

CAPE *of* STORMS

a novel



BIANCA BOWERS

CAPE OF STORMS

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For my motherland

GLOSSARY

A LIST OF AFRIKAANS, ZULU, COLLOQUIAL WORDS, AND TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE NARRATIVE. IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE.

COOLIE a derogatory term for a person of Indian origin

AFRIKAANS a language derived from dutch settlers

NGA a clicking sound made with the tongue

NET BLANKES whites only

KNOBKERRIE a wooden club with a large knob at one end

JA afrikaans origin, and slang for 'yes'

CABO DAS TORMENTAS cape of storms

MEVROU Mrs

NOOIT never

JY IS DIE MOEILIKHEID, EK SÊ you are trouble, I tell you

UITKOM get out

LAAT MY KLASKAMER get out of my class

EK SAL MY ONDERWYSER GEHOORSAAM I will obey my teacher

OUMA/OUPA Afrikaans words for grandmother/grandfather

DORP small town

GRENADILLA passionfruit

KOEKSUSTER a dutch/afrikaans syrupy sweet

SANGOMA African witchdoctor

MUTI medicine

MY MEISIE IS SO GROOT! HOE OUD IS JY? My girl is so big. How old are you?

EK KAN DIT NIE GLO NIE I can't believe it

COZZIE swimsuit

MOSSIEPOP sparrow's fart

NOG A DAG, ASSEBLIEF One more day, please

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ÊK SAL PRAAT MET I will speak to...

BAIE GOED very good

GOEIE MÔRE good morning

OPPENHEIMERS one of the richest families in the world, and involved in Anglo American Corporation and De Beers Consolidated Mines

BAAS boss

YEBO yes

KAYA servant's quarters

ROBOT traffic light

DANKIE thank you

WELKOM ALMAL welcome everyone

MÂ mother

TOKOLOSH an evil spirit, the size of a leprechaun

NEE no

KOPPIE a granite ridge

DROIT DE SEIGNEUR 'lord's right'

DASSIES from old Dutch *dasje*, meaning 'badger'

MATRICULATION final year of high school

REFERENDUM a 1992 referendum on ending apartheid

TOYI TOYI a dance used in political protests

IFP inkatha freedom party

ANC african national congress

COSATU congress of south african trade unions

CODESA convention for a democratic south africa

SADF south african defence force

RECORD OF UNDERSTANDING 1992 agreement between government & ANC, dealing with constitutional assembly/interim government/political prisoners

BUNNY CHOW a half loaf of hollowed-out bread filled with curry

TULA zulu word for 'hush'

COLOURED a person of mixed race
MPNF MultiParty Negotiating Forum
COSAG Concerned South African's Group
SHEBEEN an illicit bar where alcohol is sold without a licence
SAMP an African food consisting of dried corn kernels that have been stamped and chopped until broken
LOBOLA amount paid (usually cows) for a prospective bride
ASSAGEI a zulu throwing spear
SAWUBONA zulu greeting for hello
EISH colloquial exclamation in zulu
CREMORA a sachet of evaporated milk, used in coffee and tea
AIKONA zulu exclamation for 'no way!' or similar
KIKUYU the largest ethnic group in Kenya
MAU MAU the mau mau revolt was a war in the British Kenya Colony
BRAAI south african word for barbecue
BOEREWORS south african spicy sausage
CURFEW/PASS law an apartheid law limiting the movements of black citizens in white urban areas between 9pm and 4am
EUGENE TERRE'BLANCHE afrikaner nationalist, white supremacist, founder of the AWB, major figure in right-wing backlash against apartheid
AWB afrikaner weerstandsbeweging (afrikaner resistance movement)
GAAN KAK piss off in afrikaans
PANGA a broad-bladed African knife used as a weapon or an implement for cutting sugar cane
VOETSAK afrikaans for 'get lost' or 'fuck off'
TSOTSI a young urban criminal from a township area
MELK TERT milk tart, south african dessert made with sweet pastry crust and milk custard filling

YISLAAIK YONG afrikaans exclamation (similar to bloody hell)
AMARULA COFFEE similar to Irish Coffee, but made with a creamy liqueur made from the fruit of the African Marula tree
FLOSSIE Afrikaans slang for mistress
LAW ARTICLES law articles a law student is required to work with a practicing attorney for a period of time (up to 2 years) before they sit the board exam
BLUE BOTTLES portuguese man o' war with stinging tentacles
AG oh in afrikaans
BAKKIE a pickup truck
BARBEL catfish
SAPS south african police services (south african police force in apartheid era)
NINETEEN VOETSAK/IGVOETSAK a humorous afrikaans/colloquial expression for a very long time
WONDERBOOM afrikaans — directly translated as wonder tree
MADIBA nelson mandela's clan name — a xhosa term colloquially meaning 'troublemaker'
KIST a wooden chest

O Cape of Storms!
After all I've seen and suffered here,
there are strong links that bind me to thee still

~ Thomas Pringle



PART I

1982 - 1988

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CHAPTER 1

The infrastructure of my world began to decay when I collided with apartheid during the summer of 1982. The warmth of my mother's petite hand guided me along Hill Street, where crimson streaks formed in the dusky African sky. We paused on the pavement, splattered with mottled bird droppings, and waited for a break in the rush hour traffic.

'Those coolie mynas make such a racket,' said my mother.

'What's a coolie?' I said.

'Nga,' she made a clicking sound with her tongue, which usually signalled her annoyance. 'It means loud.'

I nodded and looked up to see hordes of Indian myna birds returning to their nests in the Natal mahogany trees that separated the dual carriageway. My mother clutched my hand before crossing the road and we hugged the inner sidewalk, like a Formula 1 racing car would hug the inside lane. Her anxiety pulsed like an electric current amidst the streams of pedestrians who raced past us, destination downtown, to join the congested taxi rank queues.

When we reached the shopping arcade she ushered me

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toward the concrete ramp and we followed the smell of cheeseburgers to the Wimpy Bar entrance. I stopped to let a black-suited myna strut territorially across our path. In those nanoseconds, something other than the bird's orange crown and yellow beak caught my attention — a black and white sign, nailed above the door. It read:

NET BLANKES

Having been forced to learn Afrikaans from Grade One, I translated the words — only whites — in my head. It didn't make sense. I asked my mother to explain.

She released my hand and sighed loudly. 'That is something you don't need to know.'

I studied her furrowed brow and pursed lips and felt my curiosity tug at me, like the myna tugged at a Wimpy wrap stuffed into the mouth of a discarded coke bottle.

'Please mom, I want to know.'

She shook her head and muttered, 'Nga, it means that only whites are allowed in the Wimpy.'

'What's a white?' I shrugged

Her hazel eyes searched the empty arcade and rested on an African man, who used a gnarled wooden knobkerrie as a walking stick. He had the type of weathered skin you'd see on an elephant's trunk, and a crooked back that curved into a question mark. She waited for him to shuffle past before she spoke.

'That man is a black man,' she whispered, 'and we are white.'

I frowned and said, 'I still don't understand.'

She sighed loudly and rubbed her forehead. 'The colour of our skin is white.' She touched the skin on her arm to illustrate her point. 'The colour of that man's skin is black.'

I nodded my understanding so far.

'Ja,' she said. Her voice dangled like a hooked fish poised for

release.

I looked at my mother, and then through the Wimpy windows. 'But, there are black people in the Wimpy,' I said.

Her shoulders drooped forward as if they too were sighing.

'Black people can work in there, Ros, but only white people are allowed to eat.'

I stared at her, open-mouthed. Awareness engulfed my mind like a fire spreading through the veld and the injustice of her revelation burned wildly. 'But, why? That's not fair.'

'It's a rule,' she said.

'I thought that rules were supposed to help people?'

'Ag, honestly, Ros, why are you so difficult?'

'What is Mohini?' I said.

'What?' she said, caught off guard.

'If we are white, and that man is black, then what is Mohini?'

She narrowed her eyes and scrutinised me like an explosive device. 'Mohini is Indian,' she said, 'and before you ask me any more questions, no, Mohini is not allowed in there either.'

'At Sunday School they say that God is love. I don't think that God would be happy with this rule.'

'I told you. You're too young to understand.'

'I do understand,' I said. 'Jesus loves white people more than blacks and Indians.'

Her cheeks flushed and she slapped my face. 'Sometimes you have to do things you don't like. Now, take my hand, your father's waiting for us.'

When I didn't move, she placed her hand behind the small of my back and pushed me across the threshold of the black and white sign, and into the home of the hamburger, where the upbeat sounds of Michael Jackson marched out of the speakers.

'What about Michael Jackson?' I said.

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'Speak to your daughter,' she said, pushing me toward my father.

'Finally,' said my father, 'I was about to call a search party.' He looked at my mother, then at me, then back at my mother.

My mother shot him one of her notorious dirty looks, then sat down next to him without saying a word.

'Hmmm. Well, I went ahead and ordered everyone's favourite,' he said, as if the universe had not tilted.

I sat opposite my parents and scrutinised them like strangers. I wondered why I saw things so differently. Rules were supposed to be good, but this colour rule seemed bad. The clatter of a tray jolted me out of my thoughts. Our jolly, black waitress didn't seem to mind that she could work, but not dine, in the Wimpy. I entwined my arms like a straitjacket across my chest, and thought of all the years I had been oblivious to the colour rule. I felt foolish. Deceived. My mind reeled like a fishing line in deep waters.

CHAPTER 2

Layers of discrimination were stripped in the four years following that Wimpy Bar episode. Right down to the word coolie. And each year, the anger, shame, and disappointment continued to burn inside of me like one of those candles that are designed to never go out. I may have been a child, but I knew right from wrong.

I grew up in a house called *Sea Breeze*, with my parents, my Uncle Jericho, Mohini (our housekeeper) and Gunther (our blue-eyed Weimaraner). The *Sea Breeze* Estate, a throwback to Palladian architecture, stood in the Durban suburb of Umhlanga Rocks, and overlooked the Indian Ocean and lighthouse. Once through the decorative wrought iron gates and up the winding driveway to the fountain statue, you entered through double wooden doors that led into a grand circular entrance hall with polished, yellowwood floors — constructed from *Sea Breeze's* own yellowwood plantation. A plantation that Uncle Jericho forbade me to enter for reasons unbeknown to me at that stage of my life. Of the multiple rooms that stretched over four levels, via a spiral staircase running through the centre of

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the house, I mostly sought refuge in three: the library, my bedroom, and Mohini's room.

The Sea Breeze Library — lit with green banker's lamps and furnished with aged leather armchairs — was my father's greatest passion. Its wood-panelled bookshelves extended to a mezzanine level, and were stocked with books that he had collected since childhood. Be it reference, entertainment, or my eternal thirst for knowledge, the Sea Breeze library had it all.

My bedroom, located in the third storey, was shaded by an umbrella thorn tree that attracted a family of vervet monkeys to my windowsill each morning. Beyond the tree, were views of the outdoor pool — edged with marine tiles, and embedded with a jade and turquoise dragonfly mosaic that paid homage to the dragonflies that nested in the nearby water garden — and the lighthouse — an immutable guardian with its ivory suit, vermilion top hat and compound eyes — which guarded one of South Africa's most treacherous coastlines, and, I liked to think, me. At night, I would stand at my bedroom window and count the twenty seconds it took for the lighthouse beam to illuminate—saying the word lighthouse out loud. The word *light*, so featherweight on my tongue, and *house*, as heavy as the anchor on Uncle Jericho's yacht.

When Mohini wasn't cooking, cleaning and waiting on us, you could usually find her tucked away in her room above the garages. Sandalwood incense tinged the air, and posters of Hindu deities adorned the marigold walls. A Ganesh figurine took pride of place in the centre of an altar that fit snugly in the far right corner of the room. More often than not, Mohini sat poised, on a crimson velvet cushion, in front of her prized possession; a cast iron treadle fiddle base Singer sewing machine. My head brimmed with memories of Mohini's brown,

weathered fingers, gripping and guiding colourful threads into shape, and her petite foot, pressing rhythmically against the pedal; the comforting sound of the needle whirring and clicking as it zigzagged through fabric.



Mohini and my oma were the only two people in the world who called me Lindy. As if they knew and recognised a different part of me. As if I belonged to them in a different way. In retrospect, Mohini knew me better than my own mother did. My mother excelled at being pleasant to Mohini's face, but sang a different tune behind her back. She loathed the scent of incense that burned daily in Mohini's room, referred to her food rituals as uncivilised, and vehemently discouraged me from partaking in Mohini's *funny* traditions and *evil* religion. Considering my mother and I clashed in every possible sense, I complied for the most part to keep the peace, but, when Mohini and I were alone, I eagerly partook in her funny traditions.

Cooking vegetable curry and eating it with our hands was one such funny pastime. I would watch as Mohini peeled and chopped the brown onions, and help her measure out the vibrant, pungent spices — saffron threads, ground orange turmeric, cumin seeds, fresh green chillies, chunky cinnamon sticks, and curry powder the colour of tabasco chillies. When the onions turned translucent in the battered silver pot, Mohini would add the garlic and spices to make the curry sauce, and within seconds the fragrance of India would fill the kitchen. Minutes later she would add the carrots, cauliflower, and potatoes and allow the ingredients to simmer while she cooked the rice. That was my cue to prepare our eating spot in Mohini's

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room. Kneeling down on the handwoven rug, I would gently unroll the rectangular turquoise straw mat, and lay it with two white ceramic bowls and turquoise linen napkins. Just before the pot came off the stove, Mohini would tip the frozen peas in, secure the lid, and let them cook in the steam. In Mohini's room, we kneeled and gave thanks before plunging our hands into the fragrant food. I'll never forget the first time I watched Mohini eat. A knife and fork had been my customary utensils, but Mohini used all five fingers of her right hand to scoop up the rice and curry into her mouth. Like so many of Mohini's rituals, it was completely foreign and yet so comforting.

Mohini's funny religion was another mystery that captivated me like a tree I wanted to climb. I visited her one morning before Sunday School, and found her cleaning the altar.

I pointed to the little statue in the centre of the altar that looked like an elephant with four arms. 'Can you tell me more about your God?'

'Your mother wouldn't like that, Lindy.'

'I know,' I said, remembering that my mother referred to the statue and colourful posters on Mohini's walls as idols, 'but I'm curious.'

'Okay, Lindy. Let's start with this picture. Brahma is the Creator,' she said. 'Like the Christians, the Hindus have a Trinity known as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.'

I nodded.

'Christians believe that one God created the universe, the Hindus think of God and the Universe as one and the same.'

'I prefer that idea,' I said.

She smiled and continued. 'Hindus also believe that the universe undergoes three different cycles.' She used her fingers to count. 'The first is creation, the second is maintenance, and

the third is destruction and renewal.'

'Destruction?' I said, having second thoughts about Hinduism. 'Is that like the Book of Revelations?'

'No,' she laughed. 'Not at all.' She pointed to the second poster. 'This is Vishnu, the Preserver. Vishnu maintains order and harmony of the universe.'

'This must be Shiva,' I said, pointing to the third poster.

'Yes,' said Mohini. 'Shiva is the Destroyer, but it is not a negative destruction. Shiva destroys the universe in order to prepare for its renewal at the end of each cycle.'

'Oh,' I said, sighing with relief.

'And it's not necessarily the physical world, Lindy. It's also a metaphor for a person's spiritual life and growth.'

'Why does your religion scare my mother?' I said.

'It's what she's been taught, Lindy.'

'Do you ever think about going to India,' I said, 'to get away from apartheid?'

'I would like to visit someday, Lindy, but India has its own form of apartheid.'

'It does?'

'There are people in India called the *Untouchables*. They are seen as the lowest of all classes. Doomed to be inferior forever. Untouchables would not be allowed to enter a Hindu temple, for example, and they would only be allowed to do menial jobs. It's called the Caste System.'

I shook my head in disbelief. 'I don't understand how people can be so mean to one another.'

She kissed me on the forehead and approached the altar. 'This is Ganesha, Shiva's first son, and the remover of obstacles. Most Hindu altars will have a statue of Ganesha.'

'What is the bell for?'

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‘I use it for worship,’ she said, ‘as well as these.’ She pointed out a bell, an incense holder, a lamp, a water container with spoon, and a small pot of red kumkum powder. ‘Each relate to one of the five senses, and they help to focus the mind when meditating.’

‘What is meditation, Mo?’

‘It’s quiet time for the mind, Lindy. You sit or lie in a quiet place, focus on your breathing, and encourage your mind to be quiet. You can meditate for relaxation, or religious reasons, or to ponder a question. You should try it some time.’

I nodded. ‘How does it work? I mean, if you have a question, or if you’re worried about something. How does meditating help?’

‘It connects you with your deeper self; your intuition. All the answers are deep within you, Lindy.’ She tapped her fingers lightly against the centre of my chest. ‘You can learn to tap into it.’

Mohini fed my mind and soul in a way that nobody else did. She always seemed to be teaching me something. Unlike my school teachers, who force-fed information, Mohini guided with a gentle hand and heart.

‘Why is there food here, Mo?’ I pointed to the banana leaf dotted with samples of fruit and rice.

‘Every morning I give an offering to Ganesha.’

‘Is this yesterday’s offering?’

‘Yes, and you’re just in time to help me replace it.’

I helped Mohini replace the burnt sandalwood incense sticks and withered flowers. We threw the browning banana leaf away and dressed a fresh green leaf with pomegranate, pineapple, cooked basmati rice, a chicken drumstick (taken from a fresh chicken curry), and sliced bananas in coconut milk.

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An angry hoot-hoot-hoot interrupted us like rolling thunder. I hugged and thanked Mohini before I rushed out of her room and down the stairs toward the garage. On the drive to Sunday School I thought about how I hated being a child at the mercy of my parents and Uncle Jericho. Mohini, it seemed, was my only ally.

CHAPTER 3

Jericho Morris, my maternal great uncle, inherited Sea Breeze after my grandfather's accident. The brothers had been traveling in convoy with their spouses one Christmas when a flash flood and hailstorm resulted in a collision with an oversized truck. My grandparents' Jaguar crashed first, head-on, and became wedged underneath the lorry. Uncle Jericho, in the car behind, had swerved, but skidded, and clipped the side of the truck before rolling and crashing into a barrier. My grandparents, Uncle Jericho's wife, and his newborn son had died on impact. Jericho, my mother and her sister, Maeve, survived. After the accident, the sisters had gone to live with Jericho at Sea Breeze. Mohini was hired soon after to look after the house and the girls. The male bloodline dried up after that. My Auntie Maeve had married young, but never had children, while my mother only had me. So, unless my mother had another baby, or Jericho discovered an illegitimate love-child, the likelihood of a male heir to inherit Sea Breeze and the construction empire remained slim.

Before Morris Construction, my great-great grandfather had partnered with Henry Malvern, a fellow entrepreneur, during the gold boom in 1886. By anticipating and catering to

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the mining and building boom, they became the modern day equivalent of property developers. While Malvern managed the building materials, my great-great grandfather managed the building and construction. Both made a fortune by riding the wave of the gold boom, but at the height of their success they had a fallout and split the company. Morris Malvern became Morris Construction and the Malverns returned to their roots and became a building supply company. Before the split, the Morris family had lived in the wealthiest suburb of Joburg, Upper Houghton, but afterwards, Morris Senior had moved the family business to Durban and built Sea Breeze. He went on to grow the company into one of South Africa's top construction giants. Jericho had carried the torch and singlehandedly grown the business into an empire.

I only knew Jericho post his traumatic life event, and my time living under his roof would best be described as walking through a forest in a thunderstorm; dodging lightning bolts between trees. I imagined that the death of his wife and son had resulted in the death of Jericho himself, or at least a part of himself. Despite the tragedy being twenty years in the past, Jericho's anger lived on his face like it had happened yesterday.

Other than ruling Morris Construction and taking the family yacht, Cabo das Tormentas, out on cruises and fishing expeditions, Jericho's favourite pastime was mowing the lawn. Despite having the money to pay for a gardener, he chose to tame the rebellious grass himself. He referred to it as his hobby, but treated it like an obsession. Jericho maintained his flawless green grass by rigging the garden with sprinklers that snaked through the flower beds, and watched obsessively for the first blade to breach 1.5mm. Then he would unsheathe his polished Fox lawnmower and unleash its power on the offending lawn.

Nothing deterred him from mowing. Even when the heat could be seen hovering like an apparition above pavements and streets.

Like Jericho had his obsession, I had my imagination. On the days when I watched him manhandle the lawn I would imagine a family of subversive moles rising up to overtake Jericho's picture-perfect garden. In reality, I didn't wish what I imagined into existence, because the consequences for an unsuspecting mole popping its head out of its mountain of earth would be dire. The thought entertained me nonetheless, and helped to take the sting out of Jericho's harsh attitude toward me.

The most vivid and antagonistic memory I had of Jericho took place one Sunday lunchtime on a warm November day.

'Ros, come and sit down. Lunch is ready,' said my mother.

'Can't I sit outside today?' I said.

'Nga. Fine,' she said. 'Come and dish up.'

'What's with the long face?' said Jericho.

I shot him one of my mother's looks and said nothing.

'Rosalinde, Uncle Jericho is talking to you,' said my father.

I glimpsed tinges of red spreading across Jericho's cheeks, while I filled my lunch plate, and knew that I was balancing recklessly on a tightrope of tension.

'Don't give any food to Gunther,' said Jericho.

I ignored him for a second time, as you would a spoilt child, and headed toward the kitchen. Gunther was technically Jericho's dog, but everyone knew that he belonged to Mohini. She had once told me quietly that Gunther's mother, Tilda, had been a puppy when Jericho's wife and son died, and for that reason Gunther served as a constant reminder of all that Jericho had held dear and lost. She had taken Gunther under

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her wing and Jericho had only been too happy, but it didn't stop him from asserting his power and projecting his pain now and again.

I paused in the kitchen to thank Mohini for the lunch and then joined Gunther outside in the shade of a blooming jacaranda tree. The sea breeze ruffled the jacaranda's lilac petals and I collected each one as it fell — on a curl of my hair, on my shoulder, my plate, my bare feet — and placed them in a neat pile in my lap, so that Mohini and I could thread the petals into bracelets and chains in the afternoon. I finished my lunch, but for a meaty bone. Gunther, who had been eyeing my roast beef, jumped up and wagged his tail when I held the bone in the air and considered what to do with it. He cocked his head this way and that, punctuating his doggy smile with whines. I couldn't help but jump up and hug the glorious creature before I tossed the bone on the grass for him.

I saw the shadow before I turned my face into an oncoming slap. The force of the blow caught me unawares, and I fell backwards, landing on Gunther's hind leg. He yelped and took his bone with him, tail between his legs, around the side of the house.

'I told you NOT to feed Gunther!' Jericho said, looking down at me, red-faced, eyes alight.

Shock kept me on the ground, but emotional flames leapt from my eyes to his, fuelling the fire between us. Mohini ran to my side, but my parents stood passively and watched. Anger and humiliation welled inside of me as the shock of Jericho's outburst took root. A prickly silence descended as I purposefully stood up and collected my plate, knife, fork and serviette, before I stood opposite Jericho and said, 'I am not scared of you.'

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He lifted his hand again. 'How dare you backchat me you little shit!'

Mohini quickly stepped in and ushered me to her room. Once inside she pried the plate out of my hands and sat me down on her bed.

'Lindy, are you alright?'

My lip quivered, and my eyes blurred as they filled up like a lake in the rain. The sound of tears filled Mohini's little room and she held me close and smoothed my hair until the emotional waterfall became a trickle.

'Rosalinde.' The door burst open, and my father glared at me. 'Your mother and I are going for a drive. No thanks to you.'

'But...'

'Don't you dare say a word,' he said, raising his index finger and holding my gaze. 'You have no respect.'

CHAPTER 4

My father worked as a Labour Lawyer in a top tier Durban law firm called Spencer & Mason, but he had started from humbler beginnings. Not that he talked about it. The only knowledge I could glean, during my school years, was that he grew up in Kenya but left suddenly, at the age of ten, due to some traumatic event that changed the trajectory of his life. While my mother knew no other reality, my father never forgot his working class roots, and instilled a deep sense of gratitude in me for what I could easily have taken for granted. My father remained impressed, and embarrassed, by his own fortune, as if he had received permission to rub shoulders with the rich, but felt like an imposter at heart. In many ways I identified with his sense of not belonging.

It would be easy for an outsider to think that my mother had married into the Morris family versus my father. Jericho treated my father like the son he never had, and my father reciprocated his reverence. Morris Construction was Spencer & Mason's biggest accounts, and the story goes that Jericho introduced my parents to each other at a cocktail party. My

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mother remained as much a mystery to me as my father's past. She seemed perfectly happy to keep her reading intelligence at a level no more taxing, stimulating, or subversive than Mills and Boon novels, and uniformly succumbed to the male opinion as if it were some sort of superior default position. Her sister, Maeve, seemed equally as pliable under her husband Léon's thumb. As husbands went, my mother and aunt shared much in common. Both seemed to have swallowed the myth that women should only aspire to be secretaries, wives or mothers, and that men claimed ownership to everything beyond that scope.

As I worked my way through school, I stopped trying to understand my role models and turned to dreaming about my eighteenth birthday and the day I could leave in protest. Hollywood birthed my love affair with America, and the fact that my parents, Uncle Jericho, and South Africans in general, harboured anti-American sentiment only served to reinforce my bond and remind me that I'd been born in the wrong country. The day that I bid farewell to South Africa and said hello to America propelled me as a future milestone.

Only one tiny detail bothered me about America. Why hadn't she intervened in apartheid? She held the title of most powerful nation in the world. Why hadn't she rescued us? Sanctions were not enough. As long as South Africa held the trump card of self-sufficiency, an American cold-shoulder was wasted. After school and on weekends I would lose hours in the Sea Breeze library, reading the aged pages of world history books. America didn't have a great track record either. Civil rights and African Americans. Slaves and slaveowners. Stories of inequality and injustice weren't buried that deep in the history books to know that America could easily be labelled

hypocrite. Still, I dreamed of an American rescue from the evil Afrikaners who forced us to live in isolation from each other and speak Afrikaans.

Afrikaans was a story in itself. My father referred to it as the oppressor's language. After all, the Afrikaans were ultimately responsible for apartheid, and it was the Afrikaans who fortified their hierarchy with language. It wasn't enough to be white. The white Afrikaner reserved the title of supreme white. At school, Afrikaans was compulsory from Grade 1 to Matric, as well as being a failing subject. Like apartheid, I saw Afrikaans as the enemy, and, like I refused to eat that Wimpy burger in protest, I applied the same theory to my Afrikaans studies, making minimal effort and scraping through with thirty-three and a third percent year after year. My Afrikaans teachers declared me defiant, with the worst school incident occurring in my last year of primary school, under Mevrouw Van Dyk, who had assigned me an oral assignment to talk about an admirable person. The assignment was open-ended; not limited to a politician or celebrity. 'Anyone,' she had clearly stated.

I chose Stompie Moeketsi; a black teenager and political activist from Soweto. When I announced the name of my admirable subject, Mevrouw Van Dyk's olive complexion turned scarlet and she flung the chalkboard duster directly at my head. I ducked, and it hit a boy named Edward slap bang in the forehead. The class burst into laughter, and Edward, who would pass me love notes in class, smiled as if another one of cupid's arrows had hit him. But Mevrouw van Dyk was not impressed. She stood up and shook her finger at me.

'Nooit, young lady, nooit. Jy is die moeilikheid, ek sê!'

'Why?' I said. 'Why is it unacceptable to talk about a young political activist? We should all be ashamed of ourselves for

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sitting here and doing nothing about apartheid. Lazing on our lilos in the pool, and sipping lemonade while our black brothers and sisters don't have the right to vote in their own country.'

Shock registered on everyone's faces and some gasped.

'Uitkom.' She pointed toward the door. 'Laat my klaskamer.'
'Fine,' I said. 'Where would you like me to go?'

She picked up her cane and thrashed the air with it. 'To the principal's office,' she yelled in English.

I gave her one of my mother's looks and went to the girl's toilet. I knew that trouble would swallow me whole for speaking my mind and disrespecting the teacher, but I didn't care. Stompie Moeketsi knew right from wrong and was not afraid to stand up and fight against injustice. What was I doing? Nothing. What had happened after that Wimpy episode? Why wasn't I fighting harder? Why wasn't I louder? Why was I afraid of being expelled from school, or being thrown in jail, like Stompie? These questions kept me up at night. Questions that I didn't want to meditate on lest I received answers I couldn't live up to.

Mevrou Van Dyk punished me with a month's detention, and thousands of lines. Every day after school I had to stay back for an hour and write her abominable lines in cursive:

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

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Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

Ek sal my onderwyser gehoorsaam.

It didn't deter me. I wrote the lines in the back of my English composition book, for the joy of irony, and felt further vindicated when she failed to make the connection.

CHAPTER 5

The annual visit to my ouma, who lived in a far flung Karoo dorpie called Coetzeesdorp, remained the highlight of my year. So, when my parents confirmed that we would be spending a week of the '88 Christmas holidays with Ouma, I bristled with anticipation. I say confirmed, because it was by no means definite. I learned that little fact in 1985, at age 11, when my mother cancelled our trip at the last minute. At that stage I hadn't worked out the reason behind my mother's general resistance to spending time with her mother-in-law, but my diary entries thereafter, coupled with memories from previous years, soon revealed a pattern. Every year, a month before we were due to visit Ouma, my mother would go to war with everyone around her; me, my father, Jericho, Mohini, random people in shopping centres. She would lock herself in her bedroom, permanently attach her ear to the telephone, and literally spend hours whispering to her sister, Maeve, in Joburg. I could safely say that if our annual trips were not followed by a trip to my Aunt Maeve and Uncle Léon in Joburg, then my mother might never have agreed to visit Ouma.

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Coetzeesdorp made its home in the Karoo; a nine-hour drive from Sea Breeze. Geographically, it sat inside the Eastern Cape and outside the Orange Free State border. The word karoo had its origins in a khoi word meaning Land of Thirst, which aptly described the dry, dusty veld with its tufts of coarse, hay-coloured grassy mounds that pained the naked soles of your feet when you stepped on them. If you looked into the distance you would see the flat veld meet the clear blue sky on the horizon. My father called it God's country, because if you walked far enough you were sure to reach heaven.

Johannes Coetzee had developed and marketed the grid-shaped dorp to retirees who needed their money to go further, and who wanted a peaceful retirement in an isolated part of the country. My ouma had allegedly bought her house for nine thousand rand, a low price by any standard, along with thirty other retired couples and widows. My uncle William, who owned a farm near Pietermaritzburg in Natal, had offered my ouma a room, but she turned him down on the grounds that she still had plenty of years left in her.

The dorp felt like another planet; an accidental seed that never received enough water or sunlight to reach its full potential. With an Anglican church at its heart, it boasted a single-pump petrol station, a convenience store, and one coffee shop that peddled my ouma's baked treats. That was the extent of it. The dorp streets had never been tarred, so people walked instead of drove. You always knew when a visitor arrived, because the car tyres would loosen dirt and create a cloud of red dust behind it. The Dutch-style houses were whitewashed, trimmed with green gables, and surrounded by verandahs. While most of the gardens were paved and decorated with hardy potted plants, that conserved water like camels, my ouma's

garden defied its surrounds and gleamed like an oasis in a sea of sand. She had insisted on having a bore hole so that she could rig sprinklers around her garden and grow vines of ruby grapes, beds of strawberries, trellises of grenadillas, and rows of lettuce, herbs, tomatoes, potatoes, and carrots. Her garden attracted bees, butterflies, birds, and chameleons. I loved finding chameleons, putting them on my arm, and watching them wobble uncertainly; their oversized eyes swivelling around and their elastic-like tongues catapulting toward unsuspecting flies.

Days, like the clouds, moved slowly in Coetzeesdorp, and our visits usually involved the same routine. Ouma and my father would sit outside on the verandah overlooking the above-ground pool, where I would spend much of my time. They would debate every subject under the infinite karoo sky, from the time the chameleons stalked the sun, to when the crickets began their nocturnal orchestra. I imagined my ouma imbibing the contents of every book, magazine, and newspaper article in the months between our visits; storing the information, questions, and opinions, like raindrops in a rural water tank, until my father arrived. My mother never took part in those discussions, nor did she swim in my ouma's pool. She insisted that I accompany her on a fifteen-minute drive to a public pool.

'Why?' I would always whine in reply. 'There's a pool right here.'

My mother would answer with a dirty look and tell my father to speak to his daughter.

While my ouma and father debated outside, Eunice, my ouma's maid, would slave away in the sweltering kitchen, baking syrupy koeksusters and sausage rolls for my father's eating pleasure. Every now and then my ouma would go inside to check on Eunice. I could hear her from the pool giving orders

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in Afrikaans, and Eunice answering her back in the oppressor's language. I could not get used to the sound of an African voice speaking Afrikaans. The mechanism of apartheid personified by the thing it fought to oppress. If Mohini and I were on the lowest rungs of the ladder, then Eunice surely lived at the bottom. I would listen to my ouma's commands, wince at her dismissive tone and eventually speak up for the silent woman whom society happily oppressed. My ouma's long, cold stares told me she didn't like my irreverence, but should my father reprimand me, she would hush him halfway through and send him out of the kitchen. I couldn't quite work out why, but it fascinated me enough to roll it over in my mind, like a dice, when I went out for my walks around the dusty dorp.

Coetzeesdorp may have been small and isolated, but it was safe enough for me to walk the streets alone. Outside of the dorp, my parents were anxious about all kinds of misfortune. My mother warned me about the Chinese who allegedly kidnapped girls and whisked them out of Africa to become child sex slaves. My father warned me about the African Sangomas who kidnapped children and babies to harvest their body parts and organs for muti. Both warned me about the ANC blacks who planted bombs in restaurants and hotels. Both assured me that there were plenty of things to fear, which made it more odd that they didn't visit Coetzeesdorp more often.

When we arrived in December '88, my ouma stood outside waiting as if she had radar. I imagined her beforehand, watching from her kitchen window for the telltale cloud of red dust.

'My meisie is so groot! Hoe oud is jy?'

'I'm fourteen, Ouma.'

'Ek kan dit nie glo nie.'

She embraced me in a bear hug and held onto me for so long

and tight that I got dizzy. My mother seized the opportunity to brush past and steal inside. When Ouma finally released me, she promised to bake rusks with me in the morning, and then led my father by his elbow to discuss the numerous bombings that the ANC had perpetrated during the year. My mother rolled her eyes and told me to put on my cozzie because she wanted to swim in the public pool. I asked why we couldn't swim in Ouma's pool and she answered me with a dirty look, followed by a quiet 'Nga, not now, Ros,' through gritted teeth. I pulled a face and went to my room to dress.

The public pool was in close proximity to the Hendrik Verwoerd Dam. It had three diving boards of varying height and met the olympic standard of fifty metres. Four silver ladders, with curved handles, were fastened at each corner and submerged into sparkling water. The pool had the loving fingerprints of a loyal groundskeeper, but we never saw anyone on our occasional visits. We never saw locals either, which suited me perfectly, because I had the whole pool to myself. I favoured the deep end; that underwater world where I could make-believe I had superpowers and push my lungs to capacity by touching the bottom. My mother inched herself into the water like a gazelle anticipating danger, but only got as far as her knees. While I swam, she laid out a towel on a bathing lounger, closed her eyes and offered herself to the suntan gods. Each time we visited, I had pondered the origins of the pool, but never followed up. I made a mental note to ask Ouma when we baked rusks in the morning.

Ouma always woke up before the birds did. She called it waking up at 'mossiepop' — Afrikaans for sparrow's fart. She liked to potter in the garden, to clip browning leaves and withered

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flowers. She said that people's lives would be vastly improved if they consistently pruned their thoughts and habits every day. It reminded me of something Mohini would say. I asked her if she pruned her thoughts every day. She nodded and said that she had a backlog of pruning to do. Then she laughed and asked me to help her pile the clippings into the wheelbarrow and dump them in the compost heap in the garden's corner.

On the morning that we set aside to bake rusks, I found her pruning the strawberry patch. She gave me a pair of black gloves, imprinted with red ladybirds, and invited me to help. I knelt alongside her and dug in the dirt, carefully lifting the strawberry vines from the earth to remove any decaying leaves. We worked in silence for a little while before I asked her about the public pool and who tended to it.

'An old man named Piet Senior built it many moons ago for his daughter, Opheila,' she said. 'From the day Ophelia could talk, she told her father that she remembered being a mermaid in another life. Her mother dismissed her as silly, but it sparked her father's imagination. Unfortunately, they were too poor to build a pool, so her father collected other people's bric-a-brac to make her an assortment of splash pools. He used everything from worn car tyres, to the frames of discarded lounge suites.'

Ouma stood up and stretched her back.

'That's not the end of the story, is it?' I said.

She shook her head. 'Not even close. Come, let's put our feet in the pool while I tell you the rest.'

We removed our gloves and sat on the edge of the wide silver ladder with our feet in the cool water.

'Fate intervened the year she turned eight,' said Ouma. 'She fell ill, and her muscles rapidly wasted away until she couldn't walk. Piet took her to dozens of doctors, but none had a

concrete diagnosis. As water was the only environment where her legs were not stressed, the doctors suggested water therapy. Her father took drastic measures and proposed that the local municipality build a public pool. He must have stated his case convincingly, because they approved the funding. It took a year to build, and each day Ophelia's condition worsened. On completion, the council held a special ceremony and dedicated the pool to Ophelia. From her wheelchair, she cut the opening day ribbon, and, with assistance, christened the pool. The pool was magnificent from what I'm told, sparkling as though polished by God himself. But a terrible thing happened a week after opening day.'

'What happened?' I said, frowning.

'Ophelia accompanied her father to check on the pool in the evening. While he busied himself in the pump house to retrieve chemicals, Ophelia must have wheeled herself over to the edge of the pool.'

'Oh no,' I said.

'Nobody can say for sure what happened, but it's likely the little girl bent over to touch the water and fell in. Whatever happened, her father found her too late.'

'She drowned?'

Ouma nodded. 'Ja, she was at the bottom of the pool and no amount of CPR, begging, pleading, or praying did any good. Devastated, the poor man resolved to maintain the pool for the rest of his days in honour of Ophelia. He and his wife went on to have a son, Piet Junior, who took it upon himself to carry on his father's tradition.'

'Wow,' I said. 'Is that why the pool is always deserted?'

'Ja,' said Ouma. 'Sometimes he says he sees the blur of Ophelia's ghost hovering above the water where she drowned.'

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'Are you friends with Piet Junior?' I said.

Ouma nodded. 'Ja, he has a sweet tooth. I bake and deliver koeksusters to his home every week. Maybe you can come with me before you leave.'

'Yes, please,' I said.

'What do you say we go and bake those rusks now,' she said.

'Ja,' I said enthusiastically. 'I'm hungry after all that garden-
ing.'

The day before our departure, Ouma tried to persuade my father to stay one more day, but my mother said no and an argument broke out. The tension had been building from the moment my mother brushed past without saying hello, but emotions had been placed on the back burner of the aga and set to simmer. I sat at the kitchen table, dunking my rusk into coffee, while Ouma and my father spoke in Afrikaans. It annoyed my mother when they spoke Afrikaans, because she spoke broken Afrikaans and she assumed that they were talking about her.

'Nog a dag, Wilstan, asseblief,' said Ouma.

'Êk sal praat met Marilyn,' said my father.

'It need not concern Marilyn. You're the man, make a decision.'

'Maeve and Léon are expecting us, Mâ. It's their eighteenth wedding anniversary, and they're planning something special.'

'We won't be staying an extra day,' my mother said on entering the kitchen.

'Marilyn, please,' said my father, 'we can discuss this later.'

My mother crossed her arms. 'No, there's nothing to discuss. Maeve has plans for us the day after we arrive. You won't want to miss it.'

'We'll discuss it later,' my father repeated.

‘You come here once a year, Marilyn, what’s the harm in letting me see my son and grandchild one extra day?’ Ouma chimed in.

‘Oh, I bet you’ve been waiting to say that since the day we arrived,’ said my mother.

‘Please, Marilyn, Mâ, can we not do this in front of Ros?’ said my father.

‘Fine,’ said my mother. ‘Ros, go to your room, or go for a walk.’

‘I’m drinking my coffee,’ I said.

‘Ros, this is not the time,’ said my father, his voice deepening a notch.

I gave him a look, left my cup of half-drunk coffee, took another rusk and left. I snuck out of the back garden gate and sat on the dusty road underneath the open kitchen window. By the time I’d reached my listening spot the argument raged and voices were raised. My mother told Ouma to make an effort and visit the family in Durban every now and then, and that it wasn’t her fault that Ouma never made an effort to see her own grandchild and son.

‘If we didn’t visit you once a year, would you make the effort to visit us?’ My mother demanded in a way that suggested she already knew the answer.

‘It’s different for me, Marilyn. I’m retired. I have people who rely on me here.’

My mother laughed. ‘Oh, please, the dorp is not going to fall apart if you decide to go on holiday for a month.’

Ouma switched back to Afrikaans and addressed my father, saying something along the lines of, ‘are you really going to let her talk to me like that?’

‘That’s it,’ said my mother. ‘I’m going to pack.’

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With that she obviously left the room, because the argument stopped and a long silence followed.

I heard my father's voice after several moments. 'Did you have to antagonise her, Mâ?'

'She has no respect, Wilstan. You and Lindy are the only reason she is welcome in my house.'

'Ja, Mâ, you make that perfectly clear each time we visit.'

I heard the chair scrape across the floor and assumed that my father had left the room. I absentmindedly gnawed at my rusk. I didn't want to take my mother's side. We did only visit once a year. I blamed my father too. He domineered my mother in so many respects, but succumbed to her in others. I couldn't understand why. She certainly made sure that she regularly visited Maeve, so why not my ouma?

We left the dorp that evening instead of the next morning. I begged my father to let me stay with Ouma while he and my mother went to Maeve and Léon, but he refused and my mother assumed her family-fallback-position; *your absence will be noticed...my family will be disappointed...blah blah blah.*

Ouma almost squeezed the life out of me she hugged me so hard. 'Write to me, Lindy,' she whispered in my ear, 'and I'll write back.'

I knelt on the back car seat and watched the red dust dance around her silhouette until the motion sensor light above her went out. Every time we said goodbye to her I worried that it would be our last. I thought about what I would tell her if I wrote her a letter, and what she would tell me.

Minutes later the dorp was behind us. I could feel the change in texture by the sound of the tyres moving from dirt road to tar. No street lights lit the way, only car's eyes that lit up small sections of the road ahead. I watched the black sky until I

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grew sleepy and then lay down on the back seat and fell asleep, thinking about what tidbits I could share with Ouma in order to coax her secrets out of her.

CHAPTER 6

I woke to discover that I had, thankfully, slept five of the six hours of travel between the Orange Free State and Joburg. I only cared about the latter end of the trip, where the magical Oppenheimer Estate could be glimpsed along the ridge. When it appeared, I hurled myself across the backseat of the car and pressed my hands against the window, straining my neck to peer upwards at the majestic eucalyptus trees that soared towards the cumulonimbus clouds and cast a shadow over the freeway. Many people were oblivious to it, unaware that a splendid, secret garden lay tucked away above the M1. Much like Ouma's oasis — a splash of green on an earthy canvas — at odds with the surrounding indigenous Transvaal landscape of dry veld. My father, the keen historian, had educated me about the Oppenheimer home on a previous trip. The estate spread across a massive tract that had been landscaped into beautiful gardens, and the house featured frequently in *House & Leisure* magazines. I held it in my gaze until we exited the freeway and it disappeared.

Within minutes we entered Parktown, home to the Op-

penheimer's, and most affluent suburb of Joburg (if not the whole of South Africa). Parktown neighboured the suburb of Upper Houghton, where my Aunty Maeve and Uncle Léon lived. Uncle Léon's house did not nearly match the scale of Brenthurst, or Sea Breeze for that matter, but it certainly made a healthy statement about his personal wealth. My father once commented to my mother that Léon had done well for himself considering he imported and exported antiques for a living and didn't have any formal qualifications. My Aunty Maeve didn't work either. For one, she didn't need to, but mostly because Léon forbade her. When they weren't eating out at new restaurants and going to the cinema, Aunty Maeve busied herself by waiting hand and foot on Uncle Léon. And while it was acceptable for the maid to wash, clean, iron, vacuum, and dust, it was unacceptable for her to touch or prepare my Uncle's food.

Every year, when we visited Uncle Léon and Aunty Maeve, my mother would tell me the story about how they met. Aunty Maeve had travelled to Paris for her eighteenth birthday and met Uncle Léon at the opening night of Don Giovanni. He had spotted her sitting on the balcony with his opera glasses and approached her during intermission. He must have done a grand job of charming her, because she returned to South Africa with an engagement ring and they married on Christmas Eve — hence our annual Christmas visit to Joburg. The only thing we knew about Uncle Léon's family is that he had grown up without a father, and his mother had died before his twenty-first birthday.

The Merc slowed down, and we turned right into the driveway. My father pressed the intercom button and waited.

'Goeie môre.'

'Goeie môre, Philemon. It's Wilstan.'

‘Yes, baas. Come in, baas.’

The wrought iron gates opened like a yawning hippo. Invisible from the road, the house slowly revealed itself around the bend of a long driveway.

Philemon and Gladys were an inherited feature of the house when Léon purchased it in 1960. They lived with their twelve-year old daughter, Promise, in the *kaya*, located beneath the main house. I had never seen the *kaya*, because it was strictly out of bounds. Philemon worked as a full-time gardener and doubled as a gatekeeper and general dogsbody. Thanks to him, the five acre property was a sight to behold. Several statuesque jacarandas populated the property and fuchsia bougainvilleas cascaded over the courtyard archway. Edged between the lawns and eight-foot white stucco wall flowered an assortment of white arum lilies, violet and yellow birds of paradise, rose hibiscus, and lilac agapanthus. Not to mention the themed garden spaces — the Japanese garden with its ornate bridge, sculptures, water features and koi pond; the traditional English garden which attracted bumble bees and butterflies; and the indigenous garden with proteas and kikuyu grass.

The house sat in the centre of a sloping five-acre plot. The 1930s era estate started life with original art deco features, including a flat roof, white stucco exterior, turquoise panels and geometric balconies. Fifty years later, it had undergone several additions and changes at Uncle Léon’s behest. The white stucco exterior now stood beneath a slanted slate roof. The guest suite, overlooking the front garden, had french doors and a wrought iron Juliette balcony. Brown awnings arched over the downstairs windows and the vibrant turquoise panels could only be recalled from memory and photographs. The few remaining art deco features were the two bronze female statues at the top of

the driveway — holding a globe-shaped light, and situated at the feet of two flamboyant trees.

We heard Léon shouting at Gladys before we parked in front of the garage. I gritted my teeth and willed him to stop. My father got out of the car and saved Gladys by asking Léon to come and help him with the bags. My mother didn't wait for anyone and made a beeline for the house to see Maeve. Once my bags were in my room, and the adults were settled in the lounge drinking tea, I went in search of Philemon. I greeted Gladys as I passed through the kitchen and met with a pair of white butterflies as I opened the bottom of the stable door. I followed their enchanting spiralling dance down the stairs, that ran alongside the house, until I found myself near the *kaya*. My curiosity drowned my fear of consequences, and I inched down the stairs to investigate. If spaces were represented by seasons, then summer ruled the main house, and winter ruled the *kaya*. I walked straight into a kitchenette-cum-diner-cum-sitting room with its concrete floors and unpainted walls and I shivered. A short corridor led to three doors that contained a bathroom and two bedrooms. The toilet had no seat cover, and the shower had no curtain. The first bedroom likely belonged to Gladys and Philemon, because it had a double bed that was elevated by concrete breeze blocks. An African superstition known as the *tokolosh* called for extra elevation. The *tokolosh* was an evil spirit, the size of a leprechaun, that targeted females in particular, and visited at night. Similar to the bogeyman, it was generally ridiculed by the white population. When I saw Promise's sparsely furnished, cold, room, I felt like I'd won the karma lottery and come face to face with the person who'd lost. I closed the door quietly, and snuck back outside. The clean air and warm sunshine felt so sweet and foreign compared to the

kaya dungeon. My spine tingled and my body shuddered at the thought of being subjected to a life of modern-day slavery. I wandered around the grounds, picking flowers, until I had enough to fill a vase, then went in search of Philemon.

He bowed his head and smiled when he saw me.

'I picked these for Promise's room,' I said. 'Do you know where she is?'

Philemon shook his head and frowned. 'Baas would not like that, Miss Rosalinde.'

'Baas doesn't need to know,' I said.

'Nee, Miss Rosalinde. Baas knows everything.'

I frowned, feeling deflated, and then nodded, not wanting to cause trouble for Philemon and his family. 'Philemon?' I said.

'Yes, Miss Rosalinde.'

'You don't need to call me Miss.'

He smiled and nodded. 'I do, Miss Rosalinde.'

I sighed and took the flowers to my room with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER 7

Uncle Léon organised a tour of Brenthurst Gardens, the day before Christmas, as a special anniversary gift to Auntie Maeve. My mother oohed and aahed as if he deserved Husband of the Year Award.

‘Welkom almal. I am Johan and I will be guiding you through these beautiful gardens and magnificent estate.’

Everyone said hello and thanks.

‘You are most privileged to be here today. Not too many people have caught a glimpse of this magical place, never mind an entire tour. So, without further ado, let’s begin.’

We formed a line of sorts — my father at the front (so that he could ask questions), my mother and Maeve behind him, Léon and I at the back — and followed Johan’s lead while he walked and talked.

‘This magnificent estate you see today began as open veld,’ he said. ‘Edouard Lippert planted the first trees here in 1890 to meet demand from the mining and building boom. At one time there were two million trees in his plantation.’

We paused in front of the elegant house with its statuesque Cape Gables to learn about its history.

‘Consolidated Goldfields of South Africa bought Brenthurst, and commissioned Sir Herbert Baker to design this

house for their directors. It dates back to 1906,' he said, 'and as you will see in a little while, Baker designed it to perch majestically on the bare rock of the koppie.'

'When did the Oppenheimers move here?' said my father.

'Ernest Oppenheimer brought his family to live at Brenthurst in 1922,' said Johan, 'and the Oppenheimers have occupied it ever since.'

My father nodded and we continued our walk to the next attraction known as Little Brenthurst.

'The Oppenheimers moved into 'Little Brenthurst' during World War II,' continued Johan, 'and allowed the Red Cross to use Brenthurst as a fifty bed hospital, called Brenthurst Auxiliary Hospital. The hospital treated hundreds of patients from the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Dr Jack Penn pioneered new methods of treatment at the hospital and established Africa's first centre for plastic surgery.'

Uncle Léon didn't seem to be listening to Johan's speech, because he repeatedly stopped without warning, causing me to walk into the back of him. Then he would laugh, as if I was in on the joke. When it happened a fourth time, I decided to employ a safe walking distance.

Johan stopped walking and switched to his next topic. 'In 1959 Harry and Bridget Oppenheimer commissioned Joane Pim to redesign the garden. As you can see here, she redesigned the terracing and made the garden easily accessible for the first time in its history.'

Everyone admired the terracing and wandered around on their own to appreciate the garden before Johan continued.

'Dick Scott took over fourteen years ago, in 1974, when Joane Pim died, and he is still here today. One of his projects is to develop the wild garden. One of his favourite quotes is as

follows:

Encouraging and matching indigenous plants for their temperament and ability to live together.

Dick Scott's quote caught my imagination. If one could match and encourage indigenous plants to live together and thrive in each other's company in a wild garden, why couldn't the whites do the same? Was colour that much of a divider? A cocky Indian myna interrupted my maudlin thoughts, and I couldn't help but smile.

'Bloody coolie mynas!' Johan shouted, flapping his hands wildly as he ran toward the myna.

We all stared at Johan. Indian mynas (or coolie mynas as they were commonly known) were one of the most commonly found birds. It didn't matter where you went or where you were in the country, you were sure to see Indian mynas. Like pigeons in London, mynas were ubiquitous.

'Ha-em. My apologies, everyone,' said Johan. 'He may look like a harmless little guy, but the fact is that these mynas are one of the biggest pests and threats to our indigenous birds.'

'Why?' said my father.

'Let me explain,' said Johan throwing both hands up in the air dramatically. 'Indian mynas are noisy, territorial, and not afraid of humans. They use superior numbers to aggressively seize and defend territory. They kill the chicks of other birds or destroy their eggs, or build their own nests on top and smother them. They have been seen to block the entries to hollows, causing the inhabitants to die of starvation, after which they lay their eggs in the hollow. Mynas build and defend several nests during the breeding season, although they only lay in one.'

'Which excludes native birds and animals from those nesting sites,' said my father.

'Exactly,' said Johan.

'So, they're like the South African government and apartheid,' I blurted out.

My mother's cheeks blended with the pink hydrangeas behind her, and everyone else assailed me with thorny stares. My father grabbed my elbow and ushered me across the lawn to the shade of an enormous plane tree.

'Your defiance has run its course, girlie. You're still young and naïve and you have no bloody idea what those kaffirs are really like.'

I flinched. 'Don't say that word.'

'It's true. I've seen it firsthand.'

'I don't know what happened to you. All I know is that Philemon, Gladys, Promise, and Mohini are all kind people.'

'Nothing is perfect, I agree. Philemon, Gladys and many more blacks are good people. But make no mistake. If a situation arose between us and them, we wouldn't stand a chance. War is messy.'

'What war?' I interjected.

'It is something you will come to understand one day,' he said. 'As for Mohini, it's a shame that she has to pay a price for the colour of her skin, but such is life.'

I frowned.

'Don't worry about Mohini,' he continued, 'she has a good life and she's well looked after. As for this apartheid business, I don't want to hear anymore outbursts from you, understand?'

'Apartheid is bigger than race,' I said. 'It's a regime. It's propaganda. It's...'

'Rosalinde,' my father interrupted me, 'this is the situation that we live in and there's nothing that you or I can do to change it.'

‘Why not?’ I said. ‘A few people have tried, but it will only work if we all try.’

‘Make things easy on yourself, Ros, and go with the flow on this. Please. If you don’t, you’ll be in for a tough time.’

‘I saw Promise’s room yesterday,’ I said.

‘What?’

‘I will never be able to go with the flow.’

My father stared at me as if he was defending his record in a staring contest, and then said, ‘You owe everyone an apology.’ When I didn’t respond, he led me back to the group, which was moving up the hill on stone pathways and up steps toward the rose garden.

‘Joane Pim created the rose garden as a spiral circle, shaped like a snail’s shell, and positioned within a sunken square,’ said Johan as my father and I joined them.

My mother gave me a filthy look.

My father nudged me and said, ‘Rosalinde has something to say.’

‘I apologise,’ I paused, ‘for having an opinion.’

My father looked at me as if I’d blasphemed. ‘Rosalinde!’

‘Next time I’ll keep it to myself,’ I said.

Johan shook his head and said, ‘Let’s continue, shall we?’

With the exception of Uncle Léon, everyone nodded and turned away from me in disgust. Léon seemed half bemused and half seething. While Johan brought the conversation back to the garden, I took refuge amidst the tall roses growing around the edges of the spiral garden. I breathed in the individual scents of the fragrant red, yellow, pink, and white petals, and focused on the butterflies wafting in and out. But it was no use. My emotions bubbled and tears slid down my cheeks.

I kept quiet for the rest of the tour, past flowering jacarandas

and gigantic eucalyptuses, while my thoughts trailed behind me like butterflies in distress. Johan stopped at the water fountain and two bronze statues of a boy and a girl. The boy stood naked on his toes, arms outstretched to the blue sky and glowing sun while the girl looked at him from the middle of a pond.

‘And now for the *piece de resistance*,’ said Johan with an unconvincing French accent. He stepped aside and swished his arms sideways as if to unveil the treasure that stood behind him, smiling like Alice’s cheshire cat. ‘Allow me to introduce *Venus Victorieuse*; sculpted by none other than Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and completed in 1914.’

‘Renoir,’ my father echoed.

‘Yes, Harry Oppenheimer brought it to Brenthurst in the early 1970s and renamed it Eve and the apple. She stands facing the house and is the jewel in the crown that is Brenthurst,’ he finished triumphantly.

Everyone, except me, cooed with delight and finished with a round of applause. I had finally seen the garden of Eden that I had so often glimpsed from the backseat of the car. A garden that had captured my imagination, and been immune to apartheid. But, as I followed my family out of the garden gates and toward the parked cars, I realised that immunity did not exist. Apartheid touched everything.

END OF SAMPLE

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