monument, I thought, and so I'll leave a stone here. Then I turned and walked out of the garden, and soon after that we said goodbye and got into the car and left. (2007, p.45)

After reading this, another epiphany occurred when I realised how this theme, a shared linking object, was repeated in the epilogue to my novel:

It's windy on the headland. He's holding your arm, gently, protecting you from the wind but nudging you forward, toward the little gate in the cypress hedge.

You stand at the entrance and look across the neat stones that line up in front of the ocean. The earth is still unsettled, where the two labourers rest on their spades, then heave the dirt back into the hole. There are flowers, fresh bouquets and wreaths and a tiny white glove that lies forlorn on the footpath.

You kneel to pick it up. You hold it to your nose and sniff its cleanness. You clutch it as you move across to the Jewish section, where the stones are still jagged and slashed with paint. You pick up a handful of pebbles and press a few into Alex's hand. He watches you place them on three graves and bends down and leaves his next to yours.

Then you take his arm and look back to the Coloured section, separated by a fence and a worn path. ... You've never been here before but you know exactly where to go.

There are fresh flowers here too, watered by a mother's tears. You drop the remaining stone from your hand and squeeze tightly on the little glove.

The Jewish custom of leaving a stone on a grave is universal but probably did not play any part in Susan Griffin's reference to stones in her book *A Chorus of Stones* (1994). Nonetheless, this quotation summarises a great deal of what I have been studying and experiencing:

Perhaps we are like stones; history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a story deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung. (cited in Schuster 2005, p.13)

But even though my links with memorials are so strong, without the reading, thinking and linking, I believe I would have remained oblivious to this strong thread connecting my Jewish past, my reading and my writing.

All these leaps have amazed and thrilled me. I grew up in a beautiful city, in “the paradise time of apartheid” (Krog 2000, p.217). My childhood was safe and ordinary; nothing exciting or traumatic took place. On the surface. Through the combined work of fiction and thesis, I have had the opportunity to use characters and narrative to render my version of the contradictions of the apartheid era, from the perspective of a Jew. It has been enthralling to discover meanings, ideas and themes at so many levels – personal, academic and creative – that I can hopefully pass on to others. That, I think, is the ultimate power of story-telling.

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# Part Two



# **Winterval**

**A work of fiction**

**by Phyllis Sakinofsky**



## Prologue

The dark mountains loom out from the ocean, carved by the coastline. Those deeply creased ranges that have followed you, haunted you, with no regard for where you sleep. From the crest of the sand dunes, you look out past the river mouth, across the bay. The sand blows onto your arms and feet, the tiny particles rasping your skin. The thrashing of the wind against your face and the roaring of the Indian Ocean fill your head. The sun has settled behind the serrated peaks, dark shards cut into the sky, at the decline of the day. Wave after wave rolls in, lined up in the depths and released by an invisible hand. You watch from among the rubbery, sour-smelling *fynbos*, their bushes swaying beneath you in the wind.

You take off your sandals and roll your bare feet in the damp, clingy sand. And then you feel those vibrations, entombed in the layers of the earth, shuddering through the fissures in its crust, through your toes. The booming of the drums and the cries of the women. The plaintive moan of the horn. But the beach is deserted.

You turn from your headland to the graveyard gate that swings on its creaking hinges. You hear the chattering of the boubou shrikes hidden in the cypress hedge. You stand alone surrounded by the vastness of the sky.

You close the little gate behind you and move to the darkened corner where the stones are huddled together. You are startled by a brush of shadow towards the hedge, a ripple of the light. You feel a gentle draft around you, a cool nudge against your shoulder and you hear your grandfather's voice. "*Babele, babele*, look after yourself, don't wait in the shade forever."

You find the place where your grandparents lie. Alongside the headstones of Max and Bashe Sternberg is a small pile of stones where Uncle Aaron has been.

"Next time I visit, I promise I'll bring your grandson."

Alongside is another stone. Shmuel Kaminer. From your pocket you remove three pebbles, caressed by the cold river that crosses the waterhole, and kneel down to place them on the graves.

You stand up and look across to the main section. You wipe your eyes, salty tears, turn around and head back to the car park where your uncle Aaron waits.

“You look pale. We’re not far from home now.”

“I’m okay. It’s a bit of a shock, that’s all, coming back. Seeing everything again.”

The engine turns slowly and Uncle Aaron pulls out of the parking area and heads toward Napier.

Even the curves in the road are familiar. The old farms, the lone tree at the top of the *koppie* on the left as the road swings towards the mountains. It is tattooed on your skin, stamped into your memories and your dreams. On the one hand, so comforting, reassuring. And yet.



## Chapter One

Susan jumped out of the car and swung her arms out as wide as she could, but was unable to reach out and grab to her chest the city that was spread out before her. It had been a long journey. But she was here, finally. Evening would be descending soon. The sun was low, dropping behind the bony mountains that ran along the distant peninsula to its narrow tip, like an old bent finger. And there, where the peaks ended and the sandy flatland began, was the majestic flat-topped Table Mountain. Its granite face had for centuries beckoned the sailors that grasped and gasped from their ships on the cold and churning Atlantic Ocean, pulling them in from the west, towards its sheltered Table Bay. And in between that mountain and its bay, crammed on the gentle slope were the tall buildings of Cape Town.

And between the city and here stretched the Cape Flats. A windy expanse of sand that was once sea, that linked the continent of Africa to her beloved peninsula. To the east, the Flats slipped into the deceptively calm waters of False Bay, protected by another spine of mountains. Across the Flats, towards the city, the air was dense with smoke from fires, in preparation for the still-cool evening to come. Beyond the power stations, Susan watched the lights of the planes as they ascended and descended onto the flickering runway, from where she'd just come.

The tableau was so familiar, as if embedded in her bones. It felt as if she had never been away. She trembled with the slow awakening of memories and the rustling of shadows, unlocking spaces inside that had remained long closed.

She stood soaking it all up, cut by the chilly wind that rushed down from the plateau to the oceans below. The vastness of the sky, the solidity of the mountains, the unknown depths of the churning sea.

Susan pulled at the zip of her sweater. Yes, she was pleased. Pleased to be back, to be home. She was home. She walked towards the car. Her uncle sat there, waiting. He had aged in these fifteen years. His thick wiry hair was white now, the eyelids around his almond eyes deeply hooded and creased, behind old-fashioned spectacles, worn and scratched. His faded grey flannel pants were sober against the green and blue cardigan that fitted like a glove, glowing with freshness.

“Okay, Uncle Aaron. I’m ready.”

She had to slam the rusty door hard to close it. While he turned on the struggling and sighing engine, she looked ahead, to the rocks and bowed stubby trees, hugging the crest of the mountain pass. Towards *Waterval*. To where she knew Katrina would be, waiting. Her stomach tightened again. It still felt so new, so raw.

“Looked just like your mother when you got off the plane.”

“I thought I looked like grandfather Max.”

“Don’t be silly. Can’t compare you to my father. Never.”

“You haven’t changed at all. Mom sends her love. My bag is full of presents for you. She’s really sorry she couldn’t come.”

“Naomi’s a trooper. She’ll pull through. My sister’s always had lungs like a bloody ox.”

“Ja. It’s only a matter of time, the doctors say, ’til she’s back on her feet. Bit of a shock though – she’s never sick.”

“Always takes you by surprise, ja. Our reaction, that’s the thing.”

She looked at him, puzzled. “Anyway, I’m glad I could come. It will be good for me to help you pack up the house. I needed a reason to come back. It’s sad that *Waterval* is being sold, but as Mom would say, ‘time waits for no man’. Yes, I’m pleased to be here.” Susan sighed, trying to reassure herself it was true.

“You must be tired. Long flight, isn’t it? Why didn’t your ... what do they call it ... partner ... come with you? Alex? Hasn’t been to *Waterval*, has he?”

“Alex and I aren’t together anymore.”

“Sorry. What about your boy? Marc. Your mom’s sent me lots of photos.”

“Alex’s looking after him. It was all a bit rushed, and Mom wanted me to get here quickly, to sort the house out.”

“It’s good you’re here. Thanks for coming.”

Susan watched his hands on the steering wheel, dotted with brown spots of age. The road turned gracefully, as they headed away, leaving the city far behind. In front was the open sea, on their left the bush that gradually gave way to farmland. “You want to stop again?”

“No. There’s still a way to go. I’ll come back here. It is just so ... so overwhelming. You forget. I forgot. And yet it feels like I’ve never been away.” Susan’s knuckles tightened.

Lorries and *bakkies* and shiny cars flew past them in the inside lane. A sign flashed by: Donkerbos 50km.

“It’s a good road now. I remember when it was just one lane. The traffic jams up the pass were a nightmare,” she mused.

“That’s nothing. I remember when it was still a gravel road. Your grandmother hated it.”

“Yes, poor Bobba. Think how terrible it must have been for her as a young woman, when she came out here.”

Oy, what a mistake I’ve made, thought Bashe as she headed away from the rocky decline clutching a lavender-scented handkerchief to her nose, slapping at the persistent flies with her other hand. Max was waiting at the wagon for her, talking to the driver, his hand stroking the rump of the front ox. She looked at him, almost a stranger, confident in a world utterly alien to her. She swallowed hard.

“Are you ready, my dear?”

“No lavatory. Terrible, terrible. Where are we going, Max? Where are you taking me?”

“Don’t worry, Bashele, it’s all for the best. We’ll be fine, I promise, and it won’t be long before we are back in Cape Town, with your sisters and aunties. Don’t worry, my Bashele, it will all be alright.”

The young man comforted the woman and led her to the wagon, a small couple, over-dressed on the hot day. His be-gloved hand gently supported her as she climbed onto the rickety running board. He spread the cushions and rugs about, making the hard bench as comfortable as he could. He squeezed her hand.

“Only one more night and we’ll be in Donkerbos.”

The driver cracked his whip and the oxen stirred and pulled. Bashe tied a fine scarf around her ginger hair and looked back, back to the granite mountains, Table Mountain, the scudding clouds, the dark sea divided into two bays separated by the

mountainous peninsula, to the settlement spread out neatly round the base of the mountain, clinging to the harbour. She could make out the five points of the Castle and the Town Hall close by. She was leaving behind Adderley Street with its department stores and small shops, the tea room in the Gardens where she and her sisters fed the squirrels, the fishmonger and his cart, who blew his horn to alert the housewives of his arrival, the post office in Breda Street where Albertina sold them overseas stamps and handed out parcels from home.

“*Oy, vey*, Max, what have we done?” She shook her head and wiped her face once more with the moist handkerchief. “*Oy vavoy*.” The wagon shook as it moved slowly along the narrow rutted track. Max stroked the fingers of his young bride. “It will all be just fine, trust me, my Bashele.”

The car was running smoothly. Uncle Aaron began humming, his hands loosened their grip on the wheel.

“Your Zeide had one of the first cars in Donkerbos, you know. I remember when he bought his Nash. Loved to take us for drives, showing off his family to everyone. Cruised down the mountain all the way to Town. Coming home, well, that was a different story. The climb took hours. Me and Naomi fighting in the back. Then we’d stop at the pass and put water in the radiator. We’d have tea in a flask. Your Zeide’s favourite, sweet black tea. And your Bobba’s date loaf. *Jislaaik*, it was cold in winter. No heating or air conditioning in those days.

“My mother – she hated the drives. She sat next to Max, always *kvetching*, complaining that he was going too fast, or there was a draught or it was too hot. She preferred the journey home, though, when me and your mommy were crammed in with all her shopping. The best-dressed woman this side of the mountains, she was. Don’t know how she did it, always up with the latest styles. Never looked hot and flustered.”

They passed the turnoff to Napier.

“Remind me to show you the corner where the old man crashed his first car. Right in the middle of Napier. That lamppost is long gone. Would have been gas, in those days. He wasn’t married then. Your Zeide had plenty of stories to tell.”

“My Bobba and Zeide. I remember them as so contented, but they bickered a lot too. An odd pair, weren’t they, Bashe and Max?”

“It was true love. Don’t think it was easy for them, living in the *goepse*, out in the back of beyond. Bobba used to complain all the time. He loved it. Hiking up the mountains. A real *chalutz*. Took her moaning in his stride.”

“Still, it must have been nice having a car, when no-one else did.”

“It was. Not that people didn’t hate us for it. Any excuse. The poor whites hated us more than the non-whites, you know. Antisemitism, it’s been out here for a long, long time. Ja, I know all about it.”

Non-whites. The word jarred. Some things may have changed, but others, they just carried on. Even though the flight attendants were African, and so were the people at passport control, Susan wondered if it would ever be that different. Now she was here, she wasn’t so sure coming back was the wisest move. As they got closer to *Waterval*, the knot in her belly tightened. She had incomplete business everywhere, it seemed.

They drove in silence. The road cut through the wheat fields like a dark snake. They passed a woman walking, on her own, paraffin tin on her head, baby strapped to her back with a blanket, shopping bags in her arms. In the opposite direction came an old man with a stick, dragging himself towards the top of the small *koppie*.

“Where are these people going? It’s so strange, seeing them in the middle of nowhere, going somewhere. It’s like the black people inhabit a different landscape.”

“Never thought about it. It’s pretty isolated out here. You get used to it.”

“What about Bobba? How do you think she handled it? Following her man out here.”

“Yes, they were made of strong stuff, back then. They coped. It was hard. She was shy. But stubborn.”

“So that’s where Mom got it.”

“Not only her,” he glanced at his niece.

She ignored his look. “Zeide was a good man. Mom adored him.”

“And he adored his Naomi. She could do no wrong. I was the lazy one, the *dom* son who was never going to make it. Not far wrong. But my ma, your Bobba, looked out

for me. When those *gatasim* next door bullied me, my father would make me fight back. Ma, she'd patch up my bruises and hide me under her skirt."

"They must have moved by now, surely?"

"The Van Zyls? Never. Still there. The sons are no different from their father. Keep my distance. No point. Live and let live."

The car entered the green avenue of trees that heralded the approach to Donkerbos. She felt like a kid again, going to *Waterval* for the school holidays to spend three hot summer weeks with her grandparents. Or the ten days in the depth of winter, when the winds screeched and crept down the chimneys and around the windows and the rain battered the corrugated iron roof.

They passed through the town, a string of buildings spread along the road. Venter's Butchery, the petrol station and agricultural supply store, Sternberg en Son, Algemene Handelaar, the old family shop with its deep red polished veranda and white gables. Then the Commercial Hotel, the bottle store and the other petrol station and the railway line. There were boom gates now, not the old level crossing she remembered. Over the line and they were out of town, heading to the gravel drive that led to *Waterval*. It was like being in one of those old home movies, jumping and splattering, colours fading in and out. Susan could no longer ignore the grinding in the pit of her stomach as they approached the house.

"No, wasn't easy for them, my parents. They were nation-builders too, you know. Don't get a mention in any history book, now or before."

Bashe was always angry with Max, during the first years. Every morning she was sick and had to go out the back, through the scratchy weeds or puddles of rain to the outhouse where the flies hovered and the door didn't shut properly.

She was hot and uncomfortable. Max was hardly ever there, away with his trunks of goods, Fryer's Balsam, cough syrup, bullets, *stoep* polish, rolls of blue and white print fabric piled in the back of old Mr Cohen's cart. Under the seat he'd safely stow the heavy pinking shears, the well worn tape measure and the wooden walking stick with the carved head, in case of trouble. And the cash tin with its padlock, the key tied with a leather thong around his neck.

Into the unknown he'd disappear all week. No letters, nothing. Every morning she'd wake with a start, remembering where she was, in a two room hovel on the outskirts of a tiny settlement near the tip of an alien land, rough and new, where the people ground out their words so she couldn't understand what they were saying. The heat was like a headache, always at the periphery, knocking, yelling for attention. Far from her family in Cape Town, even further from her beloved Lithuania, where they spoke Yiddish and drank hot sweet tea from the samovar to keep warm. They may have been poor back home, but they were happy, she reminded herself.

Africa, where the natives didn't look you in the eye, but looked down and away. Where the laced-up ladies at the filthy trading store tittered when she mispronounced a word and scowled as she handed back the dried beans because she meant peas.

How she suffered each morning as she stood up from her bed, onto the rough beaten dung floor. Sick and lonely, with her strange accent, her inappropriate clothes, like the bright silk scarf Max had ordered from Garlicks in Town for her when they found out she was having a baby.

She didn't want her child to grow up like these dirty children who wiped their snotty noses on their mothers' aprons. She pleaded with Max at every opportunity.

Why was she here? It wasn't fair. She wrote letters to her sisters in Town but they didn't understand. They wrote that she was being foolish as they compared Max to their lazy husbands, who were stupid and uncaring, with never enough money for new shoes. Only she had married well.

They didn't know. They didn't know what it was like to be alone in the dark mountains, with no-one to talk to, only simple women who had never even been as far as Cape Town. No friends to laugh with.

Waiting, always waiting for Max to come home.

Fridays were different. Just before sunset she'd watch Max arrive, his step accelerating from the shed where he'd leave the cart with the boy Keppie. Max would be almost running as he caught sight of her at the open window. He always held her close when she opened the door, resting his face in the curve between her shoulder and her neck, nuzzling in her warmth. The room was ready, as he liked it, with the bowl of grapes

on the table alongside the neatly folded newspaper, already a week old. The look on his face soon wiped away her edginess.

And she had watched the woman next door on her way back from the shops, staring in through her window one Friday evening as she was preparing to bless the Sabbath candles. She couldn't forget those eyes, hollow with resentment, and sadness. Behind the woman, her little boy, whining, barefoot and scruffy, hurrying to keep up with her. Neither of them wanting to get home, to where her husband waited.

Every Sunday evening Bashe could feel her desolation grow. She dreaded Monday mornings when Max would go, leaving her to her loneliness.

"You've got to learn English, Bashe. Why don't you read the newspaper?"

"Why? The people here can barely speak it. What good is it to me, Max? Why do I need to know what ship has docked and who is playing at the Town Hall or who is fighting who in Europe? Out here it is primitive."

"You could learn to play tennis with Mrs Kirby. She seems very kind. You must make an effort."

"I hate them all. The snobbish English – they are even worse. They think Jews are lower than natives. I want to go back."

"We won't live like this forever. I just need to save enough money to open a shop. To build you a proper house. It won't be long, I promise, my darling."

"But I'm hot and sick and I have no-one to talk to about my pregnancy. The mosquitoes have chewed me all over. I hate it here. I want to be with people I know. People who care about me and who don't mock me and whisper behind their hands."

"I want to wait for the baby to come in Town, with my sisters. I want to drink strong coffee in the Gardens and hear Yiddish in the shops. I want to buy soft fabric and have a hat made with ostrich feathers. I want to sit on the *stoep* and gossip and think about nothing except who's getting married and how to knit matinee jackets. I want to talk to people who remember home, how we picked berries in the forests and skated on the lake until it was almost thawed."

"Bashe, you go on like a spoilt child. Have you forgotten? Why did we leave? Was it good for us at home? No. How many babies died of cholera? All our cousins off to the Russian army. Pogroms all around us. No work. The poverty. The ignorance. You



may have forgotten. I can never. It's hard here, I know how you hate it. But please, be patient. Africa is a place of opportunity. If we work hard, we can have it all. Everything you ever dreamt of. I've seen it happen. I want you to be happy, more than anything in the world. I just wish you could learn to love it here. Please, my beloved Bashele, be patient. ”

“Pah,” she spat and left the room.

She knew how he loved the winding road through the mountains, that he recognised the call of the eagle and the cry of the baboon. How he followed the path of the globe of the sun, so unlike the watery orb that spent so little time in northern European skies. She shook her head. Would she ever get used to this place?

“It's still pretty remote out here,” Susan said as they began the climb of the last few kilometres to *Waterval*.

“Bobbie was never truly happy here, was she?”

“No, probably not. But she had a better life than most out here. The Van Zyls next door, they had nothing. Old man Hannes was always out of work. Drank. Beat the living daylights out of his wife and kids. Died alone like a pauper. Hated us. Always did. Some of them still do.”

“Who is still there?” Susan chewed her finger.

“Two youngsters left in the old house. Not so young anymore. Don't see them much. Except for their auntie...”

Uncle Aaron stopped talking as he slowed the car to turn off the road at the entrance to *Waterval*. The stone wall was not dilapidated as Susan recalled, but sturdy, reinforced concrete, topped with shiny electric cables that zinged in the wind. Uncle Aaron fumbled in the glove compartment, pulling out a remote control. He flashed it and the gates opened, slowly and majestically.

“Wow, that's fancy.”

“Political reality. Nowhere's safe anymore, not even *Waterval*.”

They twisted up the driveway towards the house. Across the beds of flowers Susan could see the Van Zyls' cottage, dark under the shade of the mountain. It looked closed.

The driveway to *Waterval* was guarded by plain trees, tall and dignified. Rows of agapanthus waved their blue heads as they approached. The craggy mountain stood majestically behind the homestead. Vines climbed in disarray up the walls, around the pergola and towards the roof and the sun.

Uncle Aaron stopped at the front door, the tyres grinding in the gravel. A kelpie leapt towards his side, barking and wagging its tail.

“Where’s Blitz?”

“That old dog died years ago. And son of Blitz. The only ones left standing are old and toothless, like me.” He smiled. His teeth were straight and shiny. False teeth.

Susan slammed her door and bit her lip. Waiting on the *stoep* at the top of the broad red steps were two servants. She didn’t recognise the girl. She wore a faded blue cotton overall, with a pale apron. Her hair was pulled back, not covered with a *doek* but plaited tightly in beaded dreadlocks. Bright red plastic earrings dangled from her ears. And she was wearing running shoes, not slippers or bare feet. Some things had changed. Keppie stood beside the girl, smiling widely, stooped and worn. The gaps in his teeth had grown. His cropped hair was white.

“Keppie, the garden is as lovely as ever. Wild like Africa, hey?”

“You can’t stop the Lord’s work, Miss Susan. Not with a *sjambok*, not with sekteers.”

She laughed. Bobba used to stalk the weeds and insolent creepers with her secateurs, trying to catch them out, but they always returned.

“Later I’ll show Miss Susan the vegetable garden and orchard. It’s all I can do, with these stiff fingers and legs.” He smiled again. He used to run the whole place for Zeide and then later for Uncle Aaron.

Her uncle climbed up the four broad steps to the front door.

“Where’s Katrina, Eunice?”

“In the kitchen. She says the arthritis is too bad to be walking about. Welcome to *Waterval*, Miss Susan. I’ve heard all about you. Your old room is ready and I made the chicken curry just like you like it. Katrina stood over me all the time.”

“Come inside, Susan. Keppie, take Miss Susan’s bag to her room. Eunice, have you turned on the hot water?”

“Of course, Master Aaron. And the food will be ready in twenty minutes.”

It was almost dark and the patch of sky that filtered through the open top half of the door at the far end of the passage was midnight blue. Susan could see the first stars of the night pricking through. The red Persian runner was threadbare and worn. It ran all the way down the passage. The old secretaire was still there, with the newspaper, a pile of post and framed photos of her grandparents with her mother and Uncle Aaron, young, smiling. How they used to run down this passage as kids, slamming the doors, Susan and Aggie and the maids’ children, until Zeide or Uncle Aaron would come out of the study and glare at them.

“Stop the racket, children, how can I concentrate?”

But that never stopped them, tearing up and down, watched over by the stern framed photographs on the walls. Until Aggie said it was immature and chose to sit on the *stoep* with her mother, painting their toe nails and squatting at flies, leaving her little sister behind her. It was silent now. She stopped next to a photo of her, with Alex and a young Marc, the Sydney Harbour Bridge behind them. She stared. Had they really been that happy? Alex had his arm round both of them, as they beamed at the camera.

Keppie was watching her. “Why no family with you, Missie? Next time you come, I won’t be here anymore. *Haai konna*, no.”

She moved on. Her parents’ wedding photo was still there, as it always had been in that gloomy passage, lost in hues of the past. They looked radiant, convinced that their love would last.

And at the far end, the kitchen. Still the heart of the house, warm and light. There sat Katrina in the old chair, facing toward the stove, away from the door, away from Susan. She was much smaller than Susan remembered. She still wore a faded *doek* twisted round her head. Her eyes were dull, set in a patchwork of creases. When Susan approached her, the old woman didn’t stand, but held out her arms, as if to keep her at bay, not reaching out to her. Susan hesitated.

She heard Keppie fling open the door to her old bedroom and turned, fleeing the warm kitchen for her room. The large window was pulled up to let in the fragrance of the early roses that grew on the outside wall, the scent catching her at the back of her throat, a reminder from somewhere deep inside. The once brightly striped curtains were frayed,

thin. The now shabby candlewick bedspreads on the twin beds were newly laundered. Yellow. The sisters had chosen them when Susan was twelve. Scatter cushions in yellow and orange, from that same catalogue.

“Do you remember the fight we had, Keppie, Aggie and me? But I won in the end, didn’t I? Yellow. So sunny and happy.”

“I remember many fights, Miss Susan. That’s how it always was in this house. Loud shouting and loud laughing.”

Zeide had said to get whatever made the girls happy. Susan had always loved this room, with its high ceilings where the spiders still hung. The old mahogany wardrobe, with the doors that couldn’t close.

Keppie heaved the case onto the bed, ready for her to open. “Make yourself comfortable, Miss Susan. This is still your home.”

“And yours too, Keppie. How many years have you been at *Waterval*?”

“Oh, Miss Susan, too, too many. I came here with Ol’ Baas Max from Rietvlei when he was still a *smous*, riding around on that cart of old Mr Cohen. I was a young boy then. There were too many girls running after me. So I left there with Baas Max. But look at the new South Africa. Madiba is president. I voted in the elections. But Miss, you better hurry. Katrina doesn’t like her food getting cold. You go wash and then supper will be ready.”

While she showered Susan recognised the noises of the old house. The front door closing, the rattle of the hot water cylinder, the birds outside. The towel she dried her hair with was stiff and thin. She rubbed the faint initials still embroidered in the pale cotton. *BS*. From her Bobba’s dowry. Still in service, like everything else in this dried-out house, a scab from times swept away.

Susan buttoned her cotton dress. She brushed her damp hair away from her face, picked up her watch, looked at it and then returned it to her bedside table.

There were voices coming from the living room, a woman laughing, giggling. Susan looked at her bare feet. She didn’t know they were expecting guests.

She entered silently, her feet soft on the worn floorboards, not wanting to disturb the scene before her. Uncle Aaron stood alongside the woman seated on the sofa, pouring

sherry from a decanter into one of Bobba's cut glass wine glasses. He was smiling broadly at her, and she looked back up directly into his eyes. Uncle Aaron's age, she had soft, greying fair hair pulled back with a clip. She wore a brightly patterned dress, pine green with darting yellow and lighter green. Her feet were neatly placed alongside one another in tidy beige sandals. Susan could see the wrinkling of her pantihose. Beside her on the sofa were a shiny beige bag, with a silver clasp and an upright solid strap, waiting at attention, and a black sunhat, in stark contrast with the rest of her outfit. Her pale eyes darted quickly to Susan.

Uncle Aaron coughed. "Susan, this is Tikkie Prinsloo. She's having supper with us."

"Hello, Susan. Your uncle's told me all about you."

"Nice to meet you. I'm sorry, I didn't know we were having visitors."

"Ag, Aaron, haven't you told her yet?"

"Told me what?"

Uncle Aaron's face turned bright red and he bent over the tray.

"Susan," he said with his frame still curved while he poured another glass of sherry. "We're getting married. That's why I'm selling."

Susan sat down hard on the chair nearest to the door. She swallowed. What would her mother think? It really didn't matter what her mother thought.

"Now that's a pleasant surprise. I'm sorry, it's a bit of a shock."

"It was a shock to me when he asked me, finally." Tikkie Prinsloo smiled at Uncle Aaron and the colour rose once more up his neck.

"Well, let's toast you guys with our sherry." Susan smiled vaguely and looked down at her short skirt and bare feet. "If you'd told me, I'd have worn shoes, at least."

"You're the first person I've told."

"Well, that gives us even more reason to celebrate."

Uncle Aaron walked towards Susan with her glass of sherry. She leaned forward and kissed him awkwardly on the cheek. He stumbled slightly and sat down next to Tikkie and her handbag. Susan stood up and walked over to Tikkie and touched her lips to Tikkie's soft powdered cheek.

"*Mazaltov*, Tikkie. Auntie Tikkie."

“Just Tikkie. Thank you.”

“It means congratulations.”

“I know. Your uncle has told me.”

Susan went back to her chair. The sherry was sweet. It sank straight to her stomach. She wasn't sure how she felt about the news. She knew she should be happy because, finally, her uncle had found love.

“Have you known each other long?”

Tikkie smiled. “Oh, yes. Since we were children. I grew up next door. I was a Van Zyl.”

“What?” Susan started. She didn't remember any women in that house. “You're Kobie and Petrus's mother?”

“I'm their auntie. Their mommy Ansie died many years ago.”

Susan took another sip. The sherry stuck in her throat and she coughed.

“You okay? Maybe we should go in and eat.” Uncle Aaron raised his voice.

“Eunice, is the food ready?”

Eunice showed her head around the door.

“Yes, Master. Hello, Missus Prinsloo.”

They stood up together and hurried to the adjacent room. Tikkie was taller than Susan had envisaged, and she was slim, except for a thickening round her middle. Susan wondered what she and her mother would find to talk about, if they ever met. Uncle Aaron marrying a Van Zyl. Susan sat down in the chair her uncle indicated. His seat was at the head of the table, Tikkie on his right, just like Bobba and Zeide. Yes, they seemed comfortable together, like an old habit.

Susan wasn't hungry. She idly turned her spoon in the beetroot soup, mixing the sharp fuchsia into the clot of sour cream in the centre of her bowl. It tasted just like Bobba used to make. She looked up. Tikkie too was playing with her spoon.

“My grandmother's recipe for borscht was famous in the district,” Susan said, dipping her spoon into the soup and opening her mouth wide. “Bit of an acquired taste, I suppose.”

“Yes, it is.” Tikkie tilted her plate half-heartedly. Uncle Aaron was oblivious as he scraped the bottom of the bowl with his spoon.

“So where will you be moving to, Uncle Aaron?”

Tikkie answered. “Closer to Town; we’re getting too old for the country.”

They finished the meal in silence. Every time Tikkie moved her cutlery across her plate, Susan shot a glance at her. When the older woman looked up and returned her gaze, she turned away, forcing down another mouthful.

Uncle Aaron covered Tikkie’s hand with his. Susan watched. His hand, with all its liver marks, and hers, wrinkled, pale and freckled. Susan lifted her own hands and examined them. They were still smooth and strong, and competent too, she hoped.

“What’s the matter?” Tikkie looked at her.

“Nothing. Jet lag. I should go to bed now.” She rose from the table. “I’ll leave you two alone. It’s been a hellova long day. And your news ... I think it’s lovely that Uncle Aaron has found ... love. At last. Or maybe, again.”

Uncle Aaron looked at her, and then turned to Tikkie.

“Should we have coffee here or in the lounge?”

## Chapter Two

It's true, Susan thought as she began to undress. They were so happy. She shouldn't begrudge them that, at the very least. She needed time to adjust to the news, that was all.

She climbed into the bed and turned toward the wall, as she'd always done. She used to dream a lot in this bed, as a little girl. She loved her dreams, the fuzzy world she could escape to in her sleep. She would burst out laughing at random moments when images from the previous night returned to her during the day, brought to the surface by smatterings of the conversations of others, by the cover of the book she was reading or the repetitive drone of an aeroplane flying overhead.

Until she learnt better, she'd interrupt her mother or Aggie.

"Last night I dreamt we built a house on the beach but an aeroplane flew down so low it blew it away."

Her mother would look at her and then turn away.

"Susan's like that," Naomi would explain to her friend Audrey as they sat together at the wicker table under the umbrella, drinking cocktails after tennis, keeping an eye on the children running around in their scuffed white sandshoes under the relentless sun. "She has an over-abundance of dreams. Even while she's awake."

And Aggie would look at Susan sharply and pull a rude face when she tried to describe her dreams, so she stopped telling her about them too.

And then she stopped dreaming altogether, or stopped remembering her dreams, perhaps. Except here at *Waterval* where they continued to wash over her at night, and she'd wake up still caught in their shiny cobwebs.

Susan loved visiting her grandparents in the country. It was only much later when she realised it had been her way of escaping. Escaping from the yelling and the silences and the chaos that echoed through the dank air at home. At *Waterval* her nights were undisturbed, speckled with dreams.

The house in Studley Road was spacious and light and the sun sparkled on the kidney-shaped pool set under the trees. And yet she felt confined and cramped, glad she had her own room with a door she could close, but not lock. There she played with her



dolls, or pasted pictures from comics and magazines onto cardboard sheets that she hung from the picture rail. Or she'd lie on her bed and read her books.

Her window overlooked the backyard and the honeysuckle hedge, entwined with a wild morning glory vine. At night she'd cover her ears with her pillow to block out her mother's pleading and her father's deep rebuffs. Sometimes she'd switch on the radio and fall asleep to the sounds of a studio audience clapping, or when she was older and braver, another murder successfully solved by Inspector Carr. And then it was the pop station she'd listen to, to barricade her from her suburban reality. After her father moved out it grew quieter, until there were other men, gentleman callers, who clinked glasses with her mother and responded to her brittle laughter by touching her tentatively on the arm. They needn't have worried, they would soon discover she was made of stronger stuff than Irish crystal.

In the morning she'd be woken from her restless sleep by the noises in the yard, where one of her mother's constant stream of maids would be shooing her boyfriend or husband or children out of the yard. Or she would hear the loud greeting of the newspaper boy or rubbish boy, as he clattered the rubbish bin lid. Boys? They were all men, probably with families living a thousand miles away. For the lucky ones, the maid would join them for a drink of water from the tap, or, even better, a cup of coffee at the steps of the kitchen door. Then gradually the house would wake up and the maid would push open Susan's door with a glass of drinking chocolate, sometimes still lumpy, on her tray and she'd lay her school uniform out on the chair and place her polished shoes and clean white ankle socks close by.

At *Waterval* it had always been Katrina. She'd worked for Bobba and Zeide since before Susan was born, just like her mother before her had been there for Susan's mom. Aggie hated going to her grandparents; she was older than Susan and boys would phone the house in Studley Road to talk to her. There were no socials in Donkerbos or even in Napier and no record shop. She'd complain that all you could do in Donkerbos was read or swim and that made her hair go frizzy. Susan didn't mind. The first winter she went to *Waterval* on her own she thought she'd be lonely. But Zeide took her to the shop and she helped Mrs Oddfellow with a window display of hats and coats and scarves.

“I read my mom’s *Fair Lady*, so I know what’s in at the moment,” she confided to Mrs Oddfellow. “And sometimes I get to look at old issues of *Jackie* when Aggie’s finished with them. Our fashions are way behind London, you know, Mrs O.”

Mrs Oddfellow smiled and slipped a handful of beads into Susan’s hand. She knew Susan liked the brightly coloured glass and wooden beads to string.

“Thanks, Mrs O.” She couldn’t say her name out in full because it always made her want to giggle.

When Zeide was in his office, he’d yell out to Susan. “Get Mrs Oddfellow for me, please *babele*.”

And she’d go over to Mrs Oddfellow perched on the stool behind the cash register. “Mrs O, my grandfather wants to see you in the back.”

Susan put the beads in a small white paper bag, the kind they used for the sweet selection in the big glass jars, and placed it in the pocket of her jacket that was hanging on the wooden coat stand in the corner of Zeide’s office.

In the evenings back at *Waterval* after supper and her bath she’d sit in the living room, on the small armchair on the other side of the fireplace to Bobba, with a tray where all her beads were spread out. Carefully she’d select the one she wanted and tie a knot like Bobba had shown her. Bobba crocheted or knitted, or sometimes did embroidery work, and they’d sit quietly together, nestled round the fire, while the wind rattled the windows and the rain hammered on the roof. Sometimes the radio would play listeners’ requests or they’d listen to the news. Sometimes they could hear the pages of the newspaper rustle as Zeide turned them slowly and neatly as he sat at the dining room table. Alongside was the large pair of dressmaker’s pinking shears that he used to snip out articles and the pot of glue with a brush with a wooden handle. His scrapbooks were labelled and dated and after he’d painted the back of a clipping with glue, he would carefully place the newsprint on the clean white page and write the name and date and page in his even, curved hand.

He never allowed Susan to help, even when she was doing projects at school herself, and then she grew disinterested. When she learnt to read she studied his scrapbooks. Some of the articles were in Yiddish, which looked like higgledy-piggledy to her. They were pasted in plain-covered books entitled *Family and Friends* or *Home*.

Others were filled with clippings from the *Cape Times* or the *Cape Argus* or the *Zionist Record*. These were headed *Industry and Business*, *Politics* and *Jewish Affairs*.

Every night, after he'd finished with the newspapers, he'd join them in the living room, walk up to his wife, humming to the radio and clicking her needles, kiss her grey hair, the red faded to a gentle glimmer, and return to his chair, between the lamp and the window. There was always a book on the three-legged table and he'd ease himself down, sigh loudly, raising his feet onto the soft leather pouf, and open the book to where the bookmark rested.

Katrina would come in with a tray of coffee and thin buttery biscuits.

"Thank you, Katrina. That will be all for tonight," Bobba would say as she stood up slowly and poured her husband his coffee, adding the sugar and stirring it quietly with a silver spoon. Zeide would raise his eyes above his glasses and look at her, seeing the woman he had brought here so many years before. And then Bobba would look at the clock above the fireplace.

"Little one, it's time to go to bed. Pack up your *tsatskes* and go to the toilet."

Susan did as she was told. On her way back to her bedroom she'd lean across Bobba's round lap and kiss her cheek.

"Goodnight, Bobba. Goodnight, Zeide."

Zeide would pull her towards him and brush his white moustache over her brow and she'd giggle softly. "Don't let the *goggas* bite," they'd say to one another. And the elderly pair would resume their separate contemplations.

Susan loved the winter nights in the rattling house. She pulled on her pink crocheted bed socks and snuggled under the eiderdown. Sometimes the small fluffy feathers would scratch her through her flannel pyjamas. Geese from Bobba's village. This eiderdown had come with Bobba all the way from Lithuania when she was a girl. She'd been older than Susan, almost a woman, when she and her father and sisters had embarked on the boat that had travelled through stormy seas across from Europe, down the west coast of Africa to Cape Town.

"I could never do that," she whispered to herself as she curled inside her warm cocoon and waited for her dreams to wrap her tightly.

"But I did," Susan mumbled to herself, pulling the eiderdown tighter.

When she woke up it was dark. And silent. No bats flying back across the harbour, no kookaburras rousing. Solid blackness. She made out the large window frame and remembered the old house. It wasn't jet lag alone that got her up early in the morning. Back home now, there was no escape from those things she'd hoped had been long buried. She hoped she would find some strength inside, so she wouldn't topple over, or worse, disintegrate.

She looked at her watch. It was just after four and she was wide awake, with no chance of sleeping again. She got up, pulled on her slippers and walked down the familiar passage to the bathroom. She switched on the low voltage light. The flushing of the toilet with its loud groans and creaks was yet another reminder of earlier times. But no-one ever woke. The timbers slept soundly.

On the way back, her eyes grown accustomed to the gloom, she wondered if she could find something to read to help pass the hours until daylight and breakfast. She passed the secretaire. It was too dark to see her reflection in the mirror. There were no newspapers lying there, so she opened the cupboard below, where Bobba used to keep her magazines, her pattern books and recipes. She ran her hands along the shelves and felt the roughness of her grandmother's old wooden sewing basket. That too had always been stored in the old *kas*. She lifted it carefully and took it to her room, back down the long passage, remembering the hours she'd spent sorting through buttons and combs and delicate lace collars. Closing the door behind her, Susan switched on the main light and sat cross-legged on her bed with the sewing basket in front of her. She swung the drawers open and there it was, the secret chamber, with the black key in its lock.

"Why," she'd ask her Bobba every so often, "do you keep it locked but leave the key in the lock?"

"There's nothing in this world I can lock away except in my heart," was her reply. Susan hadn't understood until their house in Cape Town had been burgled when she was in high school. Her mother wept because her silver had been taken, and Bobba's engagement ring. That weekend they'd travelled to *Waterval* to tell Bobba. It was Katrina who reminded her that she still had her children, her husband and her memories, "just like Madam would say".

The key was still there. She removed it, stroking the black metal between her fingers. She replaced it in the lock and turned it. The flap opened easily. Instead of being empty the now dull, red satin-lined cavity was filled with yellowed envelopes, a pile of letters tied with a blue ribbon, a small chocolate box and a ring box. It wasn't neatly packed, rather just as someone might have left it, intending to sort through it all later. As if it had been waiting for her, for this dark morning, to find and open. As she sat there, she hoped that clearing the house would not be as hard as she was beginning to anticipate it might be.

She removed the photos first. The top ones were familiar. Her sister Aggie's graduation, with her mother's neat printing on the reverse – name, date, city. Black and white photos of them swimming at Jonkershoek.

There were photos of her grandparents at the front *stoep*, exactly where the servants had been waiting for her the previous afternoon, but with Zeide's newest car gleaming in the foreground. Naomi in her high school uniform holding onto her brother Aaron's arm, standing proudly between their parents. Bobba, elegant in a blue veiled hat and gloves. Behind them on the *stoep*, as if attempting to be invisible, was an elderly man with a flat cap.

"Shmuel." A shimmer in the background. Susan remembered him. And then she wondered how she could have forgotten him. He had always been there, a shadow in the room, when she was little. A cousin of her grandmother's. A survivor of the war. He never spoke much. He'd touch his cap when she gave him his tea, or handed him a letter or newspaper. He did it to the servants, too, raising his hand to his head. His body was permanently stooped, his shoulders hunched, as if he was never really meant to be there, nor wanted to be. His smell. A trace of cigarette smoke lingered wherever he passed. He was never without a lit cigarette between his fingers, no filter. A full ashtray always rested beside him on the arm of his chair. Susan felt wide awake, alert and open and exposed to all the raw memories that were poking out at her, jabbing at her.

She held the brown ring box. The leather surface had peeled. She pushed the silver clasp and it opened. The blue velvet base was no longer plush. The letters had faded but she could make out the words 'Adderley Street'. There was no ring. She knew that already because it had been stolen from her mother's bedroom. A crushed petal

rested there instead. She put it to her nose. There was no scent. Susan wondered if Zeide had given it to Bobba with the ring. He was such a romantic. But Bobba, Susan realised, had she ever really known her Bobba?

In an official envelope, no longer sealed, was a pile of passports and travel documents. Zeide's dated 1910, when he'd arrived in Cape Town from his *shtetl* Ponevezh in Lithuania. A crumpled paper with a stamp: 1948. Shmuel's. Bobba must have looked after it for him. Susan remembered the two of them sitting in the darkened living room of this old house, cups of tea clattering in their saucers, while they babbled away in Yiddish. Zeide disapproved of speaking Yiddish in the new country but Bobba loved the familiar sounds. How young and pretty Bobba looked when she sang in Yiddish and joked with Shmuel. Even he smiled sometimes but the sadness always returned, as if had just remembered that he couldn't be happy. He scared her, with his solemn scowl, mumbling and blustering. And his rasping cough that would cause him to lean forward, as if unable fill his lungs with enough air, only to unfold his body and draw once more on a cigarette.

How old was she when Shmuel died? Seven or eight? The same age, her mother told her, as she had been when Shmuel first arrived in Cape Town. Susan had always felt ambivalence towards him. He hadn't belonged in her family, and his presence was a constant reminder of things that were best forgotten, even though, she realised as she sat on her bed, as such a young girl she hadn't known what he was a reminder of. Shmuel remained on the periphery, a shuffling ghost. When he entered the room, they'd stop laughing and she and Aggie would sit still in their seats, watching him tip the ash from his cigarette into an ashtray. Sometimes she would catch him staring at her, as if she was someone else.

She remembered when he died. It was the first death in her family. She had been here on holiday and it spoilt everything. No-one had any time for the girls and they had to sit quietly all the time. Children didn't go to funerals in those days. She was glad. There was talk about whether there would be a *minyan*, ten men, to bury him. There was. After the funeral they came back to the house. Milton, Susan's father, Uncle Aaron, and the old men from the congregation. She recognised them from boring Saturdays in the hot *shul* at Napier, where they swayed and muttered, under their large white prayer shawls. They sat

in Bobba's living room and ate bagels and hard boiled eggs that stuck in their dentures, and sipped black tea through sugar cubes. Bobba used to scold Zeide when he drank that way, complaining that it was what peasants did back home.

Late that afternoon after the old men had gone home, collected by their daughters in big cars, Katrina cleared the table. Her eyes were red and Susan wondered why that unpleasant old man could cause such sadness for her. Bobba said they would eat canned spaghetti and left-over bagels that night so that Katrina didn't have to cook anything. Susan hated canned spaghetti. Zeide wouldn't let them listen to the radio that night so she and Aggie went to their room with their books.

That Sunday, after the lunch dishes had been stacked away and the kitchen wiped clean, Katrina took Josephus to the cemetery. Zeide drove them there, leaving the girls at home, saying there were plenty of other Sundays for drives to the beach. Aggie and Susan bickered all afternoon and Bobba shouted at them.

When they came back, Bobba asked Susan to give Katrina and Josephus some cake left over from the funeral. They were in the kitchen, seated at the Formica-topped table. She sliced the cake and took it to them on the servants' enamel plates. Josephus looked at her and touched his hand to his head.

"Just like Uncle Shmuel," Susan said out loud, returning to the pile of photos on the bed. She shuffled through them again until she found the one she wanted. Bobba in her smart town outfit watching her proud husband and his new car. Running out of the frame, next to Shmuel, was a small boy, in shorts, barefoot. A Coloured child, with curly hair and large protruding ears. He wasn't supposed to be in the photo and no-one seemed to notice him, except for Shmuel. He was watching him and while his body was hunched and sad, his eyes were lit. With pride. Susan covered the foreground with her hand and stared at the corner of the house, where this other story was taking place.

"Josephus. My cousin."

Her breath caught in her throat. Her hands were cold. She pulled the eiderdown up around her ears. The photos and papers fell onto the floor in a heap. She could feel her heart as each beat rocked through her. She looked up. The light was weak through the thin curtains. She could hear the sounds of the house waking and she could smell the toast.

“My cousin. Josephus.” She lay curled in the bed, waiting, for the knock at her door and the mug of sweet tea, hoping it wouldn’t be Katrina.



### Chapter Three

Aaron leaned back in the worn armchair, cup of cocoa warm on his knee and newspaper unopened alongside him. He felt unsettled with all the activities of the last few weeks. It was strange having Susan in the house, slightly uncomfortable. But he couldn't clear out the entire place on his own, and Naomi had said she was too weak after her pneumonia, to travel from Sydney to *Waterval*. There were so many thick layers that had accumulated over all the years.

He stroked the arm of his chair. His father's chair. It must have been in the house since 1924 when his parents moved in. It had been there for as long as he could recall. He was getting old, like all the relics that surrounded him, and tired. Always done the right thing by the family, he had. Looked after the place and the business and made sure that nothing tumbled down. Plastered over the cracks, tied the remnants tightly with string. He'd seen Susan's disappointment, he'd seen how she looked at him at the airport, in the car. An old man, who'd come to nothing. He'd inherited the world and look at him now. Even the old armchair. How long had it taken him? For as long as he could remember, it had been in the same position, facing the door and the passage, so Max could see who came in, who went out. Did they spill tea on the tray or drop tobacco on the floor? No matter what time of night Aaron would come home, his father would be in his chair, waiting, looking at the old clock, sipping from his tumbler of whiskey.

His mother had refused to move the chair after Max died. Everything had to remain exactly as it was. She'd gaze at the chair, as if he was still enthroned in it, her eyes glazed over as she recalled his deep voice, his delicate hands and the way he put one hand on her shoulder and the other on the small of her back, gliding her forward, supporting her.

After she died, it stayed there, the arm stained with the watermark where his glass had rested, night after night, year after year. He couldn't move it, couldn't turn it around to face the window and the mountain. Then one day, he came into the room and the chair had been moved, as if by a ghost, so it looked out to the sky and the trees. For the first time, he took the paper and sat down in that chair and smiled. It felt just right.

Time was running out. He wasn't going to lose Tikkie again. It was too late to repeat that mistake. He was pleased Susan had come back. She would be useful. She'd get rid of the clutter and pick out the things of value he didn't really care about. But having her around felt awkward. And the old servants were behaving oddly. When Susan was a kid even Katrina had indulged her, just like everyone else. She'd always been like that, Susan, charming everyone, always getting what she wanted. Just like her mother. The women in his family made him feel uncomfortable. His niece had grown into such a confident woman, smart like her father. Like her grandfather too. Dad. Aaron sighed. They compared him to his father, the surviving old Jewish men in Napier, and what a failure he must seem.

Susan wouldn't be here for long; she'd run off to Town to her friends, the restaurants and the Waterfront shopping malls and he'd have the place to himself again, to close up. And then, a new beginning, right at the end. He sighed again.

With all the rushing, tonight was the first time he'd seen Tikkie in a few days. He glanced at her photo, on his bedside table. It had been in his drawer for many years but now, at last, he'd put it in a frame and placed it near him, so she was the last face he saw when he closed his eyes, and the first in the morning when he awoke. He didn't care what the maids thought, what Susan might say. He could hardly imagine it, Tikkie would be there, beside him, in his parents' old bed. He would never have to leave her, in the dead of night, to come home alone.

The relief was immense, he realised, having it all in the open. Everyone must have known, he was sure, but at last, he would be able to take her out on his arm and show the world that she was his.

It had been later than usual when he turned into the quiet street, the last evening he'd visited her. He'd come straight from the hotel, after a drink and a few hands of cards with the travellers, the salesmen who drove across the Western Cape selling washing powder and fridges and uniforms. The front light was on, so he pulled over, stopped and pushed at the half-open gate.

"You're out late tonight," Tikkie said at the door that opened directly into her lounge, above the din of the television behind her. "I wondered if you were coming."

She was tall, taller than Aaron, even in her flat house shoes. Her thin frame only added to her stature. Her dress was dark and soft, it was the apricot-coloured shawl covering her shoulders that lit up her pale cheeks and her fine hair, pulled up in a bun.

“They wanted me to stay and play more cards but I left for my date. I always watch *Law and Order* with you, don’t I?”

He kissed her cheek lightly and sat down on the sofa, next to where she had been sitting, where her knitting lay in a pile.

“I’ll put on the kettle.” She placed her hand on his shoulder. Her fingers were softened by the pearly pink polish on her nails. He took her hand to his lips and kissed it.

“Ag, Tikkie, you are too good to me.”

As she moved away, he caught the familiar scent of tea roses. Like everything else in her small, tidy house, it was comfortable and reassuring. The landscape on the wall behind the sofa, the antimacassars on the armchairs, the woollen rug beneath the coffee table. Aaron reached for the TV guide, on her pile of correspondence that was piled neatly on the embroidered cloth. On top of the guide was a letter, from the radiologists in Napier.

He tilted it towards him and pushed his spectacles higher up his nose. The results of the biopsy were positive and Mrs Prinsloo should make her next appointment without delay. He leaned back, conscious only of the pounding of his heart, like a ticking clock, until Tikkie returned carrying the tray of tea things on the beaded doily. Her grip tightened as she watched him, staring at the letter in front of him.

“I’m sorry, I should have told you,” she said, as she lowered the tray to the table and switched off the television. “I just couldn’t. So I left it out hoping you would read it.”

“What’s wrong?”

She seated herself next to him, upright, staring straight ahead with her pale blue eyes. He turned towards her and clasped her tense body to him. “What do the doctors say, my *engel*, what do they say?”

He stroked her soft hair, streaked with grey.

“If I have the treatment, I’ve got a few more years left in me. You lose your hair, you know.”

He unclipped the clasp and her fair hair fell limply round her shoulders. He scooped a handful and kissed it.

“I am so scared. I just couldn’t tell you. Anyone. I’m sorry, Aaron.” He wiped with his hankie the tears welling in the corners of her eyes.

“I’m here. I’ll help you. Get you the best treatment in the country.”

“The Lord will look after me.”

“Tikkie, so many years down the drain. They are ghosts now, your brothers, your father, my father. It’s not too late, I’ll do the right thing by you. I promise. Tomorrow I’ll go with you to Dr Jamieson and he’ll explain it all to me.”

“Just hold me.”

They clung to each other on the sofa. The tea grew cold in the pot.

“It’s late. I must go.”

“Wait, I’ll make us some fresh tea.”

Tikkie stood up and pulled back her dishevelled hair. Aaron watched her as she caught her reflection in the mirror above the fireplace. Her cheeks pale and the lines around her lips deep, worry lines, not laughter. He watched her look down at her shapeless dress.

“You’re more beautiful now than the day I first kissed you. And I love you ten times more, a hundred times more, even though this old body can hardly show it.”

He watched in the mirror the colour rising in her cheeks as she patted down her hair. Then she sighed, turned to the tray, picked it up and moved towards the kitchen.

“Old flirt, you. You still take my breath away.”

“And,” he said helping himself to a biscuit from the plate on the table, “you still bake better stuffed monkeys than my mother ever did.”

The way she looked at him, it hadn’t changed since their first kiss. His skin still tightened and tingled. He leaned back in the sofa, waiting for her to come back to him.

It had been a very hot summer, his eighteenth year. They had all been there swimming that day. Naomi with a friend from school. A short girl with freckles and round knees. Angela Braxton. The two Van Zyl boys were there too, ducking and dive bombing. Tikkie, their sister, splashed around the edges. She was shy, thin, and her bathing

costume hung shapeless about her skinny white limbs. Only her hands, neck and calves were brown, where she couldn't hide from the sun. She would have been sixteen, sweet sixteen, Aaron recalled. Aaron had had enough. The shrieks of Naomi and her friend were annoying him. He was a good swimmer, but the Van Zyls were getting rough and he knew it was time to leave. His towel was with Naomi's in the shade in the small cave.

He climbed the steep path to pick up his things. He hadn't noticed Tikkie leave the water. She was already at the entrance to the cave, leaning against the rocks.

"I saw a snake."

"Van Zyls aren't scared of snakes."

"My brothers told me there are poisonous snakes in the cave. I'm cold – I want my towel."

"I'll get it, don't be such a sissie. Which bag is yours?"

She pointed and he went in, hesitating momentarily. He knew full well there could be snakes in the cave.

"How do you know there isn't a snake in my bag?"

"I may be a mug but I'm not dumb."

He shook the bag above his head. Everything fell out, onto the ground. A cotton blouse, her towel, a hair brush, a sixpence. And her underwear. A grey coloured brassiere and panties. His sister's panties were silk and shiny stuff. He'd seen them flutter on the washing line and watched her unwrap the tissue paper when she came back from Town with parcels full of new things. But Tikkie's were faded and washed out. His face reddened.

She grabbed her things and shoved them back in the bag.

"You think I've never seen a girl's *broekies* before? I've got a sister, you know." He looked at her. Her cheeks were bright. She would know that Naomi and her friends wore imported bras fitted at Garlicks. But Naomi, with her extra roll of flesh, could never look as beautiful as a blushing Tikkie.

"You look so pretty, Tikkie, when you blush."

Sitting on her sofa over half a century later he still felt her shame.

He had reached out his hand and stroked the skin of her arm. It was soft and cool from the water. Looking at her he forgot about his sallow skin, the bristles on his lip and his big ears. Because she didn't seem to notice. He forgot about her brothers, noisily splashing below them in the bright sunlight. She took his fingers from her arm and lifted them to her lips. They were soft as peaches. She kissed them. Then he put his lips against her mouth. He couldn't stop himself. She didn't resist. She let him press against her teeth and opened her mouth for his tongue. His arms held her stiffly, like a tin soldier's. He stood there in his clingy, wet bathing suit, dripping on the ground. But he couldn't let go of her and she didn't pull away. Instead, she made a sound like a cat, a purr. They opened their eyes and looked into each other's. Then he closed his once more, overwhelmed by the pounding of his blood and the sweetness of her tongue.

“Let's go inside the cave, I'm cold. I want my towel.”

“What about the snakes?” It was dark so he knew she wouldn't see him blush.

“Here, use mine.” His towel was large and fluffy and he wrapped them both inside its softness. His body was bursting, hot then cold, from her closeness.

“I've never done this before.” She too was glad of the dark.

He kissed her long slim neck as he removed the straps of her bathing costume.

“Me neither,” he mumbled with his head buried in the cusp of her collar bone.

She lay waiting on the damp towel while he pulled off his swimming trunks. Their bodies shivered, in the coolness of the cave. They clung together, unsure, becoming surer.

“We'd better get back.” But he held onto her, his hands stroking her thin back, feeling the ridges of her ribs and spine. “I want to do this again, be with you again.”

She laughed. “I'm going to marry Willem Prinsloo.”

He fell silent. Then, “Don't. Wait for me. When I get back from Varsity I'll marry you.”

She laughed and touched his thigh. “That's not going to happen, Aaron. You know that.”

“Tikkie, I'll never love anyone else. When I come back from Varsity ...” He was pleading.

“You’ll never come back. If you do, you’ll have a girl just like Naomi sitting in the car next to you.”

“We’d better get back.” They kissed once more and made ready to leave, Tikkie first.

Tikkie came back into the room with the fresh tea.

“You have that funny look in your eye, old man. Don’t get any ideas, hey. I’m a sick old lady.”

He laughed. “I was just thinking back, that’s all. The dam.”

“You were a good kisser.”

“Why didn’t you wait, Tikkie? You knew I’d be back.”

“I’m still waiting, Aaron. Fifty, sixty years and I’m still in my own little house.”

“I’m going to marry you. If you’ll have me.”

“I’m tired, Aaron. I’m old. I’m sick. You wait ’til now to ask me. Let me think about it.”

“Don’t take too long, hey.”

“What’s another ten years between friends?” She saw the doctor’s letter on the table.

“Of course, Aaron. I will. But let’s speak to the doctors first.”

Aaron’s cup was in his hand, midway from the table to his lips. It crashed to the saucer and the tea splashed across his jumper.

“Tikkie. Tikkie. You won’t regret it, I promise.” He turned to her and hugged her.

“I might already have. You’ve soaked me with the tea.” He pushed her back and started unbuttoning her dress.

“Careful. I’m a sick old lady,” she laughed, letting him lift her from the sofa and her lead her towards her bedroom.

He made sure she was asleep before he left the house. Her hand was cool when he released it and placed it gently under the sheet. He looked at his watch, wondering what the time would be in Sydney, Australia and how his sister would handle the news.

He turned to the clock. He had to get some sleep. Tomorrow Susan would need him to take her around. He pushed the empty mug aside and folded the still unread newspaper. This old house was so comfortable, he would miss it. He switched off the light and shuffled in his slippers to his bedroom. His whole life had been spent here. He knew every cobwebbed corner and cracked pane of glass. He could recall the smells of every season. The guavas that rotted and fell outside his bedroom window in the autumn. The roar of the waterfall in winter, hidden behind the verdant canopy of trees. The rutted path covered in pine needles that dropped from the tall trees on the mountain slopes. The throaty songs of the frogs in the morning as they waited for the sun to warm the muddy banks. The cold water of the dam. Their first kiss. It had been nearly sixty years. He climbed into his parents' old mahogany bed, looked at Tikkie, in her frame, and smiled as he turned off the light.



## Chapter Four

Uncle Aaron was still at the table when Susan entered the dining room. It was later than usual for him to be eating breakfast. On the sideboard, next to the toaster, was a tray of sliced, wholemeal bread, and still-warm scones. Boxes of breakfast cereals stood like sentries. A silver jug, covered with a tasselled cloth, contained cold milk. A glass bowl of fruit compote caught the morning light.

The maid stood near the door to the kitchen. She was dressed in a pale green overall, over which she wore a small frilled apron.

“Miss, do you want eggs?”

“No, thanks, Eunice. Do you eat like this every day, Uncle? I’d be as big as a house.”

“No, no. They know what I eat. This is for you, our visitor. I usually eat much earlier, but I overslept. Too much on my mind.”

“I woke up in the middle of the night too and couldn’t go back to sleep. Yes, there’s masses to sort through. I did make a start though.”

Susan stood up to go to the toaster. Eunice moved quickly from her position in the corner.

“Don’t worry, Miss, I’ll make toast. What do you want on it? Katrina told me you liked her fig jam.”

“She doesn’t miss a thing. I love it. Does she still make it?”

“Ag, no, Miss. We do it all. It took a long time for her to trust us. Even though she’s my mommy’s sister.”

Uncle Aaron waved his hand impatiently. “That’s enough, Eunice. Wait in the kitchen to take off the dishes.”

Eunice turned and left the room.

“I’d forgotten. No-one ever makes me toast, except Marc on Mother’s Day.”

“The only grandchild. Your mom and I were very happy that he carries our father’s Hebrew name.”

“Do you miss not having children and grandchildren, Uncle Aaron? Why didn’t you ever get married? I’ve seen photos and you were quite a spunk.”

“Spunk shmunk. Didn’t happen. Never too late yet, is it? Help yourself to fruit.”

Susan went to the sideboard and heaped the stewed fruit into a bowl and stirred in the yogurt. She returned to her chair and dipped her spoon into the sweet apricots and peaches.

“Tikkie seems very sweet. How come you’ve waited so long?”

“Ag, long story. Don’t know how to tell your mom. Don’t know how she’ll take it, with her health problems. Naomi’s known her since we were kids. But ...”

He stood up and left the room, returning with the photo from next to his bed.

“She was such a pretty young woman. I can see why you fell in love with her.”

Susan held up the photo.

“Still pretty, hey, but not so young. I was a fool. Wasted too many years. She’s got the cancer now, and I’m going to do the right thing by her, hey? Don’t mention it to anyone. Yet. I must get used to it myself.”

“Where does she live?”

“In the *dorp*. She has nothing to do with her nephews next door, the *mamzerim* still live there.”

They ate on in silence. Susan glanced up to look at her uncle. He seemed to be concentrating on lifting his spoon of oats to his lips. She hadn’t expected anything like this.

“Last night I was looking through old photos. From the *kas* in the passage. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Ag, no. You’re here to go through all our closets. How many skeletons will you be finding?”

“I’d completely forgotten about Uncle Shmuel. I saw him in the photos. How come he landed up here with Bobba and Zeide?”

“Eunice,” he shouted, “you can take off the table. Bring us coffee on the *stoep*.” He stood up slowly and gestured his niece toward the door and the front of the house.

“Haven’t thought about him in a long time myself.”

Uncle Aaron sat in his old wooden chair, stirred his cup and looked down the drive.

“I clearly remember the day Uncle Shmuel arrived, like it was yesterday. We came up these steps to where Ma was waiting – Dad, Naomi, Shmuel and me – all those years ago.”

“Can I come with you, Daddy?”

“Yes, my boy. Maybe I’m needing your smile and your strong little hand. And Naomitjie, you come too. But you must be a good girl.”

Aaron was pleased to be able to go in the car with him, all the way to Town, and to the docks.

His mother stayed home. She was directing the maids, cooking, making ready the spare room, for the hundredth time straightening the bedspread and smoothing the corner of the rug. The air was rich with excitement and the smells of baking cakes and simmering pumpkin.

Aaron sat in the front next to his father. The car was clean and shining and he loved its power and speed. He watched the gum trees flash by. The dust rose behind the car like a banner, waving them on as the miles slipped away. His father kept his eyes on the road. His hands on the steering wheel were confident, in their soft leather gloves. Aaron wanted to grow up to be just like his father.

There wasn’t much traffic. His mother regularly reminded them of their good fortune to own a car, and this time it was the 1947 Packard. Today, Max was quiet. Usually he’d sing on top of his lungs, old songs from home. In Yiddish, or Russian. Aaron knew all the words and his father had explained to him what they meant. Black eyes. We’ll meet in Palestine. Some songs were in Afrikaans and he understood those words too – even the rude ones. There were English songs as well. It’s a long way to Tipperary. It must be a very long way because he hadn’t heard of it and it wasn’t in his South African schools atlas. They’d all sing along, even Ma, who was shy about her broken English. Naomi would whinny like a pony, shouting out the words she knew, avoiding those she didn’t.

Or his father would tell them stories about his years as a peddler when he’d ridden a cart in the Bokkeveld. Polly. That was his horse. Gone to the knacker’s yard long time ago. How exciting those times sounded. Sometimes Aaron wished they lived like

that, a life full of adventures, but they wouldn't have had a car, his mother reminded him, and he would have had to go to boarding school when he was eight. Aaron thought that was the main reason why he liked driving with his father. There were no other distractions, he had his father's full attention and they would talk and laugh and sing.

But Max was silent today. He didn't sing, he didn't ask questions that Aaron usually couldn't answer, which, in a way, pleased him. He hated being shown up as stupid. Soon Table Mountain was in sight but Dad didn't make his regular joke about stopping.

"Can we stop for a spot of tea with the Queen, Daddy? The table is set for us with a beautiful white cloth," Naomi piped up from the back seat.

He turned from the wheel and looked at his young daughter, his hazel eyes steady.

"Not today, my children. We're going to the docks to pick up your mother's cousin. He has been through a terrible time. He lost all his family, his brothers and sisters, his own children, his wife."

"Was it in a car crash like the Versters?"

"No. It was in the war."

"What did they do wrong?"

"Nothing. It wasn't only a war between armies. They also killed innocent people. Many Jewish people were killed. The Germans hated us."

"You mean like Mr van der Poel who chased us out of his shop in Napier and wouldn't serve us?"

"Yes. But it was much worse."

"But why is he coming by boat to us?"

"We are the only family he has. Everyone else is dead."

"Then he is lucky, to have us."

"Yes. But don't talk about it. What happened to him and to all the Jews of Europe is a tragedy. But we must move on. Put the past behind us and carry on. So, no silly questions. Just remember how lucky you are to have all your family around you. Uncle Hymie and I, your mommy and her sisters."

“I promise I’ll be kind to Uncle Shmuel,” said Naomi from the back seat. “I’ll make him Marmite toast and tea and we can pretend we’re going to eat it with the Queen on top of Table Mountain.”

“And I’ll make him a telescope so he can see the enemies from a distance and then we can shoot them with my gun.”

“You are such funny children. I’m sure he’ll be very happy to meet you. But remember, he’s very sad. I don’t know how much English he speaks. Maybe only Yiddish. So you’ll have to remember yours.”

“Then let’s sing, Daddy. Let’s sing ‘*Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen*’ until we get to the docks,” Naomi said. It was a half-hearted attempt only. Soon they were all silent. Aaron was watching the lorries shudder under their loads, and the cranes blow in the wind at the building sites they passed on the outskirts of the city.

“So if you hadn’t caught the ship with Uncle Hymie to Cape Town you wouldn’t have met Mommy and we wouldn’t have been born. Maybe you would have been dead too. We are lucky.”

“Yes, my boy. I know it well.”

“I’ll be very nice to Uncle Shmuel.”

“And if Mommy gets headaches, make her cups of tea and play quietly with Naomi. You are good children.”

It was overcast and the wind chopped at the water of the harbour. Max parked the car close to the quay and waited with the others. He greeted a huddle of men standing together, wrapped in their thick coats. Ahead loomed the huge ocean liner. The children felt dwarfed by its enormity. An official sat at a table at the bottom of the gangplank. When they arrived the first class passengers were already disembarking. Aaron watched as men with shining black shoes, fine scarves flung across their shoulders strutted down the plank. Behind them followed the native boys carrying suitcases or hauling large trunks. There were women, in high heels and the latest fashions Naomi had seen in magazines. Their curls were hidden beneath silk headscarves tied under their chins. Some were holding onto the hands of their children, some on the arms of their husbands. Three young women giggled as they made their descent, pointing out Table Mountain and waving back at the officers still standing on deck.

They showed their passports to the man at the table. He had a book, a pen and a big rubber stamp that he smashed down onto their passports.

The quay was crowded. Families hugged. There were soldiers coming off now, dapper and cocky in their uniforms. A girl nearby yelled “James” and a stocky young man looked up and smiled, running down the last few rungs to rush into her waiting arms. The children watched it all, their eyes large with wonder.

The women and children and the soldiers were leaving. The gangplank was still crowded with the disembarking steerage class. There were a few children, their age, older and younger, glassy-eyed, pale, caps pulled over their brows and ears to keep off the biting cold. Women clung to their babies wrapped across their chests. Their stockings were thick and laddered. They were mainly dark-haired and with black eyes. The men, wrapped in sorrow, carried their own luggage, small tattered bundles, dented suitcases, a few trunks.

Slowly, indecisively, they moved down the gangway. Some stared up towards the mountain, others looked down into the dark grey water. They showed bits of paper to the immigration officer who studied them slowly. Then he’d call out, “Berelowitz, Cohen, Finkelstein.”

Each time he called a name, a man would come forward from the crowd on the wharf and approach the table, as if to retrieve a missing item. A few words were spoken, heads nodded and then he’d sign a form and embrace a hollow-eyed man and pick up his bag.

“Daddy, everyone is so sad. When we pick up Uncle Ivan at the station from Jo’burg everyone hugs and kisses. But these men, they look so ... frightened.” Naomi clung to her father’s hand. He looked down at her, with a shadow of a smile, and squeezed her little fingers tightly.

“My beautiful Naomi. We must make Uncle Shmuel welcome.”

The line was dwindling. Most of the passengers had been collected. Some stood waiting, looking downward and inward, clinging to their meagre possessions.

Then, “Sternberg”. Max straightened his hat and approached the official. Aaron and Naomi stayed at his side. The man the official pointed to was grey and hunched. He wore a shabby brown scarf around his neck and his flat cap was grimy. His coat was

stained and thin. He wasn't wearing socks. He stood beside the table, looking back toward the ship.

"Shmuel Kaminer, born Papille, Lithuania 1915. Sign here, Mr Sternberg."

Max signed and then shook Uncle Shmuel's hand. Clasped it. Then held out his arms and pulled the man towards him. Uncle Shmuel was taller, his frame bent forward. His arms remained woodenly at his side. Max released him, looking at this man, whose eyes stared straight ahead, toward the ship and the ocean, oblivious to Max's emotional embrace.

Max turned away and picked up the cardboard suitcase, leading the stranger toward the car. He looked at his bag, as if he thought their father was going to steal it. A broken, dirty suitcase.

"Naomi and Aaron, meet Uncle Shmuel." Naomi smiled and he just looked at her, through her, as though she wasn't there. "Welcome to South Africa, Uncle Shmuel," she recited.

He opened his mouth. At first, no sound came out, then a sound as if he were clearing his throat, testing that his vocal chords worked.

"I thank you, children. I hope you are well."

Max looked surprised, then smiled. "I didn't expect you to speak such good English. Bashele, after ten years here, still struggles with the accent."

"I will not speak German or Russian again. I will speak only English."

"Righto," Max said.

Uncle Shmuel refused to sit in the front of the car next to Max. Aaron was secretly glad. He could sit next to his father all the way home and his sister would have to make do with the smelly stranger in the back. Uncle Shmuel sat up straight in the back seat, clinging to his suitcase. Max pointed places out and explained about Donkerbos and the trip out there. Uncle Shmuel spoke very little. His responses were terse and soon Max grew quiet.

The journey home was long. Three hours. At Naomi's feet was the hamper her mother and Maria had packed. She could smell the poppy seed cake wrapped carefully in a tea towel. She asked her father if she could offer the man something to eat.

"Ask him yourself, *mamele*."

“Mister. Uncle. Do you want to eat something? My mother’s packed us apples and cake and sandwiches.”

“No, thank you.”

“Go on, have some cake. Bashe’s *mon strudel* is famous in all the Cape.”

Naomi turned to pass him a slice. His hand shot out to grab it. She watched as he clutched it in his dirty-nailed, thin-fingered hand, and then shovelled it into his mouth. There remained a scattering of poppy seed on his lip.

“Don’t stare,” their father said in Afrikaans. Aaron looked straight ahead at the long climbing road. Naomi turned back to the basket. He must be very hungry, she thought as she chose the biggest, reddest apple.

“Here, Mister Uncle. This apple is from the Van Tonder’s farm.”

“No, no,” he said, with almost a smile, but he reached for it anyway. His mouth opened wide to bite into the flesh. His teeth were yellowed. There were gaps, just like Keppie’s teeth. The juice dripped down his chin. Naomi wasn’t hungry anymore.

They climbed the mountain pass smoothly in the shiny black Packard. Max loved this stretch. He always stopped at the summit so the family could look down over False Bay and run around and have a snack. There was a special clump of trees they’d use to go to the toilet. Our secret spot, Max would always say, touching the side of his nose.

They didn’t stop that day but headed on along the plateau, away from the ocean. They drove in silence. Aaron had no excuses to turn around and look at the man. He knew his name, had practised it all morning, but couldn’t say it. He was like a man who had no name. That made him giggle. Max looked across at him sternly.

“How about a slice of cake for the pilot and his navigator?”

Aaron helped himself to a slice of cake and offered some to his father.

At last they passed through Donkerbos. It had seemed like the longest ride Aaron had ever been on. His father was withdrawn and the man in the back just sighed and burped. Aaron was glad to be in the front. There were no Europeans about. It was Saturday and they’d all be in Napier, at the market. The Coloureds were sitting in their usual place on the steps of the hotel, empty glass flagons resting beside them. His father



didn't comment, as he always did, about the *dop* system and how doling out wine rations to the Coloureds would be the end of them all.

Finally they turned up the drive to the house. The trees were bare of leaves. You could see straight into the Van Zyls' house. Mrs van Zyl was in the kitchen, pointing out something to the maid.

Then they reached *Waterval*. He loved the swoosh on the gravel as his father pulled up at the front door.

Their mother was there, at the top of the stairs. Aaron jumped out.

"Mommy, mommy, the man's here. He ate your cake. He's got no teeth."

Max looked at him and he blushed. Naomi started to laugh and he giggled.

"Go inside, you two." Aaron grabbed his sister's hand and they ran down the passage to the kitchen, away from the man and his darkness, to the warm kitchen where Katrina would have some cold milk waiting. Down the passage the children could hear their parents' voices, soft, and they could hear their mother crying. They sat in the kitchen for a long time.

Aaron looked at his watch. They had things to do that day.

"A strange man, Shmuel. We'd never met anyone like him. A survivor. The holocaust was so distant from the Cape. Lived with us until he died. Naomi and I, we laughed at him. How cruel kids can be. He only lived a half life, you know. Lost everyone and everything. Looked different, spoke different. We never found out what happened to him and his family. Everyone just put it behind them. Moved on. I think they attacked Uncle Shmuel."

"Who?" Susan looked down at her nails.

"The Van Zyl boys. Tikkie's brothers. Funny how you forget incidents. Never thought about it really, but once Uncle Shmuel had to get his head stitched. Katrina did it, he wouldn't go to the doctor. Said he'd walked into a tree. But my folks didn't believe him. Very upset about it, they were. Thought he was beaten up by the local fascist gang. They were still around, even after the end of the war. Those Van Zyls were always trouble. I'm sure they were grey shirts. Beat him up."

Susan stared out towards the *kloof* and the river. Her uncle looked at her.

“And another strange thing Mom told me about much later. Not too long after he cut his head open, Katrina had her baby – Josephus. Story was that Shmuel was the father. I couldn’t believe it, but Mom was adamant. Who would have thought, hey?”

Susan stood up, grabbed her cup and went inside. She had to run down the passage to get to the toilet in time. After she rinsed her mouth and spat out the water, she stared at her face in the mirror. The rings beneath her eyes were dark and she noticed a small tremor in a muscle below her cheekbone. I should never have come back, she thought. I should have left all this behind. Forever.

She sighed, splashed water on her face and returned to her uncle who was waiting at the front door, rattling the car keys impatiently in his hand.

## Chapter Five

Katrina felt strange being back in the maids' rooms at the old house. Back in her old bed that Eunice, her niece, had given her for the night. But she hadn't slept. She hadn't wanted to come, but she couldn't refuse old Master Aaron's request. He thought she'd like to see Susan again. She clicked her tongue. Her back was playing up and her arthritis was bad. All because Miss Susan was back. She stretched out, listening to the noises from the kitchen and the yard, the cars coming and going.

The day before, when Susan had arrived, she'd sat silently in her chair, waiting, clasping and unclasping her hands. She gazed at the floor, the distant corner, oblivious of the stained, peeling lino, the crumbs caught behind the dresser leg and the layer of dust on the skirting board. Her days of scrubbing on all fours were behind her. Yet she was waiting in the kitchen. She was still a maid in this house, not a visitor, even though she had stopped working here in 1988. The clock near the door ticked loudly, as it had always done. Keeping time, marking time, passing time. Meals to be cooked, washing to be hung, beds to be made. The perpetual tick, the pointing hand. Do this now, do that later.

They would be arriving soon. After so many years, she'd be back. Katrina's grey dress was covered by an apron. Her thick brown ankles were rooted in her running shoes, hand-me-downs from one of her nieces. *Lekker* and comfortable. And you could wash them. Her tired feet, finally at rest in these ugly shoes. She tugged at her pale blue head scarf, making sure her white hair was hidden. Pale blue with blue and yellow flowers, two blues, one like the sky before the sun sets, the other like the sea when the clouds are billowing. The label said it was real silk. She'd had it for so long now but it was still like new. A present, wrapped in tissue paper. She had never got used to it, how he gave her things, little gifts. *Shmatters*, rags, junk, Madam would probably have called them, but she loved each one of them.

She looked at the clock again. Miss Susan would be here soon. Miss Susan who had taken away the most precious gift he had given her. When they had found her son's body at the bottom of the dam, she knew. When Miss Susan ran back to Town so quickly, she knew.

She knew they'd find him. She'd begged the Master to call the police. It wasn't normal. He'd always been a good boy. He never went off without telling her. And now Miss Susan was coming back, full of laughter and bubbles, like the surface of the milk before the cream's been skimmed. After leaving all the questions unanswered. But Katrina knew the answers. She couldn't bear to go outside to greet her. Let the others stand and smile and bow. She'd be here, in the kitchen, waiting. What were a few minutes more?

When she heard that Susan was coming back, her nightmares returned and her anger hummed, making it hard for her to swallow, just like it had been then. Susan would be here any minute, touching the door knobs Katrina had once polished, sleeping between the sheets she had washed so many times. Coming back to stir up the past that had never settled.

It had been here, in her kitchen, still a young woman, the first time she'd met Shmuel. Just like a native, he had stood at the door. Stooped and dirty, his face dark with shadows.

In the weeks before Shmuel's arrival, Madam had been in a complete state. Since they heard that her cousin was coming from home, she made the girls scrub everything, and cook, and clean again. She and Master Max had sat up until late talking in their Yiddish so no one could understand. Katrina didn't know what to expect but with him was coming trouble, she was sure. Madam called them together, all the maids and boys, and told them that her cousin would be moving in. He'd been in the war and treated very badly and that they must treat him with kindness. They talked about it afterwards. They couldn't imagine how a Jew could be poor and in trouble. But as he stood in the doorway of her kitchen, Katrina understood.

The house was silent when Master Max arrived with the stranger. Little Naomi was jumping about like a rabbit but soon calmed down. They showed him his room and then took him to see the rest of the house.

She turned from the stove when she heard their voices behind her. A tramp. Between Madam and Master stood a tramp, a European, his large frame stooped like an old man's, shabby, his shoes tied with string. His coat was ragged, streaked with dust and

grime. She stared. The only white man she'd ever seen like that was *Mal* Botha, a mad man who walked across the valley with a big stick and all the girls ran from him. Then she saw his eyes, the sad grey eyes that stared dead from under his cap. The eyes of someone who had seen too much.

"This is Master Shmuel, Katrina. Katrina's a good girl, she'll look after you. You hear, Katrina?"

"Yes, Madam. The water's hot, Madam. He can have a bath. There's a towel on his bed and soap in the bathroom."

"Thank you, Katrina," said Master Max.

They turned to leave, but he stood there. He was staring at the fruit bowl, on the kitchen dresser. Apples, bananas, oranges; they always had fruit.

"We'll have tea in an hour."

They spoke to him slowly, in English, as if to a child. He nodded. He turned toward Katrina once more, touched his cap, and followed them back down the passage.

The tank rattled as the hot water filled the bath. Young Aaron came into the kitchen.

"Did you see his teeth, Katrina? All brown and rotten. And he smelled."

"Don't be rude, Master Aaron. He's been in the war. Go finish reading the comics and tell me what's happened."

Later, Madam wandered back into the kitchen, shaking her head. She looked through her recipes, neatly written in her well worn, stained book.

"What can I make him? What can we do? He's in such a state. I'm in such *tumul*. Everything is turned upside down."

"Yes, Madam. He needs clothes, Madam. He's dressed like a *Hotnot*. I asked for his washing but he shook his head. I don't think he has any other clothes, Madam, except what he's standing in. And the mess he left the bathroom. Water everywhere. No manners, Madam. Just like a Bantu, I'm telling you."

Madam rubbed her hands together.

"What to do, what to do. Tomorrow he'll go to the shop with Master and get some nice clothes. You must get Keppie to burn all his stuff. Do you think he's got lice? What to do, what to do. Feed him, Katrina. Lots of food."

“Yes, Madam.”

He stayed in his room all day, except when Madam or Master knocked on his door to join them to eat.

Next morning Katrina was in the yard feeding the dogs. The house was still in darkness. The servants’ quarters were dimly lit and the sounds of their voices and the splashing at the tap broke the silence of the dawn. She went inside to heat the water. A shadow flickered near the pantry. She started.

“Who’s there? Stompie? What you doing in Madam’s pantry?”

It wasn’t the boy. From the pantry emerged the old man, a trickle of jam at the side of his mouth.

“Master Shmool. Ag, it’s alright, Master. Eat what you want. But you gave me a big fright. You can switch on the lights, it’s your house, do what you want.”

She smiled at him, but he stood still, like a deer caught in the headlights of a *bakkie* on the road.

“Sit, Master Shmool. I’ll make some coffee. Lots of sugar, hey?”

He nodded, touched his hair, where his cap normally rested. He was fully dressed, in his coat, wearing a pair of Master Max’s trousers, too short and tied around the waist with one of Master Max’s old belts.

He sat down at the table, the room filling with the smell of the coffee boiling in the little pot on the stove. Once again, he stared at the fruit bowl.

“Help yourself, Master.”

She muttered to herself in Afrikaans. She didn’t have all day to waste.

“What? What?”

“Do you understand Afrikaans?” She’d only heard them speaking English.

“I used to speak many languages. Yiddish, German, Russian. Now, I speak only English. But I still remember.”

“We’ll get along fine then, Master Shmool.”

“Not Master, please. Not Master. Shmuel.”

She sliced an orange into segments and left them on a plate for him. Then she got up and pulled a beaten pot onto the stove and poured the maize meal in, adding water, then salt. The old man tore the skin from the quarters and shoved them into his mouth,

sucking hard. She watched him as she stirred, smiling. She took four enamel bowls from under the sink and piled the porridge into them and yelled out the back door.

“Hot *mieliepap*. Come on you lazy so and sos. Get your breakfast.”

She took the spoons that stood upright in an enamel mug and handed them to the sleepy servants who shuffled in from outside and poured their tea from the big teapot on the stove. They saw the old man and took their bowls and mugs back outside. Shmuel beckoned to them.

“Sit, sit. Is cold outside.” He rubbed his hands.

“No, Master. They don’t eat in the house.”

He looked at her. Then he looked at the pot.

“Master, that’s *mieliepap*. It’s only for us. Ag, never mind.” She went to the cupboard and took out a china bowl, and a spoon from the drawer.

“No. No,” he said as he reached for an enamel bowl.

“This is South Africa, Master. We eat different, we use different plates. That’s how it is.”

He held on to his bowl.

“Alright, Master, alright. Eat out of our chipped bowls but don’t let Madam see.”

She smiled. She went to the pantry and brought out a jug of milk, covered with a cloth doily, and poured some milk onto his *pap*.

“And you? You have milk?”

“Why not,” she smiled again and made sure she got the cream from the top.

“But don’t tell Madam.”

“What’s this?” Madam came into the kitchen, her pink dressing gown wrapped tightly, her hair in curlers covered by a scarf. “What’s going on? Shmuel, you’re up early. I’m glad to see Katrina is looking after you. But why are you eating from the maids’ bowls? *Pap*? We don’t eat *mieliepap*.”

“Is good. Katrina is very good.” He licked the remnants from his spoon.

“Katrina, please hurry up and bring Master his coffee. You’re running late already.” She looked at the clock. “What to do. Everything is upside down. I didn’t sleep a wink.”

“At least he’s eating, Bashele. Morning all.” Master Max walked into the kitchen, dressed in a leather jacket and sturdy boots.

“Do you want to go for a walk, Shmuel? Come with me up the *kloof*. From there you can see the whole valley. I’ll get the dog.”

Master went to the yard. Blitz jumped up when he saw his master coming and barked.

“Down, Blitz, heel, boy.” Blitz licked Max’s face and bounded round. Shmuel shuffled to the corner. His hands shook as he covered his face.

“Max, Max. Take that dog out. Can’t you see, Blitz is frightening Shmuel. Down, *hund*. It’s alright, Shmuel, he’s just being friendly. Max, get rid of the *vershtunkende hund*.”

Madam shook her head. The two men headed off. She turned back down the passage and tried to open the door to Shmuel’s room. It was locked.

“So many secrets. But no key.” She shook her head and went into her bedroom, pulling the scarf from her curlers.

After that first morning, Katrina served Shmuel his porridge in the kitchen every day at five thirty. At first, he beckoned the others to come inside but Katrina growled, and they remained outside on the bench scraping their bowls, drinking steaming tea, clearing their throats and coughing, rolling their first cigarettes for the day.

The children too got used to the stranger, how he tore at the *wors* with his teeth, his broken, discoloured teeth. One morning when Blitz had bounded into the kitchen, Shmuel jumped up in fright and ran to the corner, where he cowered. Aaron giggled. His father clipped his ear.

“Show your uncle more respect.”

“And keep the bloody dog outside, children,” Madam shouted.

Naomi and Aaron stopped going out onto the front *stoep*, where he had taken to sitting on the rocking chair, drawing on his cigarette, reading the *Cape Times*, already few days old, after Max had finished with it. Or staring out across the valley, his eyes open but not seeing.



“The exercise, and Katrina’s cooking. They’re helping. And he doesn’t look like an old man anymore. I can’t believe he’s younger than you,” Master winked at his wife one Saturday afternoon as they watched Shmuel leave the garden on the path to the mountains, with a stick and an orange. He’d go off for hours, sometimes bringing back a leaf or flower, for Keppie, the gardener, to identify. He was getting stronger and his cheeks were no longer pale as paper.

“But he still never smiles. And he doesn’t speak.” Master looked at her, put his arm around her waist and they left the kitchen together.

They got used to his silences, his grey eyes that focussed on images they couldn’t see. Katrina saw Madam’s relief when he was outside, in his room, or at the kitchen table where she didn’t have to be with him, as a constant reminder of sadness and darkness, of places they wanted to forget. She left it to Katrina to make him tea, put out plates of rusks and biscuits and keep him out of the children’s way.

It was a quiet afternoon, and the kitchen was cool. Katrina was sitting in her usual chair, the tray of silver on the table next to her. Her head was tilted towards her chest, her eyes closed. She didn’t hear Shmuel as he came in through the open back door. She started when she heard the water gush from the tap. There he was, his back to her, wiping his face on a dish cloth. Katrina stood up and went over to him at the sink. The water splashed red onto the white porcelain. She put her hand on his shoulder. He froze.

“What happened, Master Shmuel? You cut your head open.”

“It’s nothing. A branch. I didn’t see. A scratch.”

“Let me look. No, Master, it’s deep. Wait, sit there. I fetch Madam’s sewing basket.”

He sat on the hard chair, hand to his forehead, which had begun to throb.

“Now you sit quiet, Master Shmuel. It will hurt, but only a little. And Madam told me you seen plenty pain. Oh sorry, Master, I shouldn’t say such things ...”

He watched as she selected a needle and thick black cotton. She held the needle to the hot plate of the stove. She gave him a wooden spoon.

“Now, you hold tight onto that spoon. If it gets too sore, hit your leg, Master, not me!”

Her fingers moved deftly in front of his eyes. She dabbed the cut with spirits. It stung and his eyes smarted.

“That is the most it will hurt, I promise, Master.”

Her hands were solid and strong, worn and dry, but her touch was gentle. His eyes were pinched closed as she tugged at his skin. She looked down. His shirt was torn and there were bruises on his knuckles and hand. It couldn't be a tree. It must have been the Van Zyl boys and their gang. She knew, first hand, how they treated the Coloureds, and she'd overheard Master talking about how much they hated the Jews. She clicked her tongue.

“There, Master Shmuel, all done. I get some leaves from the garden and you'll be good as new.”

She returned to the kitchen, held the aloe leaves under the tap and tore them into pieces. She took a strip of bandage from the drawer and bound the poultice round his head.

“Don't laugh too much. It will hurt. Sorry, Master Shmuel, that was not kind. I never see you laugh.”

“I did laugh. The world was full of joking. No more. No-one to laugh with. They are all gone, Katrina.”

“Master Max told me about Master Hitler. We have many bad men in South Africa too. They hate us. And the Jews. Master Max told me. You must be careful.”

He looked at her and then at his scraped knuckles.

She turned away. “Sit still while I boil the kettle and make us some tea.”

Katrina took her chipped enamel mug from the cupboard below the sink.

“No, no, Katrina. Today we drink from the same cups.” He went to the dresser and took two cups from the hooks, two saucers and two side plates.

“Hai, Master Shmuel.”

But she poured her milky tea into the delicate china cup and put the rusks on their side plates. They sat together in silence, dunking their rusks in their tea, sucking on the crumbs and smiling at each other.

That Friday the family drove to Napier for the weekend. A *bar mitzvah*. Shmuel stayed behind. He insisted he didn't need to see a doctor and he wouldn't go to the synagogue. The servants were delighted when these trips took place. It meant that Katrina was left on her own to look after the house while they were given permission to join their families in the township for the weekend.

The sun was already bright as Katrina lay stretched out on her narrow bed, leafing through one of Madam's magazines. She looked at the pictures of the Queen of England, with her young children in their castle, wearing a fur coat and a crown with diamonds. The knock at the door was light. No-one knocked like that.

He stood on the concrete step, a bunch of flowers from the garden in his hands. She didn't know what their names were, white people's flowers.

"They are for you, Katrina. To thank you."

He stood there, awkwardly. She held onto the door handle. No white person had ever been in her tiny room, with its bed and chair and the packing crate table, upon which rested a paraffin lamp and a bottle of cologne Madam hadn't liked.

"Do you have a ... a ...?"

She laughed and took a chipped glass, one of Madam's old ones, from the crate.

"A vase. No, only a glass."

He was looking into the room.

"It is very kind, Master Shmuel. To pick me flowers. But you shouldn't come to my room. What would Madam say?"

"I'm sorry if I shame you."

He moved from one foot to the other.

"I'll get some water." She went out to the yard to the tap and bucket, behind a sheet of corrugated iron. She came back with the glass filled with water. He was still waiting on the step. She took the flowers and squeezed them into the glass and put it down next to her lamp.

"Next time I bring you a vase."

"No, no, Master. You are too kind to me."

"You have looked after me. For that I should repay you."

“Madam wouldn’t like it that you came here. The children aren’t allowed in our yard.”

“But you have shown me kindness.”

He pointed to a drawing above the bed. The only picture on the bare brick wall.

“Where is that?” He moved inside the room and Katrina clenched her fists at her side, waiting.

“My uncle drew that. It’s the place we come from, the Cedarberg Mountains. Purple mountains, my uncle says. That’s my mother’s place. I have never been there.”

“It’s beautiful, Katrina. Where I come from is flat and cold and the fog comes in from the sea. It is winter most of the year.”

He sat on the bed, studying the picture.

“Master, you shouldn’t, you shouldn’t be sitting on a maid’s bed.”

He didn’t move.

“You shouldn’t call me Master.”

“Madam wouldn’t like to hear you speak like that. She would be angry.”

“Katrina, when I am with you, you are not servant, you are a woman with gentle hands, full of loving-kindness.”

He took her fingers and drew them across the raw scar on his forehead and then drew them to his lips.

“No, Master, no.”

She pulled away and closed her eyes, waiting, for the slap or the tug or the push. Then, when nothing happened, she opened them and saw tears slipping down his cheeks. He pulled himself up from the bed and shuffled out the room.

“I’m sorry, Katrina.” He closed the door behind him, gently.

Katrina kept to her room until it was dark. The lights were out in the house. She pulled on her shoes and crossed the yard to the back door. The stove was cold. She lit the logs and put the kettle on top, went to the bread bin and took out the heel of a loaf. Then she switched on the light. There, in the centre of the table was a green glass vase, as pretty as anything Madam had.

She sat in her chair and stared, watching the light catching the crystal. Then he was in the doorway, almost hiding in the gloom.

“Oh Master Shmuel, you shouldn’t have ...”

“You like? It is pretty?”

Katrina smiled, this time it was her eyes that filled with tears.

“Master, I have never been given such a pretty thing in my whole life.”

She wasn’t scared, she realised, as he stood at the door. He didn’t move. He stood waiting.

“We’ll have tea?”

“There’s some cold roast beef for you, Master.”

“Please, my name is Shmuel. They used to call me Shmulik. Easier, eh?”

“Shmoo lik. Yes, easier.”

“Can we eat together? We can share the food.” She said nothing.

When they had finished their meal Katrina put the dishes in the sink.

“I have something to show you.” She walked quickly from the kitchen and returned with a shirt box, tied with string.

“Look, sir. Here are more of my uncle’s drawings. They are all I have. My mother gave them to me after Uncle died. My sisters didn’t like them, so I kept them all.”

They sat beside one another at the table. Katrina pointed out the *kloofs* and rivers her uncle had named. She told him the stories he had told her and her sisters. Then she went to the sink for a glass of water. She came back, to find him staring at the stove, staring at nothing.

“Master ... Shmoo lik ... you don’t want to hear my stories, do you?”

He turned to look at her.

“You have your drawings. Of my home, I have nothing. It is all gone. Wiped out. I can never go back. I’m sorry,” he said and he got up, touching his scar as he turned to go. He touched it often, Katrina thought, as she watched him leave the room.

Katrina slept late the next morning. There was nothing to be done in the big house, but she put on her clean overall and touched her wrists with her precious eau de cologne. Yet she hoped that the foreigner would be out by the time she opened the back door. This time the fire in the stove was blazing and the porridge was cooked, waiting in the pot.

He was seated at the table, a large atlas open in front of him.

“I wanted to show you where I come from.” Katrina had never seen inside this book before. He named all the countries and seas as he drew his finger along a line from the Baltic Sea all the way around Europe, down to the tip of Africa.

“A very long way.” Then he opened to a page which he said was South Africa, surrounded by two oceans. He pointed to Napier. Katrina stared at the page. She had never seen her place laid out like this as a map before.

“Donkerbos isn’t on the map, it’s too small.”

“And where is Worcester? I know how long it takes to get there,” Katrina asked. Shmuel pointed out the town to her.

She nodded. “Hai, it makes my head hurt to think about how far you are from your family. Many many weeks, in a boat.”

“Family? I have no family. Only the Sternbergs. They are all that remain.”

His grey eyes locked again, lost in a place that she couldn’t reach. She took his hand between her own and held it, stroking it as she would Naomi’s or Aaron’s when they hurt themselves. He looked at her and pulled her closer. He touched her neck, moving his fingers underneath her scarf.

“No Master, you mustn’t see my hair. It is ugly, not like white people’s. Please.”

But he continued, winding his finger round her curls, undoing the *doek* that was wrapped around her head. She could smell his sweat as he leaned over her. She was frozen with fear and yet, she wanted him to touch her. His face was against her cheek, against her chest. He moaned and clung to her, kneeling as she sat on the kitchen chair. He sighed and his body was weightless against hers.

“I’m only a maid, but if you want a girl ... I’m clean.”

He mumbled in Yiddish. She looked into his eyes, dark pools that had no bottom. Slowly she unbuttoned her overall, took his hand and placed it on her nipple.

“I can’t read, the soles of my feet are hard from walking, but inside me, there is warmth.”

“I had a wife, Esther. I had two daughters, Malka and Sorrela. All gone. How can I find comfort in another woman?”

She unbuttoned his trousers and put her hand inside.

“God isn’t watching.”

“There is no god,” he said as he pulled her towards him.

Katrina moved the hot water bottle to the small of her back. It was soon after he had given her the scarf that she knew she was pregnant. She kept her secret until it could be hidden no longer, but told no-one who the father was. Madam knew, as soon as she saw her grey-eyed baby boy, wrapped in a blanket. And so did he.

“What will you call him?” Shmuel asked, touching him gently on the cheek.

“I’ll call him after my uncle. Josephus.”

“A fine name. May he grow into a fine man.”

But he hadn’t, had he? Josephus was gone, drowned in the dam. And now Susan was back. Same as ever. Older, like Josephus would have been, and with a child of her own, Katrina thought bitterly. Just as she had done every night before she fell asleep, she said a prayer for her son. She lay there, waiting for the morning rush to die down in the house, praying that all her questions would be answered soon.

## Chapter Six

The café was more of an old-fashioned milk bar. Three metal tables with rickety plastic chairs. A metal sugar bowl and spoon, a bottle of tomato sauce and a container of paper napkins on each. On the wall a blackboard menu with the fillings for sandwiches, on white, whole wheat bread or rolls. Tea, coffee, Coke or Fanta. Opposite was the counter, with a refrigerated section that hummed, half a *melkert*, a chocolate cake and an apple pie on display. A young girl stood behind the counter, leafing through the pages of *Rooi Rose*. The radio was on, loud, with morning requests.

There was only one customer. Tikkie dragged the spoon around her white mug again and again. She looked up expectantly as people walked past the plate glass window. A navy jacket hung over the back of her chair. It matched the straw hat with a pink bow that she wore at a jaunty angle. Her pink cardigan with a deeper purple leaf pattern was handmade. Beside her was a large straw bag. A pair of knitting needles poked out from it. Around her neck was a delicate gold chain. When she tired of stirring her coffee, her hand reached to her throat and the little cross that dangled from the chain.

She lifted the mug to her lips. The pink nail polish matched her pearly lipstick. Just then, the door opened, with a tinkling of beads and bells. Aaron entered briskly, ahead of Susan. Her eyes were red and dark ringed. She slowly pulled the door closed behind her, as if reluctant to leave the world outside.

“Hello, Tikkie.” Aaron walked towards her, put his hand on her arm.

“I thought we should start again, Susan, if you don’t mind.”

“No, I’m sorry about last night. I was just over-tired. And I was taken by surprise. About you guys.”

The blonde girl looked up from the counter. “You have to order from here. No table service.”

Uncle Aaron went over.

“I’ll have a coffee, thanks, Uncle. Do they do cappuccino?”

“This is Donkerbos, Susan. But the cake is homemade.”

“Then I’ll have to have a slice of the *melkert*, hey.”

“You won’t regret it,” Tikkie smiled.



The coffees and cake were brought across and placed on the table with a clatter.

“Yum. I haven’t had *melktert* since ...”

Susan busied herself with the sugar and the cake fork.

“I’m sorry about last night,” Susan repeated. “This whole thing must be very hard on you.”

So many things had changed, turned upside down. Josephus was her cousin. The servants ignored her. Even her uncle had a love life. Why had she bothered to come back? Not even a decent coffee. But the *melktert* was delicious.

Uncle Aaron stood up.

“I’m off to the bank.”

He touched Tikkie gently on her arm again as he left. Susan glanced up as he chatted with the blonde girl and paid her. The door jangled as he closed it behind him.

“How come you’ve never been back before?”

“It didn’t feel right, until the overthrow of apartheid.”

“Overthrow? We gave it away, girlie. We struggled out here before and after your overthrow, while your type swanned around overseas. That’s the difference between us *boere* and you folk. We built this country. It is our home and we didn’t run away. We don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“It wasn’t as simple as that.”

“No? Maybe there were other things to run away from. When you throw a stone in a dam the ripples go on and on.”

Susan’s eyes stayed on her plate, as she crushed the remaining flakes of pastry with her fork. Tikkie drew in her breath.

“I’m sorry, Susan, I don’t want to argue with you. I would like us to get on. But I, we, feel very strongly about this, you know. We had no choice. We built this land up from nothing. There are good *boere*, you know. My brothers, my nephews, not everyone is like them. My other nephew Tertius, what we call the late lamb, now he’s a good boy. He works with African people in the office. In Bloemfontein. He’s moving on. It’s hard, you know. Very hard.”

The older woman shook her head. Then she smiled at Susan. “And look at your uncle and me. Breaking down apartheid right here in Donkerbos.”

Susan looked up, grateful that Tikkie had moved the conversation on. “How did you get to know my uncle? I mean ...”

“Aaron? We were teenagers. We weren’t strong enough to make it work, at that time. Maybe we could have. Who knows? But now, there’s no-one left to point fingers and judge. So why not enjoy our last years together?”

The girl came over from behind her counter.

“Anything else?”

“No, thanks.”

“Who lives in the house?”

“My nephews – Kobie and Petrus. Kobus’s boys. I keep away from them. They’re just like my brothers. Full of hate. They found an excuse to blame your family for anything that went wrong in their lives.”

“And now?”

“Those boys inherited their father’s bitterness. And his father before him, Lord forgive me. My nephews – grown men but, oh, they don’t behave like adults. They do deals with the Coloureds from the townships and African gangsters from the squatter camps in Town. They’ve always been wild. And stupid. Except for Tertius, and he keeps well away from them.”

“They were all much older than me. I was always scared of them.”

“Ja, well, the stakes have got higher, with those boys.”

Susan zipped her bag and tucked it under her arm. She looked at her watch, hoping her uncle would return soon. The smallness of the café, the stillness of the town beyond the window and the lowness of the sky hung over her.

“You’ve got a boy, Aaron tells me.”

“Yes. Marc is nearly fifteen. He’s with his dad while I’m away.”

“Aren’t you married?”

“No. It never happened. And I’m glad, ’cause we aren’t together anymore.”

“Maybe that would have kept you together? The matrimonial vows.”

“I don’t think so. You and Uncle weren’t married, but something’s lasted, hasn’t it? I don’t think it’s got much to do with legalities.”

“When I was young, you did as you were told, you made the most of it.”

“Is that what you did?”

“Yes. But my husband was young when he passed away. Many years ago.”

Tikkie fell silent, looking down at her empty cup.

“Do you have any children?”

“I had a little baby. A girl. She lived for four days.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I never even had a photo of her. It wasn’t like today, where the father watches the baby coming out and they video the whole bloody business. No, I don’t have a picture, except in my mind.”

“That is sad. My wallet is full of photos of my boy, Marc. And I can phone him when I want to speak to him.”

“Technology. With all the tests and medicines they have today, maybe my baby could have survived. It took me so long to fall pregnant. She was very small, she could have fitted in a shoe box. Willem built a cradle when he found out I was expecting. I made pretty her corner of our bedroom. I embroidered a tapestry for her. God Bless this Child. After she breathed no more I took it from the wall and laid it in the coffin with her. I never did needlepoint again.

“She was born with long dark strands of hair. Before they took her from me I snipped a lock and tied it with thread. It is still in the little mother of pearl box Willem had bought for me. Her name was Anneliese, such a pretty name, don’t you think?”

She poured the dregs from the teapot into her cup and took a sip.

“Why am I telling you all this?” She looked at Susan. “There are no women in my family. I really want us to get on.” She took Susan’s hand. Susan was surprised how warm and strong her grip was. She liked it.

Tikkie continued speaking. “I knitted booties and mittens and a matinee jacket, all in white. I was going to buy ribbon after the birth to thread through – pink if it was a girl, blue for a boy. I chose her name. If it had been a boy, he would have been Karel, after Willem’s father and grandfather. She had a long neck, like a stem, and her small head, the flower. The midwife, Mrs Cronje, knew something was wrong, from her breathing and her colour. Every breath was a struggle. I held her to my breast, my sore breasts bursting with milk that she couldn’t drink.

“Mrs Cronje, she called the doctor. So we knew it was serious. We had no money for doctors. He came and examined her. He shook his head and muttered with Mrs Cronje. I cried and asked what was wrong with my little baby and he said it was in God’s hands. She had such weak little lungs. I washed her and dressed her and held her close to me all those days, those few days. She didn’t sleep. She coughed and cried, like a wet kitten, and her little lips moved but she wouldn’t drink. We fed her with a teaspoon but it just trickled out the corner of her mouth and she’d cough even worse.”

Tikkie opened her straw bag and took out an embroidered hankie. She touched it to the corners of her eyes.

“I lay on my bed, exhausted, clinging to her, those long nights. Willem was always out, at work or at the hotel, scared to be there when her time should come.

“She left us in the dark of the night. Her breathing grew shallower, then further apart. Her tiny body thrashed against mine, fighting for the last drop of air. Her little head lolled on its long stem. Willem must have been asleep in the front room. I lay with her, holding her to me. Finally I fell asleep and woke up when Willem was looking for his boots.

“‘Willem,’ I screamed at him. ‘She’s gone.’

“He looked at me like I was the devil, like I had blown out the little flame of her life. ‘How do I know you didn’t roll on top of her?’”

Susan’s hand flew to her mouth. “My god, what a bastard.”

“After that, I never spoke a single word to him. We buried her together. We slept in our twin beds, never touching, never talking. I cooked his breakfast and his supper and made him sandwiches every day to take to the lumber yard. One afternoon that winter the foreman knocked on the door. He came in and told me there had been an accident. Willem had been killed. He told me it had been instant. ‘He never knew what hit him, Mrs Prinsloo.’”

“He was buried alongside our baby. After the funeral I stood alone at his graveside, and cried. Cried for the baby, for my foolishness, for his fear. He hadn’t meant it. He was scared for me, for himself. We were so young, we didn’t know how to deal with pain. I had lost everything because of my stubbornness.”

She dabbed her eyes with the hankie. Susan took her hand.

“We all make mistakes,” Susan said, “things we find hard to live with.”

They sat in silence.

“I’m not with Marc’s father anymore. We split up, for the last time, a few weeks ago. I felt that he’d saved my life, that I owed him for it. But that can’t sustain a relationship, can it? Guilt and indebtedness. A child can’t do it either. Marc will be happier with us apart, ultimately, I’m sure. I wonder what’s keeping Uncle Aaron.”

“Nothing in particular. He does things at his own pace. I should know, shouldn’t I?”

Tikkie laughed, a girlish giggle, and Susan smiled.

“So you know my mother too, Mrs Prinsloo?”

“Tikkie, please. Yes, I’ve known your family since I was born. Your grandmother and my mother were friends, did you know that? Out of desperation, I should think. They were both new to town. Unhappy young married ladies who lived next door to each other. Both disliked by most of the people in the district. But your mommy had everything of the best. I got the hand-me-downs she didn’t want. Your grandfather spoiled her. Aaron was shy, gawky even, but very funny. My brothers hated him. They bullied him mercilessly. It made my heart burst. After my mother died, I only saw your family at the shops in town or at the waterhole. In the beginning, your grandmother was kind. It must have been hard, coming round to our house, to be taunted by my father and the boys. So she stopped. And your mom didn’t like having to be polite to me – Naomi treated me worse than the maids. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t speak so of her.

“But Aaron was always nice to me. Maybe it was because his sister hated me so much. So you see, it could never have worked, back then. I married Willem.”

“I wonder if that is why Uncle Aaron never got married.”

“Who knows? He was always a quiet one, Aaron. And slow to act, hey? After Willem died, I got a job in the bank. It was only open three days a week. In those days there weren’t many white women looking for work. Even though we lived in the same small *dorp*, I hardly ever bumped into Aaron. Maybe he hid round the corner when he saw me coming. Then his bookkeeper was off having a baby. So he started coming in to the bank with the deposit bag.”

She giggled again. "The first time he came to my counter he blushed. All the way down to his collar, bright red. Then he stammered and asked how I was.

"It got easier after that. He asked me questions. Then he started coming just before lunchtime and maybe a month after that, he asked where I ate my lunch. I always went home, but I told him I sat in the park near the station. Anyway, he probably knew. He most likely watched me every day from the shop.

"Next time he came in he had a bag with him, with a bunch of bananas. He asked if I wanted to go to the park and eat them. They were a present from some traveller visiting his shop."

"That sounds just like Uncle Aaron."

"Your uncle is a very generous man, Susan," Tikkie responded quickly.

"Sorry. I'm sure he is."

"He's just cautious," Tikkie smiled again. "It took him months to hold my hand or anything. And I was still an attractive young widow then, believe me. I had blokes visiting. Farmers from the district. I wasn't interested in any of them."

"Only my uncle."

"He was different. He listened to me. He remembered things I told him. And he made me laugh a lot. I was lonely. Everyone had husbands and children and all I had was my little job and my little rented house. I used to go to church but then I stopped because the ladies ignored me. Maybe because I always won the knitting section at the Women's Federation events. No, I came from rubbish. No-one in town respected us. And my brothers didn't want to see me after I stopped lending them money because they never paid me back. At the time your uncle appeared, I was considering a transfer to the Worcester branch. But I didn't want to leave the cemetery. There would be no-one to tend the graves of my baby and my husband."

"But why has it taken so long for him to propose to you?"

"He's a very traditional man, your uncle. I had to get sick before he did anything."

"Oh."

"I had treatment for cancer."

“Yes, I’m sorry. Uncle Aaron told me yesterday. Foolish man, to waste the best years of his life.”

Tikkie looked at her. “Life wasn’t as easy or straightforward as it is now. Your grandparents would have turned Aaron out. He would never have been able to see his family again. I also didn’t understand that properly when I was a young girl, but I see it now. He would have lost his livelihood at the shop, his inheritance. They worked hard to build up a life out here for their children. It would have destroyed them all. Your grandmother hated Donkerbos. She wanted to live in Town. But she knew that all their sacrifices were for the good of the children.”

“But how happy was his life, having made that decision?”

“Who can tell? We don’t have the miracle of hindsight. But at least we are together now.”

“And what about your family?”

Tikkie laughed. “Well, they would have murdered me. End of story. I was broken-hearted but I had a future plotted out. I was lucky that someone had agreed to marry me. I don’t know, maybe he owed my brothers for something. Do you know how it made me feel that someone like Aaron showed interest in me? He didn’t want anything, he just liked to make me laugh. He was very funny. He didn’t try to hurt me or put me down. He made feel like a princess. I was a princess. It lasted a summer. But they were the happiest months in my life. Until now.

“It was just poverty and bitterness in my house. I think my mother was pregnant when she got married. I was close to her as a little girl, but she was so ashamed she kept me at a distance. She was ashamed of her husband in front of her own children. And we saw what was happening across the hedge at the Sternberg’s. Your place. How could we not compare it with our life? And that made my brothers even angrier. When my brothers let down the tyres of your grandfather’s new car, my father laughed and gave them beer.

“It was so easy for my brothers to hate your mommy and Aaron. They beat Aaron up whenever they could get away with it. All the time. My brother Kobus really fell for your mommy, when she was a girl. She was very pretty, like a doll. She had no time for him. It showed. It made him even more resentful.”

The bell at the door tinkled.

“Sorry I took so long. Things ...” Aaron fluttered his hand down to his side.

“Maybe I should get back to the house and get started. How about I attack your parents’ cupboards?”

They left the milk bar together. Susan looked up, the quietness of the morning disturbed by a loud hooting and skidding of tyres. An old white *bakkie* screeched to a halt alongside Aaron’s car.

“Watch out, Auntie Tikkie,” a man yelled from the driver’s seat through the open passenger’s window. “Don’t mess with the *Jood*. It will land you in trouble.” Then he grinned and accelerated off, the screeching of tyres and the smell of rubber remaining.

Susan froze. It was Petrus van Zyl. Tikkie’s nephew. She’d recognise him anywhere. Aaron had come round to where Tikkie was standing and put his arm around her.

“You alright, Tikkie?”

“Ja. When will they grow up? Susan? What’s the matter, you look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Susan leaned against the wall of the milk bar, pale and trembling. “Nothing, Tikkie. It’s all just a bit of a shock. I’ve been away for so long.”



## Chapter Seven

The day was hot by the time they returned to the house.

“Well, I’ll get started.” Susan went to the outhouse to get boxes. There, leaning against the wall was an old, rusted bicycle. Susan pulled out the boxes and dragged them down the passage, piled outside the spare bedroom door. She heard the clicking of knitting needles in the lounge, where Uncle Aaron and Tikkie were, just sitting, not talking, as if they had done so for decades.

“There’s a bike in the outhouse.”

“No-one’s used that bike for years. Was probably mine, when I was a boy. Must have passed it on to Josephus. Want to ride?”

Uncle Aaron called out for Eunice.

“Get Siphon to pump up the tyres and clean away the cobwebs on the old bike. It’s in the outhouse.”

“I can’t remember when I was last on a bike. Maybe I’ve forgotten how to ride,” Susan said. “I might give it a go later when it’s cooler.”

She left the two and walked through all the rooms, notebook in hand, determined to do a thorough clean-up. She stuck bits of paper to the doors and on cupboards and then, starting in the dining old room, with her hair tied back and the boxes spread around her, she set about her task.

Later, Eunice came in with a tray of orange juice in a jug. “You look hot, Miss. Fresh squeezed orange juice.”

She left the tray on the floor next to where Susan was sitting and smiled as she turned to go.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing, Miss. You got black soot all over your face.”

She didn’t answer and Eunice left the room. The juice was cold and sweet. Susan stood up and stretched. Her limbs were stiff. The house had cooled down.

Susan couldn’t recall the last time she’d ridden. Not since Marc was a baby and she and Nick had hired a tandem in Centennial Park one warm Sydney winter day.

She walked round the back where the now-sparkling bike waited. The gears had been oiled and the saddle rubbed clean. Susan pushed away and wobbled round the back garden, heading out of the gate to the track. The last time she'd done this, she'd been fifteen or so. With Josephus. She looked out across the valley. She gathered speed and felt the wind brushing against her face.

How could she have forgotten how much she loved riding bikes? All round the place, at home. To the shop.

The shop. It had been gone for so long, she must have been eleven or twelve. Everything had changed. It was as if the corner shop on Hardacre Street had never existed.

Susan learnt to ride at *Waterval*. Maybe it had been Josephus who taught her, or maybe her father when he still used to go down there with them. But it was definitely Zeide who had bought her bicycle. It was red with a basket and a bell. She'd pleaded with him for her own bike. She promised him she'd always use it and would visit him at the shop. She did, sometimes, and took a handful of dried fruit from the sacks at the back of the storeroom. She brought messages from Bobba, that Uncle Aaron was going to Worcester or that there would be visitors for *shabbas* that week. She loved the wind that blew past her ears and she loved the sweat that built as she hauled her way up the hill towards the house.

At the end of the holiday she took the bike home with her, maybe as a reminder of the freedom of the farm. How she loved riding down the slow decline of Studley Road as it curved towards the big road. The surfaces were smooth after the gravel of *Waterval*. She loved bouncing over acorns and braking hard and sharp.

If you did a dogleg on Claremont Road, which was busy, you'd get to the Khans' shop in Hardacre Street. As soon as she was allowed to cross Claremont Road on her bike, Susan would go there after school or on Saturdays, to buy milk or a box of Benson & Hedges Special Mild, or whatever her mom had forgotten. If Aggie sent her for lip ice or suntan lotion, she'd demand a tip and, after screeching to a halt alongside the high step that formed the veranda round the shop, she'd go straight in and choose her sweets. A strip of liquorice, toffees, stars or a pink marshmallow fish.

Sometimes her basket was full of empty bottles and she'd be able to afford a slab of chocolate or a packet of chilli chips. But that was rare because the Malay children or the maids' kids invariably found the bottles first.

In Hardacre Street the houses were smaller and closer together than in her road. The houses were all semi-detached, and you could hear every sound your neighbours were making through the walls, and you could pass the plate of hot *samoosas* directly over the low wall before supper. They had no front gardens, just maybe a small patch of grass and a stunted tree. But mostly, a short path up to the *stoep* and the front door. The doors were always open and you could see down the passage to the backyard, where Susan knew the toilets were. They didn't have indoor plumbing, her mom had warned her. That didn't deter her, in fact, she waited eagerly for the first time she had to use the bathroom. And it was outside, but just as clean as her toilet at home.

The girls in Hardacre Street, and in the grid of roads surrounding it, didn't go to her school. They had classes behind the mosque on the Main Road, where everyone could hear the *muezzin's* call. There were always kids playing in the street. In her road, they kept to behind the hedges and played in their gardens, with friends from school. The girls had laughed at her when she'd called her grandparents Bobba and Zeide. In the middle of Hardacre Street, there was always a game of cricket or soccer for the boys. The older girls sat on the *stoep* of the Hassans' house. It was on the corner and bigger and the *stoep* ran round the whole front so they could look at all the young men who passed. When she was little, Susan would wait outside, leaning against the side of the car, while her mother went in to buy carrots or rice. She smiled at the girls and sometimes they let her play skipping games with them, but then her mother would come out, scowling, and she'd wave and jump into the car.

It was different once she could ride her bike there. She'd stay for as long as she liked, sharing her Smarties with Safeeza and Mariam, and using their toilet. Except when it was Ramadan and they wouldn't eat anything. They didn't ride bicycles, the girls. Only Abubaker, a nephew of the Khans, had a large delivery bike with a special metal frame at the front to hold a box. He was often out delivering groceries to the ladies in the neighbourhood, the box loaded with eggs and potatoes and lettuce. He managed to build up enormous speeds on his way back, box empty. The older kids laughed when he fell off

once. Susan felt sorry for him because his parents weren't around. When she asked where they were, the girls glanced at one another, but said nothing, so she never asked again.

Over the next few months Susan grew more daring in her cycling and started going further down busy Claremont Road, to the surrounding suburbs, along the track next to the river which her mom had told her to stay clear of. She hauled the bike up the few steps and onto the small rickety footbridge and watched the sludgy water trickle slowly across the mossy rocks. The river was full of broken bottles and paper, and once she thought she saw a bloodied rag. One afternoon, she would have been twelve or thirteen at the time, she was looking down at the water, where a bird was hopping on and off a discarded tyre.

"Sixpence for your thoughts." She jumped. It was Abubaker.

"Hey, Abu, I nearly fell in."

He stopped alongside her. He was a few years older than her. His box was empty, except for a bottle of Coke. He pulled it out and took a long slug.

"You want?"

She looked at him. Her mother would have been horrified.

"I'm not thirsty."

"I haven't got germs, if you're worried."

"Course not."

"You going back?"

"Ja."

"Race you."

Susan's bike was newer and had gears but Abu was by far the more skilful rider. They bumped along the river track until they reached the gate to the road.

"I won," he beamed.

"Well, you've had more experience."

He opened the gate and jumped back on.

"See you at the shop," he turned back to yell at her as he sped away, through the hooting traffic.

Susan liked to see him outside the shop, his gold-flecked eyes always alert. She made detours through the Malay quarter on purpose, hoping he'd be there and wave to

her. They never talked much and so she didn't have to pretend she was clever and knew the news headlines. He never looked her up and down the way the other boys did, as if they expected something, she never knew what, from her. She didn't have to wear her newest shorts and didn't feel uncomfortable about her bosoms that were beginning to peek through her T-shirt. She did put on Aggie's coconut lip ice once though. But he hadn't been there that day, so she didn't bother again.

As autumn crept into the neighbourhood and the leaves started tumbling into the gutters, she began to notice renovations taking place and For Sale signs going up. Some of the front gardens were being converted into carports with high gates, blocking the *stoeps* from the street.

Then one day when her mother gave her money for a tin of tomatoes she said, "Pity the shop isn't going to be there much longer."

"Why not? What's happening to the Khans?"

"Group Areas Act."

"What's that?"

"Oh, you know, government policy. Ask your teacher."

Abu wasn't outside the shop that day, nor the next time she went. She was too shy to ask Mariam when he'd be back and everyone seemed to be distracted and she didn't want to pry. Miss Barker had told her, and the whole class, about the Group Areas Act and how the Malay quarters across the city were being cleared so that they could live with their own and so that white families could move into the better neighbourhoods.

Giselle van der Poel raised her arm and waved it above her head, "But the houses have outside toilets."

"Don't worry, all the houses will be completely renovated, or knocked down and rebuilt."

Mrs Khan looked stern these days and Mr Khan would mutter under his breath when she spoke, as if she'd said the wrong thing, which she was sure she hadn't. Slowly the streets were emptied of children and crying babies and games of cricket. Then a sold sign appeared across the shop window and Susan knew that things were changing forever.

Aggie told her they were knocking a huge area down, including whites' houses, to build the biggest shopping centre in Cape Town, maybe even in the Southern Hemisphere, with a supermarket and an air-conditioned mall.

"It's going to be fantastic. Lots of boutiques, shoe shops and even a steak house."

That weekend Susan cycled down Hardacre Street for the last time. The entire road was empty, cleared of all signs of life. Already there was graffiti on the whitewashed walls and some of the windows were broken. The lemon tree at the front of No. 18, Adina's house, was heavy with fruit. Susan went through the open gate and picked a handful, sniffing the citric tartness. She knew that everything was changing. She'd never see Mariam or Mr Khan again. Or Abu.

They spoke about it when Bobba and Zeide visited, a few months later. By then the clearance was well underway, and a large map was on display near the construction site.

"We won't have to go into town to Garlicks. It will be right here."

"And so much parking."

Zeide looked up from the newspaper he was reading. "But you could walk. It's just down the road."

"Why do they have so much parking if they don't expect us to drive?" Naomi looked at her father with a blank expression.

"All this progress," Zeide shook his head. "Moving all these people out."

"It's not only the Malays, you know," Aggie interrupted, "it's white people as well."

"Ah yes, but the whites have been given adequate compensation and can still buy in the area. The Malays, they've been round here for longer than you have, and they've been forced into tenement housing. I've seen them on the way back to *Waterval*. Terrible, they are, terrible. It's a travesty, I tell you. A travesty."

"Can't you keep your nose out of politics?" Bobba said. "They don't have the same needs as us. And won't it be nice to have all these new shops here?"

Zeide shook his head again and returned to the newspaper. Susan took his hand.

“I’m going to miss them, Zeide. I won’t be able to ride there anymore and share my sweets.”

“You’re a good girl, *babele*.”

And, Susan thought as she turned back to see the afternoon sun bounce off the silver roof of *Waterval*, that was probably the end of my urban cycling career. I never cycled again except at the farm. I still followed Josephus on my bike. I’d forgotten how he’d let me hang around him and pester him. He looked after me, just like a little sister.

What a pain I must have been as a pubescent kid, she thought. I wonder what happened to my old bike. I really loved it.

The heavy bike seemed to know exactly where to take her. Susan pushed her way up the driveway, where she’d sometimes meet Josephus cycling back from the shop where he worked, his feet bare, his knees sticking up as he turned the pedals. His books were packed in an old satchel tied securely to the back of the bike. If it was hot, she’d yell to him as they entered the backyard together to come have some ginger beer in the kitchen. It was Katrina’s home-made recipe and she would always complain he drank too much so she’d have to make more.

“Stop it, Katrina. You love making ginger beer and you love watching your baby gulp it down,” Bobba said as she watched from the pantry where she was counting glasses.

“He mustn’t get full of ideas, that’s all,” Katrina said to Madam when she thought Susan couldn’t hear. “Your Susan is too friendly. She doesn’t know her place. It’s not good.”

“Yes, she doesn’t seem to be able to tell the difference, does she, between us.”

“And is that such a bad thing?” Zeide was standing in the doorway. “Can you please polish my black shoes, Katrina? I need them for tomorrow.”

Bobba left the kitchen with her husband. “It shouldn’t be encouraged. She needs to understand. She’s nearly twelve, she’ll soon be all grown-up.”

“Do you have no memory? We were the *schwartzes* back home. The other children didn’t play with us, only as a target to throw stones. And how did we feel?”

“This is different. These people aren’t white.”

“There is no difference. Hatred is hatred. I’d rather my granddaughter was friends with Josephus than with the spoilt brats at the school Naomi and Milton make her go to.”

“It’s important she gets a Jewish education. You know that. So that things will never happen again. The girls need to remember our past. They are all we have to go forward.”

“Exactly. They must remember how it was for us and do it differently, can’t you see?”

“Enough, Max, enough of those thoughts.”

The following afternoon Susan was picking mulberries and apricots from the trees in the back garden. She dropped a ripe black mulberry into her mouth and licked her purple fingers. Traces of the sticky juice splashed on her white blouse.

“Damn damn damn. Katrina will scream at me.”

“You’re not scared of her, are you?”

“What?” Josephus was there, carrying a basket of carrots and potatoes.

“Did I frighten you?”

“Not really.”

“Sorry. Keppie asked me to pick vegetables for your supper.”

“Funny seeing you out here. I dreamt about you last night.”

“What?”

“Yes. I dreamt you won the Tour de France.”

“What?”

“It’s a bicycle race. In France. I saw it at the Scala bioscope newsreel. The winner wears a yellow jersey. I dreamt you won.”

“And you?”

“Girls can’t enter races. But I would have won if I could have.”

“So do you think non-whites could enter?”

“Of course. Actually, I never thought about it. I’m sure you could.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Stop saying that. I’m not silly. Why couldn’t you enter, or win?”



“It doesn’t work that way. You’ll learn.”

“I’m not stupid. Why does everyone treat me like a baby? I’m twelve already.”

“Right. So you do know everything.”

“Stop teasing me.”

“How can I, when your face and your top are covered in mulberries?”

“Shut up shut up shut up.”

Susan ran back to the house with her bag of fruit while Josephus watched her, laughing.

Susan tried to avoid Josephus for days. Then Zeide suggested she ask him to help her with her maths holiday assignment.

“He’s very good, young Josephus. He adds numbers much quicker than I can. Like a machine. He’ll go far, for a Coloured.”

Susan’s foot slipped off the pedal and she threw her leg out to stop herself from falling. She got off the bike and pushed it the last few metres to the top of the rise. She could see the roofs of the village in the distance and the gravel road that curved in the other direction towards the waterhole. She looked away. Below was their house.

“I’ll miss you, *Waterval*, when you’re sold. I’ve always missed you, I realise, now that I’m back.”

The wind blew the trees surrounding the house and the sun caught on a window of the Van Zyls’ place.

“But not everything. Some things I still don’t want to see.”

She hauled herself onto the bike, her legs tired, but it was a downhill cruise all the way back.

## Chapter Eight

“Madam Tikkie, I got something I must give back to you. My mommy gave it to me but it belongs to the Van Zyls. She never told me how she got it. She couldn’t read, you know.”

Katrina had waited until Susan had left the house and Aaron had gone back to Donkerbos before she entered the lounge where Tikkie was still knitting. She carried in her arms a book. Tikkie recognised it immediately. The Van Zyl family Bible.

“But this was a present for your mother. From my father Hannes, when he died. I gave it to her, in this very house, when I was still young. Look, the note is still here. ‘For Maria, who saved my life. With thanks. And apologies. Hannes van Zyl’.”

“But why did he give it to her?”

“Your mother was an incredible woman. She saved his life. Until that accident, Hannes was as bad as the rest of them,” Tikkie replied, opening the worn old Bible.

“Sit, girl,” Tikkie gestured to the chair. Katrina sat down on the edge.

“Why do some people have to go to the brink of death before they pull themselves away from the edge? Poor Pappie,” Tikkie sighed.

Hannes felt the piercing of his ribs with every breath. He could taste the blood as he swallowed. His legs were numb, he couldn’t move, he lay helpless, pinned down by the overturned tractor.

“Do I just have to wait? Until someone finds me, or until I die?”

His boys Kobus and Johan had gone to Napier. There was no-one else around and none of the farm labourers would lift a finger to help him, the bastards.

The pain was blinding. But more frightening was the numbness. He felt the sun pressing down on him and then easing slightly as the day turned. Its movement and intensity told him that the hours were passing, as he slipped in and out of consciousness.

He thought about good times, on his horse Sonskyn, with his dogs. They were back at the farm, probably tearing at their chains, unable to do anything. No-one was there. They’d have found him by now, Prins and Wagter and Sissie, the pup. They would

have run down here, barking and licking his face. But he had gone too far from the house today and he hadn't needed them with him.

Why hadn't he seen the rock jutting out? Was he going too fast? One minute the tractor was moving smoothly, turning the earth, then the next thing he was out of his seat and under the wheels and twisted axle.

"Jesus God," he licked his parched, swollen lips, "are you going to save me?" He coughed and currents of pain shot through him.

"No, I thought not. Why should you save a bastard like me?"

"Mammie, where are you?" But no image appeared. Just the smell of his own faeces.

"Is this what I deserve?"

Yes, his shrieking body responded. It's only your horses and dogs who love you. He closed his eyes but opened them quickly, trying to block the faces that came in the darkness. Sannie's eyes. Small and blue, but hooded, fearful. You don't get respect if they aren't scared. That's what his Pa had taught him. That's how his father spoke to his Mammie. Sannie's eyes turned down as she pushed his plate of supper towards him. Burnt chops and hard potatoes. Hiding their children behind her ever-widening backside when he came home drunk. The bitter downward twist of her mouth. The disappointment and revulsion when there was no money for books or shoes. Sannie. She didn't even write a note when she ran back to her folks, leaving him with two wild sons and an ugly daughter. Where was she now, his wife, when he needed her? Where was she?

And then he saw her eyes, the kaffir bitch's, filled with hatred. And fear. But mostly, the hatred. But she bloody wanted it. Still her eyes kept coming at him, flashing in the dark of the pain. There'd been plenty of them, but it was her eyes he couldn't wipe out. Her disdain.

It was cold now. The sun had disappeared and the night winds were picking up.

"It wasn't my fault. They were asking for it. All of them," he breathed in, rasping as the shattered bones ripped at his organs.

Sannie's face loomed close. "Really?" Then it was her again, with her dark skin and smoky smell.

“Really?” His Mammie’s voice, whose worn hands beckoned him once, and then ceased.

His father, his brothers appeared in front of him. “Don’t let them get the better of you.”

“I worked hard. I got the wheat growing again. I deserve better.”

He wanted it to be over. Then he heard voices.

“It’s Baas Hannes.”

“What should we do?”

“He’s still alive.”

“Leave him for the jackals.”

Hannes moaned. “Please help me. In God’s name.”

“Let’s go.”

“Just tell someone. I beg you.”

Then they were gone. Helpless, shrouded in his pain, he waited for the end. He lapsed in and out of consciousness. And then he felt their warm tongues, his dogs, licking at his face, his hands, barking, yelping, pulling at their leashes.

He opened his eyes. It was the Jew. They’d gone to get the Jew.

“Hannes, can you hear me?” Old man Max Sternberg leaned over him, a lantern in his hand. Behind him, a shadow moved. She was there, carrying a basket. She poured water from a bottle onto a cloth which she passed to her master, who took the dampened cloth and placed it on Hannes’ lips. He sucked like a baby.

“I’ve called the police. They’ll be here soon. They’ll get you out. Maria, give me the gin.”

He loomed over Hannes. “Drink this, slowly.”

Maria held the bottle close to his chapped lips and slowly the liquid rolled into his mouth. He looked at her, but she was staring out into the night, beyond his head.

“More, more.” His tongue rolled in his clogged mouth. She held it to his lips once more.

“Thank you, Maria. You saved my life.”

This time she looked directly at him. The same look he’d seen before. Many times. But without any fear, just clean hatred.

“Are you okay?” Sternberg turned from him to ask her as she moved back into the shadows.

She nodded. But Hannes also heard her throwing up. He clenched his eyes closed. The Jew had put something behind his head and moved his limbs. He didn’t speak again, didn’t mention the overwhelming stench as he tried to alleviate the pressure.

After the accident he was unable to return to working the fields. Once more, they grew neglected. On good days he walked with a crutch, slowly. For the rest, he spent his days inside the small outhouse where he now lived, emptying bottles of rum into a pile that grew in the corner, until one of his boys came by and threw them out. His boys were strong but lazy, working only when they had to. They kept out of their father’s way. A maid from the house would come down every week and sweep the floors and take away his sheets. They weren’t scared of him anymore, his power gone when he broke his body. They would find him seated in his chair or lying on his bed, weeping. Tikkie, his only girl, would visit from the village. She brought him a Bible, which he began to read, reluctantly at first.

“Like a prisoner in jail with his Gideon’s,” said Tikkie when she found him reading in the dim light.

“My life sentence.”

She got the boys to find a chair for outside and an electric lamp for inside, so he could read in more comfort. She knitted a rug for his knees. The pile of rum bottles grew smaller. Then it disappeared. One time she got the boys to take him to church. They dropped him outside and left him to stumble up the few steps into the building, like a drunk. After the service, he leaned against a pole, waiting for them to pick him up. He never went again.

Tikkie brought a transistor radio, magazines and a scarf she knitted. But it was a harsh winter and his lungs had never recovered. The maid who came to clean found his body and ran back to the house. After the funeral Tikkie packed away his things. There, on the table next to the bed was a parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied with string. Tucked in to the string was a folded piece of paper: ‘For Maria, at the Sternbergs’. Tikkie picked up the parcel and took it to the big house, beyond the thick hedge.

She knocked at the door. Maria opened it.

“Mrs Prinsloo. There’s no-one home.”

“I came to see you. My father, Meneer van Zyl, died last week. This was in his room. Addressed to you.”

Maria took the heavy parcel and turned it over.

“Why don’t you open it?” Maria untied the string and the newspaper and the piece of paper fell to the ground. Left in her hands was the Bible.

She bent down and handed the sheet to Tikkie.

“Can you read it for me, please, Mrs Prinsloo?”

“For Maria, who saved my life. With thanks. And apologies. Hannes van Zyl.”

She opened the Bible and slowly turned the pages. “Thank you, Mrs Prinsloo,” she said as Tikkie turned to leave.

Tikkie handed the Bible back to Katrina.

“So you see, it’s yours.”

They heard the car approach and the car door close. Katrina took the book and left the room. Tikkie sighed and returned to her knitting. She looked up to see Aaron climbing the front stairs with a bunch of lilies and irises.

“For you, Tikkie,” he said. He placed in them in her lap. “For all those wasted years.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Aarontjie.”

She left the room and returned with a vase filled with water.

“I’ll take them home later. I’ve got some business to do right now.”

She tied her hat on and left the house.

## Chapter Nine

Tikkie pulled down the brim of her floral cotton hat and knocked on the door. Gently at first and then harder because no-one responded. The *stoep* hadn't changed. It had been years since she last visited the old place and even then the paint had been peeling and the cracks in the oxblood concrete floor were large enough for a rat to fall through. It hadn't seen polish for a long while. The low wall was secured by a piece of twisted wire. She couldn't see in through the front windows. A sheet of faded material hung precariously from a few hooks, covering most of the window. Two old kitchen chairs and an upturned milk crate with an overflowing ashtray were the only signs of recent habitation.

She looked across the front yard. The white *bakkie* was gone. An old Toyota with rusted doors rested under a tree. It wasn't going anywhere. She hated coming here. The last time was when the boys called her to say that Kobus had had a stroke. He didn't need her, he said, when he'd returned from the Napier Hospital. She should just keep out of their way. And the time before that, when she'd come about Tertius.

Her nephews Kobie and Petrus only came to her when they wanted to borrow money. They never paid her back, and she had had to threaten them with the police. That night, a brick flew through her front room window. It frightened her badly. Aaron told her to call the police, but she knew it was the boys and didn't want to make any more trouble. Especially as Aaron's car was parked in the street outside her place more and more and she didn't want him involved.

The lock rattled from the inside. The door opened slightly. The face of a maid peered round cautiously, old and weary. Her overall was a faded shade of red, stained and shabby. Safety pins replaced most of the buttons. Her head was covered by a dirty white *doek*. Her feet were bare. The brown irises of her eyes were encircled by a white rheumy film.

"What you want, Madam?" she asked through the gap.

It was dark inside and Tikkie couldn't make out much. The smell of yeast and alcohol was familiar.

"I'm the old Master's sister. Can I come in?"

“Master’s in his room. He can’t walk no more. I just come three times a week to clean.”

“Where are the boys?”

“I don’t know, Madam.”

She opened the door wider. There wasn’t much evidence of her cleaning activities, Tikkie thought as she walked inside. The light bulb had been removed from the fitting in the passage ceiling. The place smelled of sickness. Death. The maid disappeared down the passage towards the kitchen. Tikkie heard the sounds of bottles being moved.

“Who is it?” a voice roared from her parents’ bedroom.

“It’s me, Tikkie.”

“What you want?”

She gagged as she pushed the door open. The curtains were drawn and it took a while for her eyes to adjust. She went straight to the window and pulled at the curtain which almost came apart in her hand. Then she pushed the window open, shoving at the rotting frame. The smell of sour milk was strong, and pipe tobacco. And piss. An old man lay in the bed, covered by a hospital-issue blanket, twisted and grimy. His head rested on stained pillow, blue and white ticking, without a cover. That was one of her mother’s. The smell of urine was overwhelming as she made her way back towards the bed, almost tripping over the enamel bed pan, nearly full with a dark yellow liquid.

“Meisie’s got to empty it,” he said when he saw her look of disdain.

“How can you live like this?”

“I’m not really living, am I? I can’t hardly walk anymore.”

“But how can your sons let you lie around in such mess?”

“They don’t bother with me. They come and they go. They buy food and the girl cooks it, sometimes.”

“They should be ashamed of themselves, neglecting an old man like that.”

“What about you? When did you last visit your sick brother?”

“Kobus, you told me never to come here again, or have you forgotten?”

“So why are you here now?”

“I want Petrus and Kobie to lay off Aaron Sternberg. They drove past us in the town and scared the living daylights out of us.”



“Why should they? He’s caused enough trouble.”

“You know that’s not true. Aaron has been very kind to me. I’ve been sick recently and he helped me with the cancer doctors. He wants to marry me.”

There was a silence.

“What? You’re still a *boeremeisie*, you know, still a Van Zyl, even though you’ve become so la di da. Don’t think that just because you let him shove his shrivelled old pipe in your dried out cunt that you’re better than us.”

“You disgust me. Aaron is the only person who helps me. Your boys have gone out of their way to make trouble for me, their own flesh and blood.”

“There’s no place in Donkerbos for Jews. The sooner every trace of them is removed, the better. They’re licking the arses of those black baboons in Pretoria. Them and their money was behind the overthrow of our government. All I can say is thank the Lord that you’re too old to have his children. Big nosed, flat footed, greedy reptiles.”

“I’m warning you, Kobus.”

“What? What threats have you got up your scrawny sleeve? Get out of my house. You ruined Tertius – spoilt him, made him too good for us. Don’t ever come here again. Not even if that Jewboy leaves you the Crown Jewels. I don’t want him or his dirty money anywhere near this place.”

Tikkie turned around quickly, kicking her foot against the chamber pot. Its contents flowed quickly over the floor.

“Now that girl will have to do some work,” she said as she left the room, holding her hand over her mouth. She slammed the front door behind her and walked as fast as she could, without running, down through the uncut grass, beyond the fallen fence, to the road to town.

Kobus yelled for the maid.

“Come clean up this mess. You should have emptied the pot days ago.”

She came in with a bucket and a mop, shaking her head. She poured the water over the wet floor.

“Help me, bitch. I’m not lying here in my own piss. Help me walk to the *stoep*.”

She leaned across his wasted frame and pulled his shoulders up. Together they moved around the slippery patch and down the passage. She folded his limbs onto one of the chairs on the *stoep* and turned to go back inside.

“Bring me a cup of coffee, girl. And my pipe.”

“Yes, Master.” When she came back with a grimy chipped mug and his pipe, the old man was leaning back, his eyes closed. She left it on the upturned crate and returned inside.

He’d overheard the boys saying that the one girl was back. Naomi’s girl. They’d seen her snooping around town. He wondered if she looked like her mother. She had been a real beauty in her day. Spoilt and stupid, but a real looker. And now his sister was opening her bow legs for her runt of a brother. At her age. Sickening, he thought. He’d never been a match for the Van Zyl boys; completely useless with a rugby ball. Kobus had stood right here, on the stoep, watching him in their garden playing with all the latest toys, tied to the skirts of his high and mighty mother.

Kobus sipped the bitter coffee and looked across to the neighbouring house, set among its high trees. He wondered about Naomi. Where in hell had she landed up?

Kobus had been waiting for a while at the corner. His tummy rumbled and he wondered how much longer he would be able to stand there, hungry and cold. He picked up small stones with his toes and made a pile next to him. He selected three rounded pebbles and put them in the pocket of his shorts, rattling them between his fingers. He rubbed his cold foot up and down his leg, then hopped on and off the pavement, over the ditch with the swiftly flowing water. Then he stood still and took aim. The stone skimmed the surface of the narrow channel of water and dropped to the bottom of the gutter. The black cat lying in a patch of sun twitched his ears and curled up more tightly. Kobus took aim but the cat was too quick, darting behind the hedge of the Van der Merwe’s tin-roofed house.

He almost missed the hum of the motor. The bus rolled past, a cloud of dust following in its wake. Only two boys climbed down, Aaron and Oscar Thompson. The bus pulled away. The two boys waved and headed off in opposite directions, dragging their heavy satchels.

Kobus waited against the tree. Aaron crossed to the other side of the road, quickly, hungry too, Kobus thought as he rolled the pebble between his fingers before he flicked it. It curved out, arcing gracefully. Aaron leapt skyward, dropped his bag and clutched his thigh. He looked behind but it was too late. Kobus had already rounded the corner and headed home.

He laughed, his cheeks full of bread and dripping, standing at his kitchen window watching Aaron limp by, cautiously opening his front gate, glaring at the Van Zyls' house. He rubbed his leg, looking for more traces of blood. Kobus was secure behind the shutters. He was such a weakling, the Jew. He turned back to the table where the bread was sliced on a board.

"Leave some for your sister," his mother warned, her back to him as she stirred the pot on the stove. "And clear a space so you can do your homework."

"There's no homework today. It's Friday, Ma. I'm going to play rugby."

"Be back before it's dark."

He was gone with a slam of the back door.

The sun was slipping behind the mountains by the time he returned, but he was warm. He didn't feel the cold through his bare feet now. He heard Mr Sternberg's car behind him and turned to stare as he pulled up, opened the passenger door and carried a heavy box inside.

Mrs Sternberg had also heard the engine and held open the front door as her husband made his way up the steps. Naomi rushed ahead, kissed her father's cheek and looked into the box, pulled out a wrapped package, smiled broadly and kissed his forehead once more. Mrs Sternberg shook her head, smiled and wiped her hands on her apron. The door closed behind them while Kobus leaned against the wall of their outhouse. Around Naomi, he felt uneasy. She was like the *bok* he and Oom Stoffel hunted and shot. The deer's eyes flashed, as if it knew its fate, just before Oom Stoffel fired the shot. She had those eyes, moist, large and knowing. She smiled a lot though, smiled at almost everyone, especially Oscar Thompson when he went home with Aaron after school. But when she saw Kobus looking at her, her eyes grew like the *bokkie's*.

He spat. He turned away from the window and smelt the soup from the kitchen, so he went inside.

“You and Tikkie can eat now. Go wash your hands.”

“You eat with us, Ma.”

“No, I’ll wait for your father.”

“But ...”

“I’ll wait for your father.”

Tikkie came in. “Just a bowl of soup, Ma. Otherwise, you know it will be late before you can eat.”

“I’ll wait.”

Kobus and Tikkie looked at one another and then down at their bowls.

“There’s mutton in the soup tonight. I got three pieces from the butcher.”

“What about you, Ma?”

“I’m fine.”

They ate the soup quickly. Kobus cut himself another slice of bread.

“You must leave some for your father, Kobus.”

“Yes, Ma.” He cut the slice thickly.

“Oh, children, you mustn’t eat it all.”

She left the kitchen and the two children, who silently wiped their bowls with the bread.

The following day was the second Saturday of the month. Trestle tables were set up on both sides of the main road. There were horses and carts tethered to the posts near the hotel and the bank. From across the valley the farmers and their families had come.

Kobus sat by the water pump, waiting for Johan, his older brother, and his friend Frik, who were working away on farms. Aaron and Naomi walked by. Aaron rubbed his leg but said nothing.

“Morning, Kobus. Where’s Tikkie?” Naomi called out.

He pointed to the stall selling hair clasps and ribbons and shoved his hands into his pockets. He saw Naomi clutch a pink reticule close to her body. It was sequined and had a deep fuchsia strap. She ran towards the stall where Tikkie stood and held out her newest possession to show her. Aaron crossed the road to the book dealer’s table close by, looking at his sister and her friend, his cheeks pink.

Kobus watched the girls and the boy. “Keep your dirty hands off my sister,” he said under his breath. He moved to examine the coppersmith’s tools, alongside the ribbons and frippery. Tikkie and Naomi were laughing, holding up lengths of lace, pearl buttons and shining beads. The little bag fell to the ground. They didn’t notice, captivated by the soft silky fabrics. Kobus brushed past, bent down as if to tie a shoelace and moved swiftly on.

Kobus headed down the road, stroking the pocket of his shorts, leaving the town behind him, heading towards the river and solitude.

He opened his eyes, disturbed by the noise of the *bakkie* on the gravel.

“Bloody bitch. I wonder if she got into trouble about losing that little bag of hers. Serves her right if she did.”

He grunted as Petrus and Kobie came up the steps past him, carrying a box from the bottle store.

“What you doing outside, Pa?”

“Just wanted a change. The girl helped me.”

“Have a beer.” Petrus pulled the tab and passed the can to his father.

“Auntie Tikkie was here.”

“What did she want?” Petrus asked.

“She’s marrying the Jew.”

“What?”

“And you’re going to let her?” asked Kobie, scratching his beard with his large, bear-like hand.

“There’s nothing we can do. It’s a free country and she’s old enough and ugly enough to do what she wants.”

“Maybe he’ll leave her a fortune when he carks it.”

“She’ll probably be gone before him – she told me she has cancer.”

“So he’ll get her house then, greedy bastard. Must be why he’s marrying her – nasty little gravedigger.”

Kobie tipped his head back and drank from the can. “And the girl’s back.”

“Ja, Tikkie said. The Jew’s niece. What’s your problem? She’s just another Sternberg bitch.” Their father looked at them. “Don’t get up to anything stupid, please. It’s not the same round here anymore, remember. Just settle down, get married, for Chrissake, get me some grandchildren with birth certificates and some decent girls to keep this place clean.”

“Ja, Pa, whatever you say, man. You’re the boss,” Petrus laughed, his thin lips sneering.

## Chapter Ten

As she walked out of the house, the door slamming behind her, Tikkie felt weak, as if her knees or stomach were about to give way. They still had that effect on her, her brother and his boys. She'd clean forgotten to tell Kobus the other news. Maybe it was on purpose, she thought as she struggled with the gate. Tertius was coming, her favourite nephew.

She tried to concentrate on his visit, rather than on the house she had just left. Tertius always stayed with her when he came home from Bloemfontein, never with his fathers and brothers, and she had gone on the train to visit him and his family a few times over the years.

As a boy, Tertius had been small for his age. He had worn thick glasses since he was four. At his mother's funeral, he allowed his auntie to hug him. Then he saw the look of scorn on his brothers' faces, so he quickly wiped his snotty nose on his hand and reluctantly pulled away from her.

After Ansie's death, it grew harder for Tikkie to spend time with them in their house, which had once been her home too, now rundown and filthy. She was working at the bank by then and would see Tertius trailing behind some other boys on the way to the shop to buy sweets. It happened just before her tea break. The little boy with his wire glasses, held together with tape, slowed down to peer in at the door.

"Tertius, Tertius, wait for me," Tikkie called out to him. The branch manager nodded as she grabbed her handbag and cardigan. She ran out the door to catch up with him. Tertius lingered behind the boys and beamed as she approached.

"Hello, Auntie."

"How are you? And your brothers?"

"We are all well, thank you, Auntie." His bare feet were dirty, and there were buttons missing from his shirt.

"Come, Tertius. Can I buy you a *koeksister* from the bakery? It's my afternoon tea break and I love something sweet."

"Thank you, Auntie."

When she saw how he shovelled the pastry into his mouth, leaving traces of syrup on his chin, she asked the lady behind the counter for two more.

“What class you in?”

“I’m finishing Std 5 and going to high school next year.”

“And are you enjoying it?”

“Ag, Auntie. Boys don’t like school. But ...” He looked down at his ink-stained fingers. “I’ll be leaving when I turn fourteen, like my brothers, so I can start working.”

“You didn’t answer my question. I know you’re a clever boy. Why don’t you at least finish Std 8? Then you can get a better paid job. I am the only Van Zyl who got their Junior Certificate, you know.”

“Auntie, only *moffies* stay at school. And English boys. Anyway, what could I do with a Std 8?”

“Well, you could work at the bank like me. Or get a job in Napier, or even Cape Town.”

The boy’s face clouded over. “No, Auntie, my father wouldn’t like that.”

“Do you think your father would mind if you came to visit me at my house? I could do with a young boy to help change some light bulbs and fix the latch on my front door.”

“I’ll come and help, Auntie, but I won’t tell Pa.”

“Come this Saturday, but don’t get into trouble. It will be our secret.”

That Saturday, just before lunch, there was a knock at Tikkie’s door. She let her nephew in.

“Do you like sausage rolls, Tertius? I’ve just taken them out of the oven.”

She took him through to the sitting room where the small table was set with a cake, small plates and a bottle of tomato sauce.

“Do you want Coke? Fanta?”

“Coke, please, Auntie.”

She poured him a glass as he looked at the pictures on her wall.

“Is that Ouma and Oupa?”



“Yes, my ma and pa. They didn’t take many photographs in the old days. And here’s one of our whole family: my parents, Johan, who was much older, Kobus and me.”

“Why doesn’t Pa talk to you?”

“Ag, it’s a long story. It doesn’t matter to you and me, does it?”

He stared at her bookshelf, a hot sausage roll dipped in sauce in his hand. Her collection wasn’t large. On one shelf was her Bible, an English–Afrikaans dictionary, an atlas of the world and a two-volume encyclopaedia. On the shelf below were some volumes of Readers’ Digest classics and a few dog-eared books. And an assortment of knitting patterns.

“Would you like to borrow some of my books?”

He shook his head.

“You can always come and read them here.”

“What will I tell the others?”

“You’ll think of something.” She gave him a copy of Elsa Joubert’s *Ons Wag op die Kaptein*.

“This was a favourite of mine when I was your age. It’s an adventure story.”

After that he became a regular visitor. First he’d eat the biscuits or sandwiches she laid out for him and then he’d sit on her sofa, and start reading, until his aunt had to remind him to go home. She rejoined the library, borrowing books she thought a twelve-year-old might enjoy.

Six months later, Tikkie was chatting to the branch manager when Tertius came running in, holding a piece of paper.

“Look, Auntie.” He pushed his report onto the counter. “I got an A for Afrikaans and a B for Maths and Mr Potgieter says I’m the cleverest boy in the class. Look, Auntie.”

Tikkie clapped her hands. “Come, Tertius, let’s go and get a *koeksister* to celebrate.” The branch manager was smiling.

At the beginning of the next school term, Tikkie made an appointment to see Mr Potgieter. He agreed to keep an eye on Tertius and encourage him as best he could. Together they would make sure he did well at Std 6, with the hope of completing Std 8 and the Junior Certificate. Matric would be out of the question.

It was a struggle. Mr Potgieter visited Kobus at the house. Finally Kobus agreed Tertius could continue to Std 8, but no further. Mr Potgieter told Tikkie that he caught Kobus smiling as he showed him out. He let Tikkie know when the boy missed school too often and how his glasses got more and more misshapen and cracked. They knew it was the brothers. He worked hard, doing his arithmetic and book-keeping, but it was Afrikaans literature he loved most. He no longer relied on his aunt to get books for him from the library. He would go after school and work his way along the shelves. Tikkie left the key under a pot plant in the garden. Often she'd come home from work and find her nephew sprawled on her rug, reading.

"Take your feet off the furniture," she'd admonish, at the same time delighted to find him there, comfortable in her home.

Towards the end of term, it was the boy's fifteenth birthday. Tikkie made Tertius a huge Sunday lunch. He had grown, but was still small for his age. His glasses were thick and always broken. Tikkie noticed that he had started shaving his upper lip and his legs were covered in long fair hair. He no longer kissed her on the cheek when he left her house, and she regretted that he was becoming a young man, no longer the needy little boy with a dirty face.

"It will all turn out well, I promise. In the meantime, let me give you your birthday presents."

Tikkie went into her bedroom and came out with brightly wrapped packages of different sizes. "Open them."

Tertius stared. Tikkie was sure, even though she couldn't see through his thick frames clearly, that his eyes had misted over in tears.

"Auntie, how did you know it was my birthday?"

"Stupid question, boy. I was there when you were born, remember. Now hurry up so we can cut the cake."

Carefully he unwrapped the paper, all different colours, the smallest parcel first. It was a pair of brand new glasses.

"You must come with me to Mr Shipley and he'll adjust them to your eyes."

The boy looked stunned.

“You can wear them to school and put your old ones on when you go home, if you like,” his aunt said, sensing his concern. Then he unwrapped the others, a shiny wristwatch and the complete works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

“Auntie, you are spoiling me. You are just like a ...”

“Shush, my boy. I don’t have my own child and you don’t have a mommy. I want you to have everything I didn’t have. Specially a good education.”

She took the small boy and hugged him to her. He didn’t resist, but softened into her arms, lingering there before he pulled himself away and picked up one of his brand new books.

Tikkie left him and went to the kitchen, returning with an iced cake with fifteen candles burning. The boy blushed as he blew them out and she sang to him.

“Tertius, what are you going to do after you’ve got your Junior Certificate?” She sliced the chocolate cake.

“I don’t know, Auntie. It’s been very hard. Pa is always complaining I use up too much electricity reading late at night.” He filled his mouth with cake and cream.

“I have great plans for you, my boy. I’ve got money saved. If you want to go to Napier and finish Std 10, I’ll pay for it. It would make me so proud if you went to university in Stellenbosch. No-one in our family has ever been there.”

“No, Auntie. I have to start working. I must pay my way.”

“What kind of work?”

“Work on a farm. Like the others. Or for de Kock’s haulage.”

“No, my boy,” she looked at his thin arms and stooped shoulders. “When you pass your exams, we’ll find you something better. A job at the bank? Or at the library?”

“I’m not a sissie, Auntie.”

“Look forward, Tertius, think big.”

“It’s not so easy, Auntie. They laugh at me at home. I don’t have any shoes and long pants. Who’ll give me a job?”

They looked at one another. Finally, Tikkie spoke. “Do you want me to speak to your Pa?”

Tikkie walked slowly up the path of the old house, hesitating with every footfall. She had made sure the *bakkie* wasn't there. Kobie and Petrus could not be at home to laugh at her and make her feel useless. Mr Potgieter had told her that he was sure that underneath, Kobus was proud of Tertius' achievements. She had to give it a go.

Kobus was in the backyard, knocking fence palings into the hard ground.

"Tikkie, what brings you here?"

"Hello, Kobus, how are you and the boys?" She put down her basket and emptied it onto the ground. "Here are some things. Rusks, some plum jam and a few bits and pieces for you all. Socks."

"Have you come about Tertius?"

"How did you know?"

"He finishes school soon."

"Yes. Kobus, he's a clever boy. He has the world at his feet. I'm willing to pay for him to continue 'til matric."

"But what about us? I need him to get out and work. There are always bills. I can't afford to feed them all."

"When he finishes school he can get himself a proper job with good wages. He's the only one who'll be able to look after you. And look at him, he's not big like the others. He can't do physical labour."

"His brothers won't agree."

"Who's the boss round here?"

"I don't have the money for more books, for shoes, pencils. The boy burns the lights 'til all hours. He costs me a small fortune."

"Kobus, I'm happy to pay for him to go to boarding school at Napier or Worcester."

"What about Petrus and Kobie?"

"What about them? They weren't interested in school."

"They're good boys."

"I didn't come to talk about them. Give Tertius the chance you never had. Do you want him to remember you like we remember Pa?"

"Don't bring him into it."

“Well, what do you say?”

“If you pay for him, and if he pays me from his wages. And he’ll have to go away. I don’t want him showing off in front of his brothers.”

“Thank you, Kobus.”

Tikkie turned around quickly and left the yard. She didn’t want her brother to see her shaking with relief.

By the time she reached *Waterval*, Aaron was standing at the door with the dog, waiting.

“Come, I’ll take you home, you look wiped out.”

“Yes, they always do that to me, don’t they? I must get my house ready. Tertius is arriving soon.”

“I’ll be back for supper, Susan,” he called as he pulled the front door to.

## Chapter Eleven

The evening passed uncomfortably. Susan and Aaron ate together, not talking much, then moved to the lounge where they drank coffee and watched the television.

The phone rang. Uncle Aaron looked at his watch and frowned.

“Must be Australia. For you.”

The telephone was in the passage, as it had always been. The cord was too short to move anywhere, so she sat on the passage floor, facing the wall.

“Hello, my *boyjie*. How are you? ... It’s all okay. Very busy. There’s lots to do. ... Doing nice things with your dad? ... Does he? Alright, put him on. I miss you, Marc. Don’t forget to ring your nanna every day and visit her once a week. ... Hello Alex. I’m good. And you? Everything alright with Marc? ... I don’t think I’m being over-protective. ... I’ve been very busy. There’s a lot to sort out. A lot going on. My uncle is getting married. I haven’t had a minute to think about ... about us. Give me time. ... I know. Fifteen years. It should be enough, ja. I was hoping it would all fall into place, coming back home. An envelope? From you? No, I didn’t find one. In the top part of my suitcase? I’ll go and find it. Thanks for calling.”

Susan replaced the handset and went to her room. The house was quiet, except for the debate on the television about water resources. She pulled her case off the chair and ruffled through her clothes. She ran her hands through the section at the top of the case and felt an envelope. She pulled it out. Addressed to her, in Alex’s neat writing. Inside were printed pages. She sat down on the bed and started reading.

*My dear Susan*

*You know how it is when you see something and you look away but it’s fixed itself in your skull and no matter how many other things you try and replace it with, you can’t block it out.*

*That happened the night I met you at that party in your Oranjezicht house. I thought the room was empty. It was dark and quiet and the air felt undisturbed and heavy. But you must have moved, slightly, and caused a*

*shimmering of light, because I glanced toward the sofa as I passed through, and you were there.*

*You appeared utterly alone, even though there was a party going on around you. You seemed secluded from the sounds of the music and the clinking of laughter and bottles and the smell of braaivleis.*

*I stopped. You were lying with your feet flung across the arm of the sofa. Your hair hung across your face. Thick, heavy, but lustreless in that dimly lit room. Your hand hung out limply, stretched over the other arm of the sofa. In it dangled a plastic cup, stained with red but almost empty of wine. Your tie dyed T-shirt rode up your stomach and there was a stretch of your pale skin between the T-shirt and the top of your cut-off jeans. Your large eyes were ringed with blackness. You lay there, thin and wretched. That word that kept spinning round my head. Wretched.*

*You turned your face towards me, taking a while to focus on my body, to realise that you didn't know me. And then that curtain dropped again and you withdrew, and I disappeared once more from your realm.*

*A half-smoked joint lay in the ash on a saucer on the seat.*

*"Hey," you said when I had almost reached the further door.*

*"Hey, is that a bottle of wine you're holding? My cup is empty." You shook it at me and red drops spattered on the patterned blanket that covered the sofa.*

*"Gimme a dop? Please? I'm so thirsty."*

*I moved closer. "Hi, I'm Alex. And you?"*

*"Sorry." You pulled yourself up and tugged at your T-shirt.*

*"Susan."*

*"Should I get you a glass of water? You look like shit."*

*Your mouth drooped. You looked so incredibly torn, like you wanted to say something but couldn't, like you were reaching out to grab at me, but then withdrew, stumbling and retreating.*

*I am an engineer. I fix things. I build things. That's what I wanted to do to you. Reassemble you. It was easy to see the outstanding quality of the raw*

*material. Your beautiful eyes, so sad and lost. Your defiant chin. And later, the way you stood with your feet firm, standing your ground, not budging. Then, with a nervous flutter of your hands, you'd just give in and hide behind your thick hair that flops across your face. Your small hands with their squat spatula thumbs. My mum would have fed you bread and milk like a lost puppy. Like all the strays I brought home from the paddock near the river. She would have reminded me of all the dogs she had had to look after. But she was dead and I wasn't thinking about her when I first saw you.*

*In the beginning you were often sick. Throwing up. Your throat was raw, always sore. You wouldn't let me kiss you on the mouth. For ages. Even after we started sleeping together.*

*But you liked to lie against me. You liked to feel me around you, surrounding you like a blanket of fog, you said. And then, it happened a few times, that you'd open your eyes, like waking from a coma, and there'd be a brightness for a while, until you'd start remembering, and you'd close up once more. How can I forget how you bloomed like a krantz aloe, which opens in the coldness of winter to reveal its coral red flowers? But then you'd turn away and that would pierce me with your spike, and leave a taste of bitterness on my tongue.*

*Even that closeness took a while to reach. It was after you'd become used to me, after we made love together several times. You lay with me for a long time, just resting up against me. And then, when we were nearing sleep, you'd press against my back. Like an afterthought, something you fought against but couldn't stop. I loved it, the way you unravelled and shuddered and gently kissed my shoulder. I turned back to you and in the swirl of sleep we made love again.*

*Afterwards, you closed your eyes and I stroked your hair and I thought I'd broken through, passed something that was stronger than your will. This was how I grew to love you.*



*You stopped drinking too much and throwing up, you stopped looking beyond me to the night sky, where you reached out for the answers, to questions I never knew. You cried when I went back to Mossel Bay to work, my leave over. You called me every night and told me how much you missed me. I came back two weekends later, and then two more and then it was going to be over because my contract had ended and I was heading home.*

*We knew this, you knew this, since the first time we'd left the house together, when we drove to Signal Hill to look out across Table Bay and the ships in the harbour and the aeroplanes taking off in the distance over the Cape Flats. I told you how I wanted to travel on a freight ship but that I'd be flying home soon instead. You nodded and we spoke of other things, as if I'd never said anything.*

*But you clung to me tighter as the date approached and I moved in for the last few days before I left. And I felt good. Yes, you were, are, gorgeous, forthright, sexy. Confident in a way I hadn't known in girls back home in Lilyfield where they listened to their mothers and their brothers.*

*I never met your parents then. You said we didn't have the time to waste on a mother who paid you no attention and a defeated father who had lost the battle. And I wasn't really interested, to be honest. The days were spent together, in your bed, with the noisy birds outside.*

*I left. I knew you'd be fine. I knew that metal filings coursed through your veins, even though sometimes I had to assemble you carefully, piece by piece, when you cried in the night, emerging from a nightmare, fragile as a porcelain tea cup.*

*My dad and Alethea, my sister, picked me up from the airport and we went home to a feast prepared by my aunts. I slept all Saturday and called you but you were out. Then I called again but they said you were sleeping. We spoke in the middle of the night, remember. I sent you a postcard of the Opera House, far from the weatherboard house in Lilyfield.*

*Then you rang. It was two in the morning. I ran to the phone, as you do when you know it's for you. You were quiet, as if I'd woken you, not the other way round. You said how much you missed me. That you still loved me. How you liked the postcard and when could you visit?*

*"The thing is, Alekkie, I think I'm pregnant."*

*I was sitting on the floor in the passage next to the telephone table. I think you repeated yourself. I nodded, but you couldn't see. You rattled on.*

*I was holding on to the receiver hard. I thought we'd been careful. My head was filled with the wailing of a baby and then your face and your voice washed over me and I felt calm again. I reassured you and you surged on. Three tests that day. It had to be right. No legal solutions. No legal abortion.*

*All the while I was quiet. I like to weigh up all the options. And my father and my sister were beyond the wall I crouched against.*

*You were so optimistic, I remember, and I was bewildered. It wasn't how I'd planned things. But you can't plan out your life, can you? I promised you could come here, that I'd be here, that it would be okay.*

*I put down the phone. I heard a car go by outside. It was raining and the tyres swished against the water. Its lights flashed through the glass of the front door, fragmented by the panes. My father's front door. The home I'd grown up in, where my mother had died and where Alethea and I had been close and separate, depending on our whim.*

*I shook my head, stood up and went back to my room. Your voice had been so near. I longed for you. The sheets of my single bed were dishevelled and I imagined you already lying there, waiting for me, your hands on your swelling belly, looking directly at me, the vacant pools gone from your eyes.*

*"Susan, Susan," I said as I pulled the crumpled sheet over me, knowing that sleep was impossible now. Nothing would be the same. Tomorrow the world would be a different place to how it had been that day. And you were going to join me. And you were having a baby. Our baby.*

*I put on my Dollar Brand tape, softly, and listened to his fingers stroke the keys like a lover while the rain fell in the yard.*

*By the time I got up the next morning, I was thrilled. It was all going to work out fine.*

*But it didn't, did it? Oh, for a while, your pleasures at Sydney, at the growing form beneath your stretching skin, the games of finding somewhere to live. We both tried, I know, but it was like we were tugging at the end of two different ropes and we just went flying, in opposite directions, with poor Marc hurtling into the sky. And all those questions, the ones I should have asked, they are yet to be answered.*

*You know, don't you, that I've never stopped loving you, and I can't stop trying, even though we're so far apart. As always.*

*Alex*

Susan got up and went to the bathroom. She stared into her puffy eyes as she brushed her teeth. She was tired, so tired, but knew that sleep was far off. She opened her toiletries bag and swallowed two Valerian.

She tossed in her bed, trying to will herself to sleep. And then, she slept.

The sounds of a distant rooster and the servants in the yard woke her. She drew her knees up to her chest and sat, still wrapped in the early morning glow. She remembered that time, when she had stopped dreaming, too scared to go to sleep, to close her eyes and let the rest sweep over her.

It was Alex who had pulled her through, unintentionally, unwittingly, he had been there. He had been the one. She wiped away a lone tear that sneaked down her cheek. She reached across for her pad and pen.

*Dear Alex*

*What can I say? I'm so stupid, so shallow. Just like Aggie and my mom. Isn't it a joke? Fighting them all the way, only to see we are one and the same. As my bobba would have said, "oy vey".*

*I have read and re-read your letter and I can't honestly believe that you still want to be with me. But you do.*

*I got to know you through a mist. That summer everything was as if through a dirty glass, thick and unclear, sticky with fingerprints and the residue of red wine.*

*Did you ever really know me well? Did I know you? That I can answer. Oh, I do, after all these years we lived together. But those first months in Oranjezicht, you were a buoy in the bay, something to cling to, to keep me from drowning. I learnt later that you weren't a buoy but an atoll whose pure coral reaches down to the ocean's floor. But there I was, clinging to you, pulled by strong currents, lurching in the backwash.*

*You stopped my nightmares and shifted the grey pallor that engulfed me. You sliced and buttered bread and fed me morsels. And slowly, I let you hold me. And then you were gone, as I knew you would be, and I was left with the orange peel drying and a Midnight Oil tape beside the bed. You had saved me from my terrors, but I never explained them, did I? I never let you in.*

*Yet you did rescue me, finally, and Marc, and I have always been grateful and I've hidden myself in that gratitude all these years.*

*That is what I assumed held us together but I needed to pull myself away to see if there was something stronger. And there is, as you always knew. If only I'd trusted you at the beginning; all along.*

*I'm surrounded by my family's past, and am sorting through the remnants. The house is full of signs of affection and tokens of love but also shards of pain and disappointment.*

*I've seen how superficial and judgemental I've been. Poor Uncle Aaron. I'd always been so disdainful of him, just like my mom. That has made me ashamed, made me feel like a silly kid. Finally, he's found the courage to marry the woman he loves, after letting her slip away all those years ago. I can't let the same thing happen to us, Alex.*

*It takes so much strength, to trust and love. I don't know, do I have it in me? Alex, can you see it in your heart to forgive me? For not having loved you as I should have, as you deserved.*

*This trip was so necessary. But there are other things I need to do before I can go back to you. When I do, I'll be ready for you and Marc. I promise. I'm sorry it's taken so long, that I've wasted so many years.*

*Susan*

She found an envelope and left the letter on the secretaire, to be taken to the post office. She ate breakfast on her own and then returned to the floor of the spare bedroom, surrounded by piles and boxes. Faded clothes, linen reeking of mothballs, old school books and stacks of magazines, toiletries and hats. The air was full of dust and her hands were filthy. It seemed like nothing had been sorted or thrown out since Uncle Aaron requisitioned his parents' bedroom and had everything moved out and into this room.

Together with Eunice they had marked what they could into four categories: one for the maids, which would probably be the largest pile, another for a man from an auction house in Cape Town who was coming to pick up everything the following week, the things that Aaron might want to keep and the few items Susan wanted.

She loved her bobba's Grimwade rose tea set, only used for visitors, now worse for wear, missing a few cups and showing cracks. There was a standard lamp that would look beautiful with a new lampshade, a few dishes and plates and the old sewing basket. There was so much to go through, in every room, furniture, kitchen equipment and books that she still had to sort. It was all so shabby and tired. Her mother had cleared the house of all its gems after Bobba died and again before she emigrated to Sydney. Her flat in Waverton had some beautiful pieces of early twentieth century Africana, the yellowwood tallboy in her study, the mahogany dining table with the six matching chairs and sideboard, and the stinkwood *kis* at the bottom of her bed. And the gilt mirror she had given Susan, now packed in a box with all her things in a colleague's garage, which was waiting for her to go home, to make a decision.

As she touched the glasses, books and chairs she was surrounded once more by the faces; living people, dead people, whispering to her, urging her, looking at her with

knowing glances. They were the same voices that had followed her last time, after she left *Waterval* for Cape Town, that chased her to Australia, haunting her waking moments and stalking her in her sleep.

*I can't deal with this. I had no choice. I never hurt anyone. Why don't you all fuck off and leave me alone?*

How she had loved this house, this valley, the bedroom she and Aggie shared, the garden they had played in, the beach where they'd learnt to swim. The way it had been until that last summer. She had returned, finally, only to be locked in a house of silent reprobation, tortured voices and ominous warnings.

It wasn't only the Van Zyls, Susan thought, as she sorted through a box of shabby, faded handkerchiefs that would have belonged to Zeide, but Katrina's withering looks, cold hands and hostile silences, Tikkie's swings between cloying sweetness and old fashioned truisms and Uncle Aaron's useless flopping and pacing. He wanted it all to be over and done with so he could move on or, it seemed to Susan, return to his past. They were all watching her, even the shopkeepers and the bank clerk.

*Like they are waiting for me to make a move. What move? I owe them nothing. I owe you nothing.*

The handkerchiefs went into the maids' pile. Then she started on a box of old bills, telephone, electricity and invoices from Garlicks in Town. There was no paper recycling in Donkerbos, so they went into the rubbish. She dug her hand into the box.

"Ow," she yelled, pulling her hand out. She'd cut it on something. Blood splashed onto the papers. She picked up one of the handkerchiefs and dabbed the cut, then sucked her knuckle.

"Damn, damn."

Tikkie's head appeared round the door. She was always there. "Everything okay?"

"Just cut myself. No drama." Tikkie was always about, trying to smooth things over, trying not to make suggestions or impose, finishing Uncle Aaron's sentences, neatening the scatter that Susan left trailing behind her.

Susan felt trapped. This house was like a tomb. The town was too small. She felt like everything was closed to her. She couldn't go walking, not to the waterhole, not

to the beach. She was locked out. She kicked the box hard and sighed. Then she picked it up and carefully emptied its contents into the black bin liner until the small framed drawing with its broken glass slid out. Most of the glass was still intact. The drawing was done in pencil crayon, a protea bush in bloom, at the side of the *kloof*. On the way to the waterhole. 'For Shmuel Kaminer. Protea cynaroides, Western Cape. By Josephus, 11 years old.'

She stared at it. She closed her eyes. Slowly she stood up, unclenching her body as she rose. She felt weak, as if the small shard of glass had torn right through her. She picked up the broken picture and closed the door behind her. Her letter was no longer there in the passage. She pushed open her bedroom door and placed the frame on the bedside table.

She picked up the towel off the back of the chair, shoved her swimsuit in her pocket and slammed the kitchen door behind her. Stompie wagged his tail and refused to turn back, so she let him follow, or lead her, toward the track. Keppie was working in the garden as she walked past.

"No-one here swims at the waterhole anymore, Miss. Not since ... Katrina's boy drowned."

She felt her temperature plunge. "I'm going there, anyway."

The sun was high in the sky and the day was hot. Just like then, except it had been the dead of summer.

She'd been along the track so many times, every summer holiday as a girl. And yet it felt different, this time. Everything was smaller, as if she were a giant striding out. She'd grown used to the vast blueness of the Australian sky, the hardness of the dry and burnt earth, the shabby greyness of the eucalypt forests, where the bark peeled like paper and where the birds called out sharply in warning. Here, she stood surrounded by granite cliffs, dark and cool, and the whispering leaves of the candlewood trees. The greens were stronger and cleaner and the cragginess of the mountain scratched gently into the solitude of the day. Moisture seeped from the undergrowth and sunbirds twittered gently from the high branches, cooing and whirring. She swung her arms out about her, protected by the

stillness of the branches and tall grasses as she made her way up the incline. The gravel crunched under her sandals.

She bit her lip. This was meant to be hard, and yet she felt at ease, as she passed a lizard sliding off its sunny rock.

“I’m home,” she said as she passed the lone oak tree with hearts and dates sliced into its solid trunk. “And Alex still loves me.” As she moved up the gradual incline, as her calves stretched and lengthened, she felt the slow release of the ache in her neck and shoulders, an ache that had been buried for so long, the unplugging of a scream that had been jammed, shoved back down, waiting inside. I’ve got to keep going, she thought and began to run, up the side of the mountain, until the path rounded the *kloof* and she could run no more, her breath short and hot, her stomach tight.

She stopped and looked down to the valley below. The town had grown. The Sternberg and Van Zyl houses were no longer on the outskirts as they had been when Max and Bashe had moved in, but two among many. The fields were smaller, neatly demarcated, and an industrial estate had spread its tentacles. Surrounded by little boxes. That would be the township. Neat rows cut through the concrete blocks. No trees, but what seemed like a field of different coloured sheets of corrugated iron. The squatter camp. Huge lorries roared along the national road, hauling produce and livestock from the farms. She looked directly below to where their house was, the tall trees up the drive and bright beds of flowers. The silver roof reflected the sun into her eyes. Then she looked further, to the other property, climbing the side of the mountain. Outhouses sloped down, vehicles were scattered behind the building. A white *bakkie* in front. Always the white *bakkie*. Her heart quickened. But it was distant, far beneath her, out of reach. She stood there, in full view of the valley. If anyone cared to cover their eyes from the sun and glance up towards the mountains, they’d see her standing, leaning against the rock face.

She carried on walking, following the bending track, pulling her thin top closer to her, her sweaty body cooling in the breeze that caught her hair and blew it across her eyes. The sun was behind her now. She found a stick and threw it up ahead. Stompie dashed forward and brought it back to her between his teeth, panting. She patted his head.



As the foliage grew taller around her, she heard the sound of the water as it cascaded across the boulders and into the river. The gentle swishing sound that had been there forever, millennia before her, before her grandparents, at the waterhole. The sound that roared in winter and softened to a murmur at summer's crest. Its whispering song soothed her, until she reached the break in the trees, to the small path that led down through the thickening bush, down towards the water.

She could go no further. Her feet wouldn't take her down into the darkened grove where the birds were silent and it was cold and gloomy and damp.

"It's past, behind me. I'm home." Still, she couldn't move, so she sat on a large rock on the track and looked down, listening to the call of the flowing water, stroking the dog that sat next to her.

The year Susan finished her law degree had been one of the hottest on record. The heat was throbbing and Susan's lip was damp with sweat. Freedom at last. She'd escaped from home for a few days at her grandparents, exams behind her forever. Her cotton T-shirt clung to her body. She carried a plastic bag with provisions. The weight of the bottle of wine grew heavier as she climbed.

The air was filled with the scent of camphor from the bushes, with the hum of the heat and drone of the insects. The air seemed to melt in waves against the granite rock face that followed the path towards the river. The trees were silent and still, not a breath of wind moved their leaves. The flowers had closed their blooms, in anticipation of the coolness of evening. Below she could see the neatly segmented fields, the tracks criss-crossing them, and the houses. *Waterval*, on the edge of the village, the largest in the valley, and then the Van Zyls', directly beneath her.

The track was deserted. It curved round the rock face and the thickness of the bushes increased and soon she could hear the sound of the river, not a gush or roar but a gentle murmur. She took the turnoff through the bushes and then removed her sandals to climb over the smooth dark rocks, overhung by branches. Ahead, the sun broke through onto the water, a calm pool nestled beneath the rocks. The waterfall trickled over the lip. She climbed above the waterhole, up the craggy steps, carved by water and time, to the cave that nestled in the side of the mountain.

She left the bag inside the entrance of the cool cave, the secret place they had shared as children. They used to play there with the other local kids until Kobie and Petrus and the other older boys frightened her and Aggie away with dead snakes and live spiders. She shivered and, with only her towel and a book, went down to the waterhole.

She threw her towel over a warm rock. Her legs and tummy were brown from many hours on the beach and at the pool at home. She leaned on her elbows and turned the pages of her book impatiently, twisting a permed curl around her finger, tugging it and letting it go, like a corkscrew. She stood up and clambered onto the highest rock formation and looked down across the valley. Two horses behind the fence to the Van Zyls' property swished their tails against the heat. She could see the distant farmhouse, the disused tractors and rusted cars on blocks.

Sure she was alone, she jumped across the boulders, dropped her bikini top on her towel and dived into the water, dark and still and green.

"Ah," she cried to the birds as they made a hasty ascent to the low-hanging branches. She kicked and splashed and then, chilled, climbed carefully over the slippery rocks and returned to where she'd left her towel. She looked down at her cold body, drops of water rolling off, slipping over the suntan lotion. She dabbed at her breasts with the towel, looked back at the water, wondering how it would be tomorrow morning, when she would be here with Hugo. Slowly she turned on the towel, stretched and sighed. She pulled her T-shirt over her damp skin, it clung and twisted. It was time to head back to Bobba, who would be starting to worry.

She walked round back to the cave, checking that the bag was not visible and turned toward the house.

Bobba worried about everything, as the years had passed since the death of her husband. Katrina was still there, out in the yard with Josephus and the other servants. And Uncle Aaron too, with his silly jokes and secretive ways. Susan turned back, toward the track back to the house. It was so beautiful. And tonight, she'd be back here, showing it to Hugo.

Hugo Malan, tall with a laugh at the corner of his mouth, his strong shoulders and his big feet. Better than any character in her boring book. Hugo was coming that night on his way to the surf at Jeffries Bay. She had told him that if he stopped off she'd

show him the hidden cave. She'd loved it ever since Uncle Aaron had first shown it to them as kids, and as a teenager reading soppy love stories, it became her dream to spend the night there in the arms of a lover, strong and silent, keeping the baboons at bay. At last. Her time had come. It wouldn't be full moon, but it was warm. She couldn't wait to report back to Hannah and Lauren at home, waiting to hear the next instalment.

Bobba would freak if she found out that she had non-Jewish boyfriend, not just a *goy*, but an Afrikaner. She would be on the phone to Susan's mother within milliseconds. When Aggie had dated, briefly, a nice Anglican accountancy student, her parents had literally gone into mourning, until she met David Lipman and that was that.

She joined the road to the house. She heard the gravel churning behind her and turned to see Josephus on a large black bicycle. He was a proper adult now, not just the gawky teenager who always seemed to be there when she dropped something, or swore, or couldn't do her homework. She felt her cheeks redden, as they always did, glad that it was hidden by her tan.

"Hello, man. Howzit? Haven't seen you in yonks."

"Hello Miss Susan."

"Don't Miss Susan me. How many times do I have to ask you to call me just Susan?"

"Okay, just Susan. How were your exams?"

"Not too bad. Katrina tells me you're studying by correspondence. How's that going?"

"Too hard, just Susan. Commerce through UNISA is tough. I don't have anyone to tutor me – your grandfather was very handy."

"I miss Zeide too."

They walked on in silence.

"Have you been to the waterhole?"

"Ja. My favourite place round here. Do you go down there?"

"No. We're not really welcome there, specially during the holidays. Anyway, I can't swim. Scared of the water."

"Ja, I remember. Maybe I can teach you while I'm here?"

"I'm happy not knowing how to swim, just Susan."

“Stupid attitude.”

“What’s it got to do with you? Sorry. I forgot how ... straight-talking you always are.”

She looked at him. She’d forgotten his sad, grey eyes, shaped like almonds, gentle, yet always waiting to cry, it seemed to her. He stood leaning slightly, his hands anxious, fluttering, resting on his brow, then tugging at his curly dark hair. They were long boned, his hands, elegant, she thought, like a musician. He looked much older than his almost thirty years, that was for sure.

“How come you aren’t married yet?”

“I could ask you the same.”

“I’m only twenty-one.”

He looked at her. The intensity of his stare made her flush again and she turned away, running to the edge of the road where the wild *disas* grew. She bent down to pick a handful. How come he always managed to make her feel awkward, like she said the wrong thing? For as long as she could remember. No-one else seemed to mind or take offence like he did. Funny what you forget. And what you can’t.

“Just Susan, you shouldn’t pick them – they’re endangered, those *disa uniflora*. I’ll pick you something from the garden.”

“That’s very sweet, Josephus. I don’t know the difference between an aloe and a *watsonia*.”

He laughed. His teeth were uneven and small.

“Hey, do you remember your old Uncle Shmuel? He could identify every flower and insect. He used to take you and Aggie walking in the *veld*? He was always far in front and you two just tagged along behind him. He loved the bush.”

“Oh ja and I hated it. The *goggas* would chew at our legs and it was so sticky and sweaty. And he got so excited about stupid butterflies or bushes. We thought he was a raving lunatic and we couldn’t understand a word he said. His accent was much stronger even than Bobba’s.”

“He was just a sad old man. Lonely. He was always kind to me. He took me on hikes too, when I was a kid.”

“I didn’t know.”

“See, you don’t know everything. He taught me how to recognise different varieties of proteas and ericas. I remember once we explored some underground springs. We even stayed out one night in a cave full of Hottentot rock paintings. He read a huge amount. Lots of his books weren’t in English. Old ones, from the early explorers.”

“What happened to them?”

“Didn’t you know? He gave them to me. Left them in his will.”

“Fat lot of use they’d be to you.”

“What?”

“I mean, not being in English. You shouldn’t get offended so easily, hey.”

He dipped his head. “Sorry, you’re right.”

“Don’t you know that Zeide never stopped telling us how bloody brilliant you were compared to his featherweight granddaughters. He was a real pain in the ass sometimes, specially when it came to you. You were like a protected species, like some rare orchid. Weird.”

“I never knew.”

“Well, I’d hate it to go to your head.”

Josephus raised his eyebrows, seemed to be about to say something, but kept quiet. They had reached the house. Susan climbed the front steps, waving to Josephus who continued round the drive to the back.

Susan jumped. Someone was coming. She ran to the side of the track, closer to the rock face, away from the drop down into the dark undergrowth and the river below. Stompie followed, unperturbed. She saw why, when Katrina’s heavy shape appeared around the bend, moving slowly, dragging a long, carved walking stick. With relief and dread, Susan pressed her body into the rock face but she couldn’t make herself disappear.

“Hello, Katrina.”

“Yes, Miss Susan. Keppie said I’d find you out here.”

Susan didn’t respond.

“I come here every time I’m in Donkerbos. But you’ve never come back before, have you, Miss?”

“No. It’s my first time.”

“My life was destroyed that night too.”

Susan looked down at her feet.

“I saw you at his funeral.”

“Yes, I thought you did.”

Susan looked at her face quickly and then dropped her eyes once more.

“Will we ever know what really happened that night?”

“It was so long ago.”

The old woman stared at Susan, her black eyes not moving, until Susan dropped her gaze to her clenched hands.

“Scot free. Those boys got off scot free. Those Van Zyls murdered my boy. I know it but I’ll go to my grave without justice being done. Miss Susan, do you know how many years have passed? Fifteen years. Sixteen this summer. To live with the truth all that time, how hard it must be.”

There were tears in the corners of Katrina’s eyes. Susan moved toward her but then pulled back. Katrina was standing so close to her and yet she was so far distant.

“Your hand is bleeding, Susan.”

Susan looked down. She hadn’t felt the cut re-open. “I cut it on some glass at home.”

She sucked on her hand and mumbled, “I’m so sorry, Katrina.”

“No, Miss Susan, it’s you I feel sorry for.” Katrina took her stick and pushed aside the bushes, revealing the almost hidden path, and made her way heavily down to the waterhole.

Susan wanted to cry out, to run to Katrina and lose herself in her soft body, like she had done as a little girl. Instead, she folded her arms across her chest, hugging herself tightly, and turned around to head back to the house. The dog ran ahead, stopping and waiting, then running once more, until they reached the back gate together.

## Chapter Twelve

It was cool when Susan returned to the house. She knew that somewhere behind on the track Katrina would be struggling with her stick. She didn't turn round but continued, her stomach churning. She reached the house and went straight to her room through the kitchen. Eunice knocked on her door quietly to tell her that supper was ready. She joined Uncle Aaron in the dining room. They ate in silence and then went to the lounge together to watch the news on television. The sound was on full blast and her head spun. After the headlines, Susan excused herself and went to her room. She fell asleep immediately and dreamed.

When she awoke it was early but the birds were already restless in the garden. She looked across and saw Josephus's drawing of the proteas next to the bed. She turned back toward the wall, cocooned in the soft light and sounds of morning stirring, then stretched and got out of bed. She had to get on with her piles and her lists.

She gathered the remaining books from the shelves in all the rooms and stacked them in boxes. Uncle Aaron had already selected those he wished to keep. She pushed the boxes into the passage so that Keppie and Sipho could pack them in the car while she had breakfast. She planned to drop them off at the Anglican Church hall.

Susan wanted to get out of the house, to leave behind Katrina and her knowing glances and Tikkie, so sickly sweet, with her silly hats. Even Uncle Aaron, always mild and funny, had been looking at her strangely.

"Be back soon," Uncle Aaron said as he gave her the keys. "Need the car this afternoon to take Tikkie to the doctor's. Don't go driving about, it's not safe."

"No problem, Uncle Aaron, I'm just going to the shops and the church."

Stompie sat beside the car, thumping his tail.

"Can I take him along? Nothing will happen if I've got Stompie."

She opened the back door and he jumped up, squeezed in by the boxes.

The car was sluggish, but solid. Susan drove through the town, past the turnoff to the church and took the national road, along the pass towards the coast.

It had been so long since she'd been out on this road and yet it was all so familiar. Zeide used to take them for drives. On Sundays during their school holidays or,

if Bobba was tired and it was a particularly fine evening, after work. Her mother and grandmother didn't like going down to the beach; they preferred the garden and the proximity to the maids. Zeide loved to take his two granddaughters in his car. Always the latest models, his cars were impeccably kept. The boys had to keep them in mint condition, washing them every week, waxing the wheels and topping up the oil. Zeide had always worn the softest kid leather gloves when he drove. He'd taken the girls to Napier a few times, proudly showing them the corner where he'd crashed his first car.

"Five pounds. That was a huge amount in those days, you know. The magistrate fined me five pounds. But you know what, my girls? I was proud. Young and stupid, too. But everyone talked about the corner where Sternberg crashed into the bridegroom's car on the way to his wedding. Don't tell Bobba or your mommy, girls. They don't like me bringing up the bad old days."

"This is where we learnt to drive," she said aloud to Stompie in the back seat. The dog nuzzled his nose in her neck. The car swung around the curve of the mountain and then suddenly, it was there before her, spread out like a picture in a well-worn book. The bay. She slowed down. Its grandeur never ceased to astonish her.

The grove of cypresses emerged on the left-hand side. Susan turned off the road and glided down into the parking area, dusted with sand. The gravel crackled beneath the worn tyres as she braked sharply.

She walked along the path, on the one side was the tall hedge of the cemetery, on the other, the reeds and heath of the *fynbos*. Susan climbed the last few metres to the top of the dune and there was the Indian Ocean spread out before her. She breathed in deeply and flung herself down among the tall grasses, gasping at the vastness spread before her.

*It's been so long. Fifteen years. You think you've forgotten, but you can't, can you?*

She stared out across the bay, the white sand, the pale blue water, the blurry outline of mountains and the huge sky. The lines between them were indistinct, except when the grey was broken by a silver shaft of sunlight that broke through the cloud, lost in the morning heaviness. No people, no houses, just the ocean flowing in towards her. She had come here all the years of her childhood. Swam and walked and picnicked. She



had carried the smell of the washed-up seaweed with her. The heaving water deafened her ears, the rumblings of the waves as they gathered their strength out in the bay and rolled lugubriously toward the shore, heaving the undercurrent, dislodging the sand and the small fishes in its pull.

She lay propped on her elbows with the dog alongside, watching the ocean curl and unfurl before her. Surge after surge of water beat against the white sand and slunk back out again, toward the distant mountain ranges and the endless ocean beyond. The sting of grains of sand embedded on her skin in the wind, the memories of the sound of the whispering waves had lulled her to sleep on foreign beds. This was why she'd come back. To feel the damp sand under her feet and to listen to the cry of the wheeling gulls. To wash it all away. Then she turned to look behind her, to the little fence with its gate, to the windswept cemetery. She felt icy, as if a bank of thick cloud had obliterated the sun. She squashed the fat leaves of the sour fig bush between her fingers and dropped the remnants onto the sand, putting her fingers to her nose. That tart smell, unforgettable.

The wind felt cold against her cheeks. Susan touched them. They were wet. She let the tears roll. Josephus. My cousin. I did not mourn for you but sat hidden over here from your funeral.

*What have I done?* She lay back against the dune and looked out, as she had that day. The wind bit into her neck and she pulled her uncle's woollen cap over her ears. She scraped a handful of moist sparkling sand, rubbing it between her fingers, then scattered the grains into the wind. She picked up a piece of driftwood and flung it high. It landed near the edge of the sea and Stompie chased after it. She watched his smudged paw prints indent the sand, pulled herself up and followed them, leaving behind the heavy imprint of her feet. He raced back to her, wood clenched between his jaws and dropped it at her feet. She picked it up and threw it harder. Together they ran towards the outgoing tide. Her footprints disappeared in the shallow water, as the waves slapped up and slid back, licking the sand of all traces.

The power, the noise, the wind, the cold. She had forgotten. Now she was running, arms at shoulder height, like helicopters she and Marc still played on Coogee beach in the early mornings when they thought no-one was watching. Her jeans were wet

from the spray, from the dog, and she ran faster and faster, Stompie running behind her, ahead, around her.

“Aaaah.” The air in her chest burned. Susan sat down on the firm sand to catch her breath, the dog beside her. They had completed a circle; she faced the dunes, crowned by the low wall around the cemetery and its small latched gate to the beach. It was as it had been then, fifteen years before.

She had arrived early, unsure of why she had come, what had made her get into the car and drive from Cape Town, round the bay, over the mountains. She sifted damp sand through her fingers, fall by fall, instant overtaking instant. Watching time pass in the uncountable grains. Infinitesimal seconds. The waves swept across the long beach, flap and slide. Slap and slip. The seagulls’ tortured calls struck against the wind that roared across the bay.

She felt the vibrations in the sand before she heard the beating of the drums and the cries of the women. She heard the plaintive moan of the horn before she saw them descend from the brow of a distant dune, dark figures, cut-outs against a rim of sky and the green blush of the sand dune. The line grew, figures bending and straightening. In front was the man with his horn, weaving and diving, forward into the wind, reeling them in with the piercing thread of sound. He stopped and waited for the congregation to gather, then threw his hat into the air and caught it. Slowly he led them down towards the soft sand and the waves. The drummers followed, beating solemnly to his rhythm.

As they grew closer she could make out the black suits of the men, trousers rolled up to the knees. Barefoot. Stamping and singing.

Then they followed, the eight pallbearers carrying the large wooden coffin. And then the women, black dresses, bare feet, dark heads wrapped in black *doeks*, swaying to the drums, ululating hands on mouths open close, open close.

Children running to the front, holding back, returning to their mothers’ sides, watching the water, bending to run their hands through the white sand, picking up shells and throwing them toward the sea, or slipping them into their pockets.

Slowly the procession sashayed from the ridge down to the beach. Across the beach. She watched, clinging back towards the dune. They passed her, not seeing her

among the reeds and bush. They marched and sang and cried. She watched the sway of Katrina's broad round hips and heard the depth of her sorrow as her voice rose and fell, leading the others. Her sisters, her cousins, workers from the surrounding farms.

They reached the gate of the cemetery. The horn blower lifted the latch, threw it open and they filed in slowly, singing, beating on the drums to where the minister was waiting.

She turned toward them, facing the dark mountain and the sandswept graveyard.

Remember me. Forget my fate.

The wind was cold on her wet face. She swayed in its strength. The sand scratched her bare arms. She hugged herself and waited and listened as their voices swelled and receded and swelled. She heard the minister calling out to his god. She heard a seagull screech.

Katrina looked up too. Saw the gull sweeping across the bay, followed it with her body and as she turned, she saw Susan, cowering and shaking. She shook her head and dropped her eyes once more to the ground. Her boy was dead.

Susan found herself back in her car, away from the wind and the stinging sand. From the glove compartment she pulled a bottle of brandy. It warmed her momentarily. She turned the key in the ignition and headed back to Town, to where her days were crammed with shrill laughter, a bottle of wine begun before noon, pills and *dagga*. In those moments when the fog cleared, the light was brittle and sharp and hurt the back of her eyes and she picked up her glass or drew on her joint.

Nights were hard, when she forced her eyes to close and willed rest to sweep over her. Her doctor prescribed drugs so that darkness descended and clamped down on her like a thick blanket and smothered her until she struggled to wake up and then the clock would show that she had been lost for several hours. It shocked her to see the grey hairs creeping into her thick hair. Too young, she wailed to her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Too young.

Days dribbled past, chances lost and friends despairing, uncertain and puzzled by the changes. Then there was Alex and then he had gone, and she slept on in her twisted threads until she felt it murmuring inside her, a tadpole in a bubble of hope. She packed and said goodbye and Marc was born in Sydney.

Susan walked down the dune to the water. Stompie sat at the edge, waiting. She took off her sandals and left them on the dry sand. The water was icy. She drew her toes along the wet sand, drawing a line that quickly filled with water. A wave rolled in, wetting the hems of the legs of her jeans. She unzipped them and flung them on top of her sandals. She walked into the gentle water, her bright green T-shirt flapping against her thighs. The waves lapped gently against her calves, on the shallow shelf that reached far out into the bay. She turned to look back at the sweeping beach. Its immensity, her smallness, caught in her throat.

She shouted out. Louder. The seagulls flew higher, squawking in alarm. The cry curled out of her, from her belly, washing through her lungs, twisting out her throat and surging over her tongue and blasting through her lips. She roared, splitting the air with her noise.

And then she was silent, surrendering to the repeated lashings of the waves. She looked out, shivering, Goosebumps on her thin arms. Susan breathed in sharply and ran towards the deep water, until the waves were larger and stronger and the sand dipped away from beneath her feet. Stompie stood barking on the sand and then she couldn't hear him anymore. She kicked and beat her arms, pressing against the current. Her mouth filled with the salty water. She could no longer feel the sand beneath her feet. Her breath came in hard surges. She pounded against the water, beating against every breaking wave. And then she was washed over by weariness. She felt clean, empty, and numb. She lay on the water and waited for a powerful wave to carry her limp body back towards the shallows. She pulled herself to her feet and dragged herself over the soft sand, exhausted, to where her clothes lay and where Stompie sat patiently with the piece of driftwood in his mouth. Grabbing her things, they ran up the dune together, past the open gate to the cemetery, back to the car park where the wind had dropped and the sun was warmer.

She pulled off her wet T-shirt and underwear and snuggled into the sweater she'd left in the car. Her hair hung limp and damp on her shoulders. She sighed. She looked at her hands. They were white and wrinkled from the water.

*That's how they'll look when I'm old. Worn and unhappy. There's blood on these hands. Wash out those thoughts. Wash it all away. Go home and have a shower.*

*Stompie, Stompie. I've been such a shit. Why isn't Alex here now? And Marc? I should have told him. I should have let him in then, so he could have loved me. And I could have loved you, Alex, like you wanted. What a fool. I'll go to the police, talk to Katrina. Tell her what happened. She'll understand. They'll finally have to pay. First, I'll have shower. And I'll call you, Alex, the call you've been waiting for. Is it too late? Alex? Oh my God.*

Susan felt light. Lighter than she'd felt for years. Fifteen years. She heard herself singing: "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with". She banged her hands on the steering wheel in time, singing out to the countryside that flew past the open window. She slowed. There was something going on up ahead. She hoped it wasn't a hit and run. A white *bakkie* jutted into the road, on the curve, at the beginning of the pass. She edged onto the wrong side of the road, unwilling to stop. She looked at the *bakkie*. It was them, Kobie and Petrus. As she drew level, the driver's door was flung wide open, forcing her to swerve, and then it slammed shut and they took off after her. Stompie growled from the back seat.

There was no other traffic. She managed to swing the heavy wheel and straighten out, but not before she skidded on the loose gravel.

"Holy fuck."

They were on her tail now, chasing her up the steepening pass. She clung onto the steering wheel, gripping it as if it alone would save her life. Their *bakkie* was so much more powerful. They could easily force her off the road. Her foot jabbed at the petrol pedal, going as fast as she possibly could, clinging to the gracefully cambered highway. They were so close behind her she could see their grins, their eyes hidden behind shiny reflective sunglasses.

She was still a few kilometres out of town and hadn't reached the crest of the pass yet, where the rocks and trees tumbled down the side toward the river bed.

"We've got to do it, Stompie."

They were too close. She felt a sway, as they nudged her rear mudguard.

"If they don't kill me, Uncle Aaron will."

Kobie, driving, pressed his hand on the hooter. The noise was deafening. She couldn't stop. She had to keep on.

Then they reached the straight and the gradual downhill. The *bakkie* pushed her once more, swerved, and overtook her. As they drove past, Petrus yelled out of his window.

“Get out of Donkerbos, bitch.” And they were gone, accelerating into the distance.

She couldn’t pull over, she couldn’t stop. She drove, barely breathing, until she entered the town where she stopped, a block away from the police station. She sat in the car, shivering, her hands still tightly clamped to the steering wheel. Stompie nuzzled her from behind.

“They’re gonna get me. I’m going to catch the next flight home. I should never have left Marc. I should never have come back.”

A girl walked past dressed in her school uniform, carrying a heavy backpack. She looked into the car, puzzled.

“You alright, lady?”

Susan stared at her. “Yes, yes. Thanks.”

She rolled up the window, turned on the ignition and headed back to *Waterval*. Her uncle’s remote was in the glove box. She scrambled for it and pressed. The gates wouldn’t open. She tried again. She could hear the sound of its motor jarring. She looked around. There was no-one about. She unlocked her door and climbed out the car, leaving Stompie inside. The gates had been bound together by a dark piece of rag. She undid the knots and untwisted the tie. Her fingers were rigid as she fumbled but it came loose easily in her hands.

She dropped it to the ground. It was her bikini top. The one she’d worn to the waterhole that night, all those years ago. She grabbed it from the road and shoved it in her bag. The gates swung open and she drove up the drive, screeching and bumping over the rough road.

“Alex. Alex. I need you. Forgive me, Alex.”

She opened the back door for the dog and ran into the house, straight to the bathroom where she turned on the shower, hot and strong, and let the spikes of water beat against her.

## Chapter Thirteen

Susan tied her hair in a towel and went to sit on the *stoep* in her dressing gown. She'd have to tell Uncle Aaron. He was fussing about the car, emptying boxes from the back seat.

"You told me you were going to drop these boxes at the church this morning. Told you I needed the car this afternoon. What the hell happened? Came running in like you'd seen a ghost. My bumper's dented and paint's scratched. What's the matter with you? Just trouble, you are."

"I've come all this way to help you pack up and everyone is being nasty to me."

"Grow up. We all know you left here with a string of unanswered questions. We had to clear everything up, you just ran off. Never said a word about what happened. Upset your Bobba, the maid, everyone. Josephus wasn't the type to fall into the waterhole drunk. Even I knew that. You think you can just swan back in and everyone will forgive you? Doesn't work that way."

Susan's lip quivered and she felt the tears welling.

"I'm sorry, Uncle. I wanted to tell you. I was going to tell you. It's all become too much for me. And I'm so scared. I was forced off the road by the Van Zyls. They followed me ... They wanted to kill me. I should never have come back. I'm such an idiot. I should have stayed away forever."

"You're completely hysterical. Get yourself a cup of tea or something. Tikkie'll be here any minute. With her nephew."

"Her nephew?"

"Tertius, from Bloem."

"Tertius?"

"Stop repeating everything I say and help me with the boxes. I can't find the boy anywhere. No, go inside and get changed. Can't look like that in front of Tikkie and Tertius."

Susan ran inside, shaking her head. She was losing control. When she'd changed, she sat at the living room window, waiting behind the curtain for Tikkie and her nephew.

A large maroon Ford Mondeo with Bloemfontein number plates glided to a halt behind Uncle Aaron's car. The newly dented bomber looked lame alongside it. A small man with fading blond hair and black rimmed glasses jumped out of the driver's seat, ran around the car and opened the passenger door. His grey pants had a neat crease down the front and his blue and white striped short sleeve shirt was immaculate. On his wrist was a thick strapped plastic digital watch. The grey leather-look shoes coordinated with his outfit. Susan smiled to herself, feeling more at ease. "A Woolworths customer, or his wife is." She left the house and stood next to her uncle on the *stoep*.

Tikkie emerged from her seat, beaming at the attention.

"Tertius van Zyl, meet Aaron Sternberg and his niece Susan. I don't know if you remember them."

They all shook hands politely.

"We'd better head off if we want to get there on time. And you must go across later and tell your Pa you're here."

"We can go in my car, it's more ... it's a company car."

"But I've just cleared all these boxes out."

"Come on, Aaron, let the youngster drive us."

Aaron sat in the back.

Tikkie waved, "See you later, Susan."

"I just don't know. That girl ..." Aaron muttered from the back seat.

"Everything will come right, listen to me," Tikkie said and then went on to tell Tertius about Dr Jamieson and his tests.

They were driving back from Dr Jamieson's. Aaron's brain was awash with medical terms, options and procedures. His temples were throbbing.

"Can we stop at the cemetery, Tertius? I need to tell them my news. And you can visit your mother's grave. It's been a long time."

Tertius looked at her and smiled. He turned into the empty parking area, stopped the car and opened the door for his aunt. Aaron opened the gate and went to the far end of the cemetery. Tikkie unwrapped the flowers she had brought with her and pulled the dead ones from the plastic vases placed on the graves.



She was walking toward her nephew who was staring at the gravestone of his mother when she heard Aaron's voice.

"Tikkie, Tikkie. *Oy vey*."

"What? What, Aaron?" She ran quickly past the low white wall. Gravestones had been uprooted, smashed into chunks. Sprayed with yellow and red streaks. Swastikas on the white wall. Shattered bottles strewn across the grassy graves. The smell of beer and urine was still strong. The contents of a rubbish bin had been flung across the paths.

"*Shma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad ...*"

She looked to where Aaron was crouching, wailing. Then she turned and vomited. A pig's head, blood still dripping, was skewered on a post, staring at them, a grin slashed across its broken jaw.

Aaron went over to Tikkie and pulled her up. They clung together.

Tertius was running toward the car. "Come, come, hurry. We must call the police."

Aaron's body was shaking, as if in prayer. He mumbled and shook his head.

"I must call the Rabbi. I must go back and clean it up. I can't just leave it. *Oy vey, oy vey, the tsoris*."

"Get in the car, Mr Sternberg, get in the car. They may still be around. If it was just me, I'd beat the living crap out of them, excuse the French, but with you two, we should just get out of here and get the police."

Aaron stood.

"I can't leave them like this. My parents. I must stay. I must clean it up."

Tikkie took his hand and led him gently.

"Come, *lammetjie*. We'll get you home. Then you can call the Rabbi and your other people and they can sort it out."

She sat with him in the back of the car, stroking his arm and his thigh, whispering, while he sat in silence, hunched over.

In front, Tertius was muttering under his breath. "It's those bloody Mohammedan terrorists who are responsible for this. Pardon my French. They're doing it everywhere. And now, even in our district. I'm heading straight for the police station."

"Tertius, my dear, how wise is it to involve the police?"

“What do you mean? We must catch them. They can’t get away with it.”

“Maybe it’s more local.”

“All the more reason to get the cops. They’ll clear the squatter camp.”

“No, it may be ... your brothers,” Tikkie put her hand on her nephew’s arm.

“What?”

“Yes, Kobie and Petrus may be mixed up in this. There was trouble here years ago. Aaron’s niece is back. Things aren’t right.”

“What’s she got to do with it?”

“I’m not sure. I don’t know. Secrets and whispers. *Stille waters, diepe grond.*”

“Sounds way too far-fetched for me.”

“Who knows, Tertius? Aaron tells me she thinks they chased her this morning. Out here,” Tikkie said.

“Still, I’m stopping in at the police station.”

They drove on, all three enveloped in their own silence.

## Chapter Fourteen

The car doors slammed. Susan heard them from the back bedroom. She'd calmed down, and was working her way methodically through her grandmother's fabrics and pattern books. She'd phoned Alex and Marc again. Numb, she was determined to continue with her task, forcing herself to think about her conversation with Alex, blocking out her drive home.

*It will all get sorted. Alex will clear it all up. Alex will help me, again. But he's right. The circles won't end. But this has to. I must make a decision. It's messing us all up. And being here, it's making it harder, not easier. Please, let me find the answer. Let me find an answer.*

She heard another car pull up and two more doors bang. She froze. It sounded like a *bakkie*. She stood up quietly and hid behind the closed door.

But she could hear her uncle opening the front door and greeting the new arrivals. Silently she opened the door and peered down the darkened passage to where two policemen were silhouetted against the light beyond the entry. The younger man was Coloured. They were both neatly dressed in dark blue shorts, light blue short-sleeved shirts, long socks and blue peaked caps. They had handguns on their belts, she saw as she drew closer, slowly walking down the passage, nudged against the wall, hidden in the shadows. Who had called them? Why? Had Uncle Aaron taken her seriously?

Susan followed them into the sitting room. "What's happened? Is everyone okay?"

"It was shocking. Terrible," Tikkie was trembling.

"What?"

"The cemetery. Your part. It's been wrecked," Tertius said, standing up as Susan came in.

"My part? The Jewish section? But ..."

She listened as her uncle ushered Inspector Bothma and Sergeant Viljoen onto the sofa, ordered Eunice to bring more coffee for them and explained to them what had happened. The inspector with more stripes on his sleeves asked the questions. They all answered at once.

“But I was there earlier today. Everything seemed okay then,” Susan interrupted.

Her uncle looked up at her. “What? What were you doing there?”

“I tried to tell you earlier, but ... I went there this morning. With Stompie. I didn’t see anything. We were on the beach. The dog was fine. He didn’t notice anything. There were no other cars. Except ...”

“What?” Uncle Aaron and the sergeant asked together.

“There was a white *bakkie*. It was parked just off the road, jutting into the road, at the beginning of the pass back to Donkerbos. At first I thought it was an accident, but then I saw, it was them. It was Kobie and Petrus. Van Zyl. Your nephews. Your brothers,” she looked at Tikkie and Tertius accusingly.

“Why should they have had anything to do with it?” Tertius asked.

“They followed me into town. They chased me, and rammed me. They forced me off the road. They yelled. They hooted. They laughed at me. You can see the damage to the car. Uncle Aaron saw it earlier. The paint ... that’s evidence, isn’t it?”

“Why didn’t you report it to us?”

“I was going to, but I was too scared. I came home instead. I thought maybe Uncle Aaron had called you and that’s why you were here.”

“But what do the two things have to do with each other?” Tertius asked again.

The inspector looked at Susan. “It all goes back to the drowning of the Snyman guy.”

“Who?” asked Susan.

“Josephus,” her uncle looked at her sharply.

She bit her lip.

“We’ve got a team coming from Napier to look at the cemetery. Things have been very quiet in this district. No inter-racial problems. There is no Muslim community here. This is very unusual. That’s why Napier’s been called in. We’ll go to the pass and check for clues. Do you want to report the damage to your car? We can match the paint, as the young lady says. See if there are traces on their *bakkie*.”

“No,” said Aaron quickly, “We don’t want to cause anymore trouble.” He looked at Tikkie. “Thank you for coming so quickly, Inspector Bothma.”

Uncle Aaron saw them out. The remaining three sat in silence. Susan was twisting her fingers around the tassels of the chair cover. When she heard the front door close she stood up.

“Excuse me. I must get back to my packing.” As she turned to leave the room, she saw the glance between Tertius and his auntie. She avoided her uncle in the passage.

She was moving boxes filled with old paintings and tapestries so that she barely heard the tap at the door.

“Can I help you?” Tertius stood there awkwardly.

“Sure. There isn’t much room in here though.”

He sat down on the edge of the bed.

“Auntie’s a bit tired, so I’m letting her rest on the bed before I take her home. I know that she’ll be running around and preparing food and who knows what else so I think a little kip would do her good. What a day it’s been. My head is still reeling. I can’t believe it. The cemetery was too terrible. I can’t believe my own brothers are involved. But...”

“How long are you here for?”

“Only a couple of days. I don’t like leaving my family. I had to come and see Auntie. She saved my life.”

“What?”

“Sorry, it wasn’t that dramatic. She persuaded my pa to let me finish school, that’s all. She paid for me to go to boarding school.”

“That’s why I don’t remember you.”

“Ja. Let me help you.”

He took a flat-packed box and assembled it for her. Susan threw rolls of fabric in.

“It must have been hard for you. Your brothers. They’re not exactly ...”

He laughed. “Why do you think I live in Bloemfontein? But I hear they got you to run all the way to Australia.”

“What do you mean?”

“No offence – I just asked Auntie.”

“What are you implying?”

“The Coloured bloke who drowned. They say it was my brothers. They were somehow involved. And so were you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Sorry, sorry. Only rumours. Hearsay.”

“What?”

“They were rescuing you.”

“Rescuing me? From what?”

“The darkie attacked you and they chased him.”

“Is that what people have been saying?”

“Look, I wasn’t here. It’s only gossip. Old gossip.”

“Is that what my uncle believes? And Katrina, Josephus’s mother?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never set foot in this house before. As I said, it was so long ago, just stories. Your family was strictly off limits to us.”

“It’s not true. That isn’t what happened.”

“So you do know?”

She looked at him, fearful. She couldn’t believe he was one of them. A Van Zyl. He had a strong Afrikaans accent. He wore a thick gold wedding band. His hands were small and chunky. His fair hair was cut very short, probably by his wife. His glasses were years out of date, framing pale blue eyes that were warm and sympathetic, like his aunt’s.

“Let me show you something.” She stood up and left the room, returning with the scrap between her hands.

“See this?” She shook it out, tentatively holding onto her black bikini top, as if it were a poisonous snake.

“It was mine. I found it today. Someone had tied it round our electronic gate, after I was chased over the pass. I last saw it fifteen years ago. The night Josephus drowned.”

“And you think it was my brothers?”

“Come on, let’s go for a walk.”

He slid off the bed and she led him out of the house, out the back, towards the track that led to the waterhole.

They sat on the warm rocks. Susan dangled her hand in the water and watched the movement of the water behind her fingers. Her fingers were white in the translucent water, like dead squid. She shivered and pulled her hand out. She was cold, deeply cold. Tertius had left his shoes, with his socks neatly rolled into them, on a nearby rock. The bottoms of his trousers were wet and his striped shirt was speckled with mud.

“I haven’t been here in fifteen years. I almost got down here yesterday, but I couldn’t make it.”

“I don’t remember when I last came here. I always hated swimming.”

“Josephus couldn’t swim either.”

She stood up and clambered over the slippery rocks. Tertius followed cautiously behind.

“Do you remember the cave?”

“I avoided it. Petrus and Kobie used to scare me half to death in there. Snakes. I hate snakes. Another reason I kept away from here.”

“To me, it had mystery. Romance.”

“You must have been a funny kid.”

“You wouldn’t have liked me.”

He looked at her. She felt her cheeks colour. She sat down on the ledge and patted a space next to her. He bent slowly, uncomfortably, and sat next to her. She pulled her knees up to her chin and leaned back against the rock, away from his gaze. She swallowed hard, her hands were shaking.

“I’ve never told a living soul.”

The old woman and her granddaughter had eaten early so it was still light when Susan declared her headache and went to her room. Uncle Aaron was at the hotel, playing cards with the travellers.

It was easy to leave unnoticed. She returned to the cave while the sun was still above the horizon. Her watch said seven and she expected him in about half an hour. At the turnoff from the main track to the waterhole she left an empty wine bottle she had found in the bushes, pointing down the path.

“Just like spin the bottle,” she giggled.

The rocks were cooling down and it was already dark at the waterhole. She made herself comfortable against the rocks, sitting on her towel, looking up at where the path broke through. She brushed her curly hair with her fingers and put on lip ice from a tiny pot in her skirt pocket, just a hint of allure, she thought. She could hear the roar of a *bakkie* on the Van Zyls' property – she saw the swirl of dust at its tail below her. Hugo was late. He always was. And he could easily get lost on the unfamiliar track.

She smiled. He tried to be such a tough guy but she had known from the first time he opened his mouth that he would be like butter in her hands. He was kind and thoughtful and treated her well. Like a gentleman. He always asked how she was, what she wanted to drink. Maybe it was because he was almost thirty. Maybe it was because he was Afrikaans. She hadn't known any Afrikaners before, except from here, and he was so charming, especially compared to the Van Zyls. He wasn't interested in what her father did and what kind of car he drove. He never discussed his family. And she loved the sex with him, it was as if he really cared whether or not she was happy. Not like Nate at Jewish summer camp. Or Errol. This was different. It was so much more adult with him. Was it respect? Did he respect her? She wasn't sure. It was all still new and exciting. She didn't love him. Not yet. But that didn't matter. Maybe it would happen tonight, here at the waterhole.

The sun had set behind her. Lights were popping up across the valley as the mauve sky turned slowly black. She bit her lip. Why wasn't he there to share it with her?

"And where the fuck is he? It's getting late," she reprimanded the sullen looking rocks across the pool.

She was annoyed because the sunset and the sunrise were to have been the most meaningful moments of the experience and he had already missed the first one. She got up and climbed above the cave so she could have a better view of the track and the distant road. Lights zigzagged but they stayed on the big road. She went back to the plastic bag and found a crumpled joint. She had been waiting to share it with Hugo, but it was getting cooler and she needed to warm up. She put on her pink zip-up sweater.

She lit the joint and drew hard on it. The night was settling in. She wasn't scared; she had been here so many times. As young kids they'd been here with old Uncle Shmuel to look for fire flies. They'd bring glass jars and try to capture them, watching



their light slowly fizzle out. They'd seen, or first heard, owls. He'd identified them for the girls.

She wished Hugo'd hurry up. The cicadas were silent and the bats swept across the sky, now almost black. She heard rustlings, but they were distant. The wind. It was cooler. She wrapped the towel around her legs and continued to wait, annoyed with herself for making this stupid plan and not bringing her jeans with her.

The sound of the footfalls was close. She must have dozed off.

"At last. What took you so long?"

"Sorry. What do you mean? I saw ..."

"Oh. Josephus. I was waiting for ... a friend."

"It's very late. I saw you coming out this way but you never came back and I was worried about you. Sorry to disturb you. But it's dangerous out here."

"I'm fine. Typical Josephus, worrying about me. It's very sweet of you but can't you just leave me alone? What is it with you? I had this arrangement to meet someone out here but they're obviously very late."

"Ja Miss, just Susan, it's almost ten. Funny place for a date ... an arrangement." He looked around.

"Oh fuck. Sorry, Josephus – for swearing – he must be lost. You're right. It is a bit dumb, meeting someone in the middle of nowhere. Maybe I should have met him closer to civilisation. Well, he's a big boy, he can look after himself."

"Do you want me to take you back down?"

"No. Ja. In a while. It's so beautiful up here. Let's stay a bit."

They sat together against the rocks, now cold behind their backs. The sky above the branches was huge, lit only by a small moon and the piercing pricks of the stars. They didn't speak, enveloped in the noises of the night around them.

She picked up the joint.

"Josephus, do you smoke *dagga*?"

He looked at her sharply.

"Not much, anymore. But ..."

"Ag, come on, you're not too old, are you?"

"Don't make jokes with me, hey."

“You must have smoked plenty of *dagga* in your time. You all do, don’t you? Oops, that was a bit ...” She looked at him coyly and then smiled. “Sorry. This is really good stuff.”

She lit it, took another drag and handed it to him.

“Come on, man.”

“You shouldn’t be out here, alone. I can’t smoke with you, it’s not right.”

“There’s no-one here. Your mother won’t find out.”

“My mother?” He looked at her. “Who do you think is the kid around here?”

He took a long drag. His face was set, serious, his grey eyes eternally sad. He wiped the joint with his fingers before passing it back to Susan, who returned it to between her lips. He looked at her as she inhaled and handed it back to him.

“I’ve never done this before.”

“What, smoked some *zol* out here?”

“No. No. Smoked some *zol* with the Master’s granddaughter.”

“Ag, forget that, Jo. We’re just two individuals out on the *kloof*. One young, one not so young. Two South Africans, watching the future unravel before them.”

She laughed and he smiled, for the first time.

“Hey, at last. You never smile. Always so serious. What can I say to make you smile again? Or do I have to force you with drugs?”

He smiled again. A slight movement in the air caught Susan’s hair.

“Are you cold?”

“Not at all. This is wonderful. I’ve never been out here so late at night. The whole world is asleep in front of us.”

They passed the joint between them in silence.

“It’s been a long time, Susan, since we spent any time together.”

“You were so much older. And always so ... earnest. I was remembering the times when we came out here with Uncle Shmuel. Catching fire flies. Did you come with us?”

“Often. You don’t remember? Typical.”

“Don’t be so hard on me. I was a little girl. I wasn’t interested in boys then.”

“And now? Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

She looked at him, at his soft curly hair, and his strong nose. They sat in silence again, wrapped in the comfortable cloth of their recollections.

“I knew nothing about you. You were always there, in the background. Just one of the maids’ kids, helping round the place. I never really thought of you as a person, if you know what I mean. Shit, that’s rude. I’m sorry. But you taught me to ride. And I remember Zeide once asked you to help me with my maths. You were so awkward and shy, you barely opened your mouth and the last thing I wanted to do at *Waterval* was maths equations. Do you remember?”

“Of course. You were such a pretty little girl. But spoilt.”

“And dumb.”

“That’s not true. See, we live in separate worlds, Susan. Even sitting here now, smoking together. I’m finding it really hard.”

“Why? Can’t we be friends?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think we could ever be friends. We’ve got nothing in common. For God’s sake, as you said, I’m just the maid’s boy. And you’d probably lose interest, like you do with everything you outgrow or can’t use.”

“Is that how you see me? You don’t know me at all.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. It was completely out of line. I watch your world, I read about it, but I’m not part of it. Even at work, I’m still only on the edge. And, that’s exactly how you whites want it to be.”

“We aren’t all like that.”

“No? You just said, I was just the maid’s child.”

“Maybe I’ve grown up. Maybe I see things differently. You think you can point your brown finger at me and be rude and that’s okay. But it isn’t. You have no right to put me down like that. You may not like me, but you have no excuse to be rude and get away with it.”

“Susan, I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s come over me. A spell? The *dagga*? I don’t know you at all. I only get to observe you for a few weeks every year, and sometimes, I don’t like what I see. But I have no right to be judgemental. No right at all. But you don’t know me either. You don’t see me. To you, I’m just another Coloured. We

aren't all the same. I have my own ideas. You can't feed me *dagga* and shove your bosoms in my face and think I'll be flattered."

"That's mean. Why are you trying so hard to hurt me? I'm just trying to have a bit of fun." She paused. "And I've never sat so close, alone, with a ...a ... black guy."

"Okay. We're even. Tell me about the guy you were meant to meet here."

"Why? Hugo's Afrikaans. He's tall, fit, loves rugby and surfing, he's confident and ... he's probably everything you'd feel intimidated by. Just tell me to shut up and grow up."

"Well, if those things are important for you, and you like him, what does it matter what I think?"

"You asked, didn't you?"

"Do you think he's still coming?"

"No. It was a silly idea. Why would he waste his time on a spoilt princess who had some silly romantic notion about spending a night of lust in a cold cave with rats and baboons."

"I'm enjoying myself."

"Are you?" She smiled, cautiously. "I'm a real idiot, aren't I, expecting someone to come out all this way for a ... for a ... bit of fun." She turned away, resting her back against his thin arm. "Thanks, hey."

"What for?"

"For coming and checking on me."

She leaned across and touched his shoulder. He flinched.

"Am I that scary?"

"No. It's just that ... I haven't been touched by many white girls. Any. Ever. And I'm definitely not used to overbearing Jewish madams. Maybe we should go back down. And forget this ever happened."

"I'm finding this just as hard as you are. What a stuffed-up world. We don't know anything about each other, even though we lived under the same roof and I've known you since I was in nappies. Jo, do you really find me totally objectionable? Or maybe do you like me a little bit?"

“Yes, Miss Susan. How could I not like you a little? I know your grandfather, remember?”

He smiled and touched her nose with his finger.

“Why do you have to bring him into this?” Susan pulled away, rummaged in her bag and found the bottle of wine with its cork already replugged. She pulled it out and handed it to Josephus.

“Here, have a *dop*.”

He looked into her eyes. She didn’t drop her gaze. He took a swig and passed it to her. She wiped the mouth of the bottle and saw him flinch and turn from her.

“It’s just a reflex. No offence. I don’t think you’ve got germs, I promise. You must hate me.”

“No, no I don’t. It’s not only and always about you. Can’t you see how risky this is? Not just the fact that if someone came and found us, I could land up in jail. No, I’m a real person, you know, not a ... a cut-out paper doll.”

Susan drank hard from the bottle. “What do you mean?”

“You don’t get it, do you? And why should you? Anything you wanted, someone provided. Your Zeide, your father, my mother. Everyone was ... is ... at your beck and call.”

“I can’t believe you can say these incredibly mean things to me.”

“I’m sorry. They just blurt out. It’s because I’m protecting myself.” The apology came out slowly, as if being dragged by a chain.

“From what?”

“From you, just Susan.”

Josephus was crouched next to her, his legs hunched up against his chest. Their knees touched.

Susan exhaled deeply, as if she had forgotten to breathe.

“Still brown,” she said, raising it to the moon. “And I’m still a spoilt princess. We can’t change these things.” She looked at him.

“I’m not who you think I am. I remember a time when I was a kid. I went bike racing along the river near home. With a Malay boy. He shared his bottle of Coke with me. I think I opened my eyes then to what was going on right in my suburb. I didn’t

understand it, but I knew I didn't like it, even though everyone around me thought it was the right thing to do. They moved them all out, to build a shopping centre."

"No, I know, I've always known, I think, that beneath that spoilt shell was a warm heart beating. Just like your grandpa."

"That's so sweet. I loved him very much. Thank you." She picked up his hand and put it to her mouth and licked it. She watched as he closed his eyes, as if waiting for a blow to fall. She moved towards him, her lips brushing his.

A sound emerged from his throat, a groan. She moved herself against him.

He placed his fingers on either side of her lips and leaned towards her. "Do you know where this will take us?"

"Just shut up and kiss me. And smile, for God's sake. At least pretend you're having a good time."

He wrapped her in his arms and pulled her close, still not smiling.

"Is this what you want? Are you sure?"

He kissed her. She was staring at him when he opened his eyes, which were full of laughter.

"At last. Your eyes are smiling." She stroked his eyelids and his cheeks and they rolled up tightly on the hard rock, oblivious to the night-time noises around them, the wind in the branches, a rustling in the waterhole.

"I won't treat you like a little girl, if that's what you want. But don't play with me. I'm not a kid. This isn't easy, believe me. I don't go in for this sort of thing, with any girl."

She pressed her body along his. "Just let's see where it takes us, okay? And no regrets. And don't try to always have the last word." She wrapped her legs around his thighs, drew his hands across her body and sealed his mouth with her tongue.

Her bikini top beneath her sweater came off easily. She felt a brief hesitation before he allowed himself to become lost between her taut breasts and her soft belly. She was smiling, teeth glinting, eyes flashing as they moved together.

He came quickly and rolled away from her, on the cold stony surface.

"Come back, Josephus. Come back to me." She pulled him nearer and, resting on her elbow, looked at his body.

“So this is how a naked black man looks. Not bad. And no horns or tail.”

“Don’t mock me, Susan.”

“I’m not, I’m not. This is new to me too.”

“What? Being with a Coloured?”

“No. No. I mean, yes.”

“Well, now you can add that to your list of conquests. Should we pack up and go back down?”

“Come on, Josephus, chill out. Relax. The night is still young. And I’m ...”

She put his hand between her legs and moved his fingers inside her. He looked at her, shook his head slowly, smiled, then kissed her and sighed again.

“You bear the sadness of the world in you, Josephus.”

The night disappeared beneath them as they lay together at the entrance to the ancient cave. They didn’t smell the dust particles behind the *bakkie*, see the dimmed lights and the doors closing. They didn’t hear the distant crunch of gravel or the slap of branches or the quiet cursing as feet slipped over wet rocks.

They were right there before they heard anything, before they could pull themselves apart from one another.

“*Hoer. Wat doen jy met die fokken kaffir?*”

“You fucken kaffir cock sucker. We aren’t good enough, for you Jew bitch, hey?”

“Come on Petrus, let’s show her. Kaffir, fuck off.”

Kobie, it was Kobie, they both recognised him, who hit Josephus across the face with his hunting rifle.

“Run, Josephus, run. I’m sorry.”

“Come with me, Susan, come with me.” He pulled her from the ground and dragged her, down the pathway, towards the waterhole.

The two men ran ahead of them and blocked the track.

“No, kaffir, not so fast. Just because you got your matric, don’t think you’re cleverer than us.” Kobie hit him once more with the rifle butt.

“Josephus. Josephus. I’m so sorry.”

Susan went towards him. She stretched out her hand but Petrus grabbed her and pulled it behind her.

“What are you doing? Petrus, I’ve known you since I was a kid. You know me.”

“Yes, you filthy *Jood*. Snob, bitch cunt.” He pressed her arm tighter.

“You’re hurting me.”

“We’re just protecting you from Hotnot shit like that focken mongrel.”

Kobie was pushing Josephus, kicking his stomach with his heavy boot. They had reached the rocks that guarded the waterhole. The sharp granite tips tore at Josephus’s bare back. He screamed. Kobie flattened him down on the uneven rough surface.

“Leave him. He’s done nothing.”

“Shut up, Jew whore.”

Both men turned on Josephus, kicking him, pushing him towards the water.

“Not the water. Don’t push him in the water.”

She stood, whimpering, as they nudged his struggling, heaving body into the waterhole.

“No. He can’t swim. Leave him.”

They laughed.

“Of course he can’t swim. He’s a wild animal.”

“You focken baboon. What gives you the right to fuck white girls?”

“Go, Susan, run back to the house. Go.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“We’ll get you, bitch. We’ll show you what real men do to whores like you. Don’t think it’s over, bitch.”

She ran, limping and crying, away from the waterhole, away from the splashing and the cries that slowly dissolved into the darkness. She ran towards the house. The bedroom window was unlatched and she flung herself inside. She wrapped herself in her grandmother’s eiderdown, rolling, clinging, tears dampening the feathers. Finally she clawed her way onto the bed where she hid in the blackness of the night and the eiderdown, where she lay, clutching at her pillow, shaking and sobbing, until the sky lightened once more beyond the thin curtain.



The house was beginning to stir. She dragged herself to the bathroom, to the stream of hot water on her body which awoke once more the soft crevices he'd touched. Her feet were dirty, her legs scratched. Her eyes looked back at her, hollow. She limped back to her room and closed the door firmly behind her. No-one knocked with tea that morning. The front of the house was silent, but she could hear anxious calls and running feet at the back.

Finally she slept. It was midday when her grandmother knocked and came in, to tell her that Josephus was missing. Later she got up and joined Bobba in the dining room. Together they picked at the chicken carcass that Katrina had left on the table.

"This is so unlike him. He was such a good boy. I can feel trouble, I can feel it in my waters."

"Stop fussing. I'm sure he'll be back. It's probably nothing, just a girl."

Bobba looked at her and looked down. But there was still no trace of him by the evening. Uncle Aaron insisted they call the police. They didn't visit, just took down the details over the phone and promised to investigate. Susan was quiet. She stayed indoors, speaking reassuring platitudes to her grandmother and Katrina.

That night sleep evaded her. Her head screamed. The following morning Uncle Aaron drove her to Napier to catch the train home. He was quiet in the car, he didn't like trouble.

"So that's what happened. The truth." She shivered. Tertius took off his jacket and placed it round her shoulders.

"I rang Bobba, my grandmother, every week. There was no news. They said he had vanished without a trace. And I never saw Hugo again. I couldn't bear to ask him what had happened to him that night. I wanted to blank the whole episode out of my mind. Can you understand? I don't expect so. I have never been back to *Waterval*. Until now.

"Bobba rang me when they found his body. The police said he must have fallen in, drunk. Everyone who knew him knew that was impossible. I came back to the district for his funeral. I drove my mother's small car around the bay, up the mountain pass and

down into the valley. I watched from the sand dunes. And that was it. I locked it away forever.”

“And now?”

“I’ve told you.”

“They’re my brothers. What you going to do?”

“What would you do? Stupid question, you’d never be in a situation like that.”

“Situation? Someone died, Susan. According to you, he was murdered. By my own brothers.”

“Don’t you believe me?”

He looked at her. He was silent for a few seconds. “I do.”

“Will the police be able to do anything?”

“I don’t know. There’s no evidence.”

“My bikini top. And today. Forcing me off the road. The cemetery.”

“Who would believe that?”

“I thought if I came back, it would be easy. I’d be able to ...”

“To ...?”

“Forgive myself.”

“Is that what you want?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s no better. It’s worse.”

“It’s your decision. What about justice? What about his mother?”

“What gives you the right to be so fucken righteous?” She looked at him. “I’m sorry. I have no right to be rude to you. I’ve unloaded all my shit onto you. And I don’t even know you.”

“We’ll be family soon. Your uncle and my aunt.”

“Oh no. I didn’t think.”

Susan looked down at her hands, tightly clenched.

“And do you know what else I found out since I got here? He’s my cousin. I let my own flesh and blood die in a hole and did nothing. I did nothing. I ran away.

“My grandmother saw me run away. She never said. No-one told me his father was her cousin. I didn’t know.

“Marc. Alex. It’s all been a web of lies. For fifteen years it’s eaten into me. It’s like my insides were a thin shell, cracked. Now, it’s broken. Right through, the fragments are piercing me, like I can’t breathe anymore.

“I must tell them. I owe it to them all, don’t I? Katrina. And Shmuel. Bobba. If she died believing that Josephus had attacked me, how can I live with that? It wasn’t like that. It’s all upside down. And Alex. Living with me with so many questions unanswered.”

They walked back through the undergrowth in silence. The birds were chortling in the gloom and cool. Soon they were back in the afternoon light, back on the track that headed down to the valley.

“Maybe I should see a lawyer.”

“What good would that do?”

“I’m confused.”

They walked round the final bend of the track to where it reached the gravel road. The sun was in their eyes. Susan stubbed her toe on a branch jutting out. She stumbled.

“Ow.”

Tertius stretched his arm out to help her regain her footing. She leaned against him.

“Thanks.” She felt his body tightening as he pulled away. This time they both heard the noise of the *bakkie* as it slowed down, skidding on the gravel. They both saw the figure, black against the sun, standing behind the cab, shotgun trained to his eye. They both watched as he swivelled and aimed.

“Get down,” Tertius pushed Susan back onto the path. The sound of the bullet cracked the hardness of the day. The air was forced out of Susan’s lungs as she was pushed harder into the gravel by a huge weight. Tertius was lying across her.

“My God. My God. It’s happening again.”

The figure at the *bakkie* waved his shot gun and the vehicle reversed noisily and pulled away quickly.

“Tertius, Tertius. Are you okay?”

She pulled herself from under his body. Her hands were sticky. Black.

“I’ve been hit. Tertius. Tertius.”

She felt numb, but she couldn’t feel any pain. His body was motionless. Then she saw his eyes. Staring out towards where the *bakkie* had been. His glasses had fallen. His pale blue eyes stared out in horror. Blankly.

“It’s you. They shot you. They don’t know who you are. They didn’t know you were here.”

She looked at her bloodied hands. She screamed. The back of his head was open, leaking onto the gravel.

“They didn’t know you were back.”

She pulled herself up onto her unsteady legs and started onto the road. Then she ran, faster and faster, until her chest ached. Just like the other time. Finally she reached the back gate. Sitting in the backyard, shelling peas, was Katrina. She rose and the dish of peas fell onto the ground.

“Miss Susan, Miss Susan. What happened?”

“Call the police. Katrina, I’m so sorry. Please forgive me. Call the ambulance. Tikkie, I’m so sorry. Zeide, Zeide.”

## Epilogue

It's windy on the headland. He's holding your arm, gently, protecting you from the wind but nudging you forward, toward the little gate in the cypress hedge.

You stand at the entrance and look across the neat stones that line up in front of the ocean. The earth is still unsettled, where the two labourers rest on their spades, then heave the dirt back into the hole. There are flowers, fresh bouquets and wreaths and a tiny white glove that lies forlorn on the footpath.

You kneel to pick it up. You hold it to your nose and sniff its cleanness. You clutch it as you move across to the Jewish section, where the stones are still jagged and slashed with paint. You pick up a handful of pebbles and press a few into Alex's hand. He watches you place them on three graves and bends down to leave his next to yours.

Then you take his arm and look back to the Coloured section, separated by a fence and a worn path. You squint in the sun but your chin juts forward determinedly as you move across to the part where there are no carved headstones, but wooden stakes and metal plates. You've never been here before but you know exactly where to go.

There are fresh flowers here too, watered by a mother's tears. You drop the remaining stone from your hand and squeeze tightly on the little glove.

Alex pulls you close and strokes your hair. He breathes on your cheek which is cold from the wind slashing against your tears.

"Come, my love, let's go back to the house. Marc will be wondering where we've got to."

## **Glossary**

Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging (AWB) (A) Afrikaner Resistance Movement  
Babele (Y) baby  
Bakkie (A/SA E) ute/pick-up truck  
Bar mitzvah (Y/H) male coming-of-age ceremony  
Bioscope (SA E) cinema  
Bobba (Y) grandmother  
Boer/e (A) farmer/s  
Boeremeisie (A) farm girl  
Bok (A) buck  
Bokkie (A) small buck  
Chalutz (H) pioneer  
Dagga (N/ A/ SA E) cannabis  
Doek (A) headscarf  
Dop (A) drink and the system whereby farm workers were paid partly in alcohol as part of their conditions of service  
Dorp (A) village/small town  
Engel (A) angel  
Fynbos (A) shrubland vegetation of the Cape coastal region  
Gatasim (Y) riff raff  
Goepse (Y) middle of nowhere  
Gogga (N/A/SA E) insect  
Goy (Y/ H) gentile  
Hotnot (A) Hottentot  
Jislaaik (A) expression of surprise  
Jood (A) Jew  
Kabbalah (H) esoteric reading of Jewish texts  
Kis (A) cupboard  
Kloof (A) gorge  
Koeksister (A) syrup-coated doughnut  
Koppie (A) hillock  
Kosher (H/Y) food prepared according to Jewish dietary laws  
Kvetch (Y) complain  
Lammetjie (A) baby lamb  
Lekker (A/SA E) nice  
Mal (A) mad  
Mamele (Y) little mother  
Mamserim (Y) bastards  
Mazal tov (H/Y) good luck/congratulations  
Melkert (A) milk tart  
Meneer (A) Mister  
Mieliepap (A) maize meal porridge  
Minyan (H/Y) ten men required for communal Jewish ceremony  
Moffie (A/SA E) homosexual  
Mon strudel (Y) poppyseed strudel  
Muezzin (Turkish/Arabic) the man who issues the Muslim call to prayer

Oy vey (Y) an exclamation of dismay, exasperation or pain  
 “Ons Wag op die Kaptein” (A) “We Wait for the Captain”  
*Rooi Rose* (A) Afrikaans women’s magazine  
 Rozhinkes mit mandlen (Y song) raisins with almonds  
 Samoosa (Indian) curried triangular pastry  
 Schwartzes (Y) blacks  
 Shabbas (Y) sabbath  
 Shema Yisrael (H) first two words of Jewish morning and evening prayer  
 Shmatters (Y) rags  
 Shul (Y) synagogue  
 Shtetl (Y) Jewish village or small town  
 Sjambok (A) whip  
 Smous (Y) hawker or peddler  
 “Stille waters, diepe grond” (from A. proverb) Still waters, deep ground, the devil wanders below  
 Stoep (A/SA E) verandah  
 Talmud (H) ancient writings on Jewish law  
 Tsatskes (Y) trinkets  
 Tsoris (Y) suffering  
 Tumul (Y) commotion  
 Veld (A) wild rural spaces of South Africa  
 Vershtunkende hund (Y) stinking dog  
 Waterval (A) waterfall  
 Wors (A) sausage  
 Yiddishkayt (Y) Jewish way of life  
 Zeide (Y) grandfather  
 Zol (A) cannabis

A      Afrikaans  
 H      Hebrew  
 N      Nama language of southern Africa  
 SA E   South African English  
 Y      Yiddish