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—Mongane Serote

New places are always different from old ones. Temba is. The old place, Walmanstadt, was surrounded by hills, was naturally green, had lots of water and all the time, a cool breeze blew to the East. The summers were not very hot. The winters were cold. Walmanstadt, it seemed, was in a valley. Watched from the hills, this village in the valley, dappled many colours, spread itself, like a carpet, spread-out houses, leaving space and space in-between them, long patches of green fields and brown fields which seemed to dance to a rhythm of an unheard music.

All kinds of people lived in Walmanstadt. There were the old people, who still ploughed and had cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens; they grew vegetables and fruits. Everything about them, their eyes, faces, their clothes, their hands said they were part of the land. Each of the many houses, had someone old; they

still sang the old songs, told tales about the old days, and never hesitated to state their bewilderment at the new ways of the young. Most of the old, were women, their men had been taken by the war, which claimed them either through the grave or the mental asylum; some men had never come back from the mines.

There were the young ones, who were in constant motion. They came to the village towards weekend and vanished by the end of the weekend. Most went to the nearby suburbs of Pretoria or Pretoria itself, some to Johannesburg. Some of the young had gone and never came back to the village. Some came back from the mines, never to go back; now they found the old, the peasants, either as cripples, or ill; coughing and coughing forever. Some of the young women, who had been to the city, came back having left the village hardly able

to wipe their noses. They came back, with bundles on their backs or huge stomachs, and sad stories about their love lives or lifelessness or death, which cities are so able to hatch.

Walmanstadt and its people, spread itself, with space, with green, with brown, with mud-houses, or brick houses or corrugated iron houses, with trees it spread itself, wide — on the one side — towards the horizon; on the other side the hills seemed to touch the sky. Everyday of the week, unless one got close to the houses, whether it be a Monday or a Saturday, the village spread and sprawled a quietness, a silence, which embraced the trees, hills and the sky.

When getting closer to the houses, one heard laughter, whispers, mbaqanga, hymns or stokfel songs. Everything, the song, the humour, even the footpaths, houses, schools and churches told one that, they were of the people, made by them. No wonder that everyone knew everyone here.

Once people left Walmanstadt, they knew nothing about it anymore. There was no way of going back to it. The new place, Temba, asked about and demanded the lives of the new people. There were other people in Temba, who had been there longer, but who still felt new to it, lost, as if they had never lived before. The new-comers from Walmanstadt, had never heard of the places these other people came from, nor did they understand their language. The conflict, for in practical life, this is what is pain, almost cost the new-comers their lives.

The only memory the people of Walmanstadt now had of their village, was that they had fought, they fought with everything they had and knew, and had lost. The battle had been long, but the victory of those they were fighting against, it seemed, had been swift and also final.

One day the trucks came, and with their roar and what seemed to be their

natural haste, the way they came and left, the trucks pulled the life of Walmanstadt out with ease. From the time Ma-marie was on the truck to the time when she was left in her new house, she had tried hard, to remember what the reason was for their having been moved to Temba, but her memory failed her. She knew that whatever the reason, the word which described the ordeal started with an R. She remembered this because when Rebecca explained this to her, during the battle, to remind herself, she told herself that Rabeccas's name starts with an R and the word starts with an R. She did also remember the word from some of the literacy classes conducted by Rebecca. Ma-maria and Rebecca knew each other from a long time ago. The first time they met was when Ma-maria needed help, after her husband, Churchill, had died suddenly. Rebecca was the pride of Walmanstadt. Walmanstadt had given birth to her, and educated her, and she had become a social worker. She became everything to the village. She talked about the laws and rules of the white people with the village. She taught the children, the adults and even those young ones from the cities, how to read, write, knit and sew, and also, about new methods of caring for the village's fields.

She brought contraceptives from her offices, tablets for flu, penicillin for VD to the young from the cities, and to some in the village. At times some people in the village watched her with suspicion, again with admiration, at times with anger; but all these were also because, the village claimed and loved her, and expected her to know better. There were those families who did not want to see her near their doors, but there were also those who asked her to come again for tea, or porridge or to talk; and Ma-maria was one of those who asked her to come back.

For six months that Ma-maria strug-



gled through Temba, often talking to herself, for there was no one to talk to since her only daughter, Maria, had become a vegetable after a hit-and-run accident, she longed and thought a great deal about Rebecca. Ma-maria knew though that Rebecca would come to see her one day, she had said so, and so she would. She wanted her to come soon though, there were many things they would talk about while drinking tea, she would ask her questions, and Rebecca, patient, and explicit, would answer her, and maybe, these many things which now plagued her would become clear.

Temba is, to use the crazy South African parlance, a township. South Africa has a way of exploding extremes in people. This is because it is one of the most backward, and thus, one of the most notorious countries in the world. Because of that, and also because it is always ready to defend itself by any means necessary, and often does, it has no way of hiding its crudeness. Anywhere else in the world, the word township is neat and clean, but not in South Africa. Here it means that the Black people are living there, and inherent in that, is that easily that word has in it ingredients for a holocaust. Too much madness is created, is maintained and lives on in a South African township. Temba is a huge township. It is a huge township, with scattered cement slabs topped with grey asbestors. The slabs, most of which have two rooms, stand on thin white sand.

The short, sparsely spread thorn trees, the effect of the blinding monotonous sand gives the feeling of a disastrous impending end. The new people here, like new inmates in prison, eye each other, listen, look at each other, but hardly talk to each other. Everything about them, their gait, their eyes, even the way some usually stand in the middle of nowhere, staring, seems to say

that the people, these people, think that there is no bottom further than the distance they have made.

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face a rock? Who should die first, Maria or herself? No, if Maria remains and she goes, that would be bad.

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Each person watches and listens without a word, as if waiting for an answer, as if wanting to know if it is true. If it is true, what can defeat it then? That is the most curious question. If it is not true, what beats it then? That was the most dangerous question. It is dangerous because then, distances are relative, and if depths are also, the one travelling them has the final say.

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Both questions seem to question the essence of everyone, and, everyone knowing this, dared not be haphazard, or reckless with their conclusion. Once a victim, you know a lot about the powerful one, even about their fears. The day the people of Temba talk to each other, it will not be about having a party.

At seventy, Ma-maria, a farmer, a builder, and a good villager, suddenly found out that her strength and her will had gone. Besides the journey from Walmanstadt to Temba, what seemed to usurp her strength, daily, slowly, was a huge protruding rock, which was hard as steel, showing every sign of being embedded deep into the ground. The rock peeped from beneath the ground, into Ma-maria's front door.

Every morning, Ma-maria walked out of the door to do the only thing her strength allowed her to do, which was to gather twigs, make fire, make tea; breathing heavily, and sitting on the wooden chair, which Churchill had made and loved, she always noticed the rock looking at her. She sat there all day, noticing the rock, thinking, at times talking to herself. Like the rock, the word starting with an R also occupied most part of the day, as she sat there, whether it be cold or hot, and at times, it took her long to find out that it was drizzling.

What is the word which starts with an R? How can anyone in their right mind build a house, and have its door

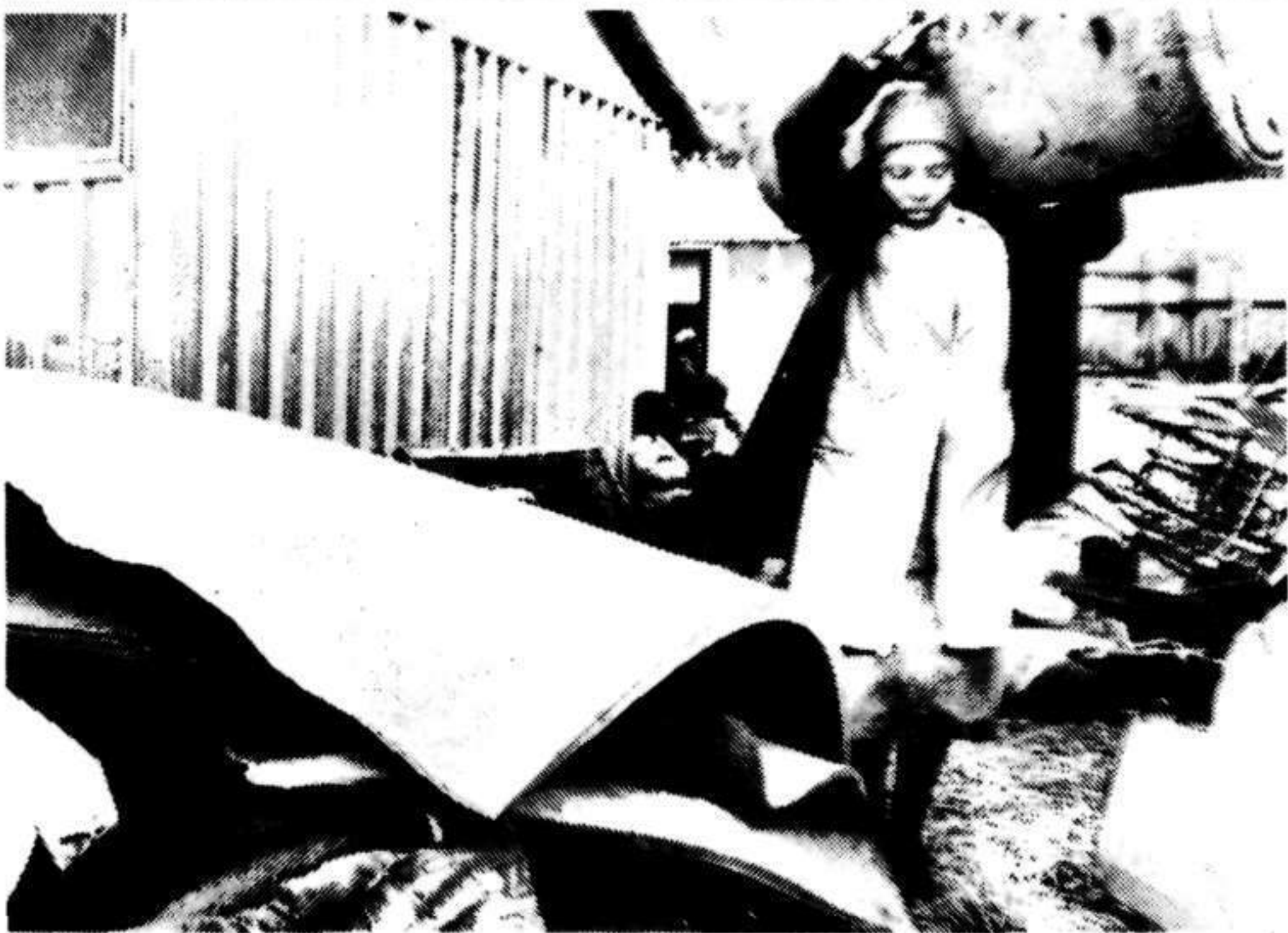
If Maria goes first, she would bury her, but if she remains, in her semi-death, she would still be embraced by the things of life, who would feed her, who would give her water, who would put her to bed? No, she must wait, Maria must go first.

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These thoughts, like the curls of smoke from the twigs, came and went and came and went, while Ma-maria sat by the fire, in the heat of the sun. She was sweating, sometimes tears came from her eyes, from the thin, light blue smoke.

Now and then she wiped her eyes. Now and then she sipped her tea. She was a folded, small bundle on Churchill's chair, wearing a blue dress inside out, a black doek and brown shoes. Now and then she bent to the dying fire, to blow it, and the flames leapt, eating into the twigs. Now and then she wiped her forehead and sat back to watch the flames. She was about to lift up her mug, to sip tea, when she saw shadows. For some time she looked at them, then she knew they were shadows of people. But where were the people?

She looked up, in the wrong direction. She saw no one. She looked up again at the shadows; seeing the shadows elongated, she knew that the two people were very near to her. She looked up, but this time she began to weep; "Jo, Jo, how can death come now, how can it, I cannot leave Maria behind, how can I die now!"



She struggled to stand up, and felt a hand hold her. Weary, voiceless, shaking, she tried to fight back by hitting at the hand that held her. "I cannot die now, leave me alone, I cannot die now", she kept saying. "Mama, it's me" Rebecca said, "It's me Rebecca", she said, holding her so as not to fall. Rebecca saw it, she had seen it before on other faces, the face of insanity. It is like death. The sun

was hot.

In her madness, in the heat of the sun and the fire, once she saw and recognised Rebecca's face, Ma-maria remembered the word that starts with an R.

"Resettlement, Resettlement", she kept saying, as Rebecca and her friend, Tshidi, held her, leading her to the house, to Maria, who was staring into space, lying on her back.

**DAWN POLITIXWORD NO. 1 – ANSWERS**

Across.

1. Glycerine    6. LLA    7. Rear    9. Dose    12. Narcosis  
 14. Reecho    15. MC    17. Go    18. AAM    20. Era  
 21. Sentry.

Down.

1. Geldenhuys    2. Year    3. Ecuador    4. ILO    5. Ustinov  
 8. Rose    10. Siege    11. Escort    13. Roman    16. cat  
 19. MR