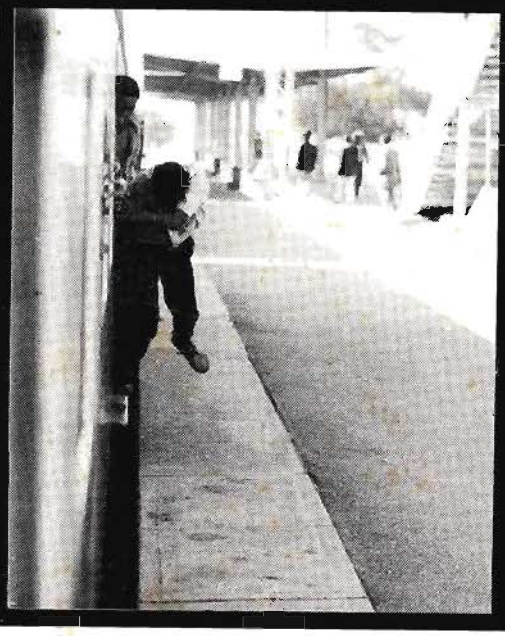
Staffrider

Volume Four Number One April/May 1981 R1,00 (incl. GST)



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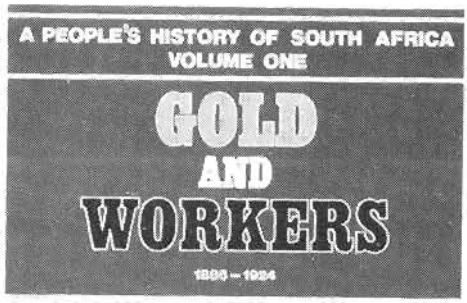

A People's History
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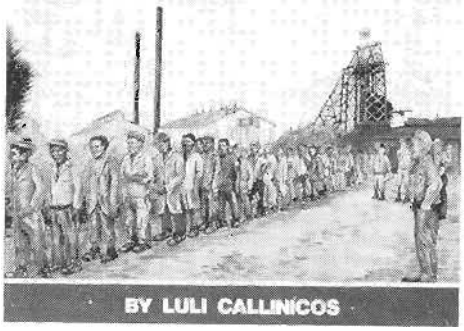

'Very interesting to us, the workers. It gives a background to labour relations when industrial mining began.'
– Moses Mayekiso, Transvaal Branch Secretary of Metal and Allied Workers Union.

'It is extremely well researched . . . It aims to set up the black workers who have underpinned our industrial economy as unsung heroes who have borne the heat of the day (or rather the depths) so that the economy, from which whites have been the chief beneficiaries, could prosper.

'It is rich enough in ideas and stimulating enough in content to serve as a source book for classes throughout the land.'
– Prof. T R H Davenport , History Department, Rhodes University.

WORKING FOR BOROKO

THE ORIGINS OF A COERCIVE LABOUR SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA
by Marian Lacey

'Working for nothing, for a place to sleep.' A searching new history which analyses the relationship between segregationist land policies and labour systems under successive South African governments.

LOOKING THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

by Noel Manganyi

Further essays on black culture and experience by the author of *Being-Black-In-The-World* and *Mashangu's Reverie*. The collection includes the text of a long interview between the author and Professor Es'kia Mphahlele.

THE SCHOOL MASTER

by Rose Moss

A powerful and challenging new novel set in contemporary South Africa, which tells the story of the struggle of a humane young South African to resist the complicity of his unwilling collaboration in the daily practice of apartheid.

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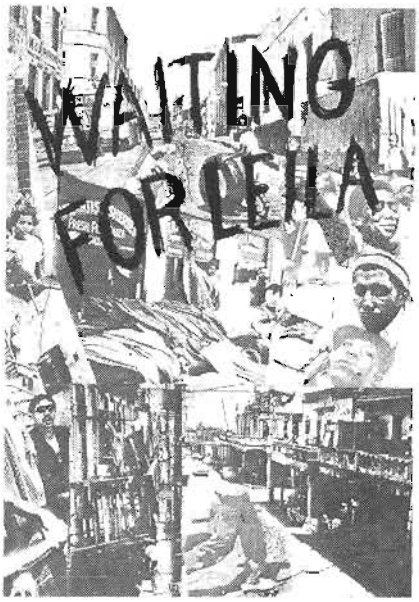
by Wessel Ebersohn

Now unbanned. Sam Bhengu, young black leader and political detainee, walks the painful road others have walked before him.

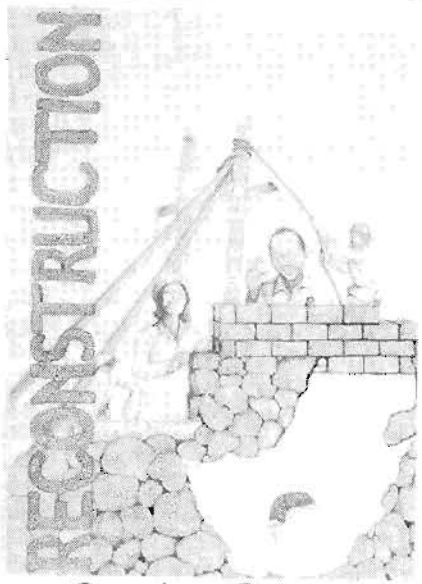
'Store Up The Anger is a very fine book – intensely disturbing, necessarily controversial, smouldering with implications.' *Times Literary Supplement*

Staffrider Series



by Achmat Dangor
Staffrider Series Number Six

Winner of the Mofolo-Plomer Prize in 1980.
'All around him they were breaking down his city, brick by brick, stone by stone.
"District Six – Rock of My History!"
"Leila! Where the hell are you?"
Samad's search for Leila is an odyssey through a world where the jackhammers are destroying more than bricks and mortar: they are tearing into the hearts of its people, brutalising them, leaving them with hearts as empty as the shop windows on Hanover Street.'



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Staffworker

A Factory Worker's Story

In this article Simon Kumalo, a worker at Colgate-Palmolive, speaks to *Staffrider* about two incidents which he experienced at the factory where he works.

The first concerns the removal of discriminatory signs from the toilets at the factory, and the reaction of white workers to this.

The second concerns the dissatisfaction of the black workers with the liaison committee, the initiative of the workers to join a union, and the reaction of management to this initiative.

Other workers are invited to bring the stories of their working lives to *Staffrider*.

Some names have been changed in this article.

Simon Kumalo, photo, Paul Weinberg

THE SHOWER ROOM INCIDENT

When the signs of discrimination were removed from the toilets of the company we were called by the liaison committee, and advised that discrimination in the company's facilities had been ended, so we've got the right to use what was once for whites. So they demolished all the toilets in the company which were mainly for us first and they re-built them to match those of the whites and even in the change houses the same thing happened. Firstly the company started by demolishing all the blacks' change houses and we had no place where we could take a bath or a shower. Knowing very well myself as having been told before that we had a right to use any company facilities, I went to the change room that was for whites before. As I was still having a shower, being naked and having soap all over on my body, a white engineering foreman by the name of Mr Van der Vuis came in and caused a hell of a row with me there and he started fighting me and telling me that I'm not supposed to be having a shower in that room. A fight broke out and we started punching and he couldn't just get me because my body was so slippery with soap. Until finally I had to go out naked, with the soap all over my body.

After going out of the change rooms I had to wipe all the soap off my body with a towel. From there I went to report to the liaison committee which had told us before that company facilities were integrated and I asked them to take the matter up to management and what they said was that they were not going to take it up because I didn't get hurt. As long as I didn't get hurt it doesn't matter. That would be sorted out as time went by. So after the refusal of the liaison committee to take the matter up with management, one of the representatives by the name of Joe who has already resigned from the company said that it was unfair and took it up with Mr Dyson who is the director of Employee and Industrial relations. Mr Dyson called me to come and explain how everything happened. After relating my story, Mr Dyson said this matter, as company facilities were supposed to be integrated, would be reviewed and as soon as something had been taken up, then he would let me know what the final outcome from management was. I asked Mr Dyson to give me permission: should I be in such a position again and be faced by such a man I should have the right to have a punch up with him or to hit him. He said the company policy does not allow workers inside the company to fight. Mr Dyson mentioned that he wouldn't like to take the matter up with the managing director because he knows that Mr Van der Vuis likes to beat up black people and if he hears it then Mr Van der Vuis will be out of a job. After it had been known by all the white men working in my department that I had been in the white change room, they were all against me, they hated me for it. Even at work I was pressurized while doing my job. One time, Leonard Foreman who is the foreman, came up to me and said Mr Van der Vuis had hit me a little bit, but he should have molested me a lot. I said to him that it was the company law that I should go and wash in those change rooms and after that Leonard left to inform the other foremen of what I had said and all the foremen concluded that I was cheeky and I was kept under a thorough scrutiny and all the time I was pressurized at work. Up to this date no black goes near the whites-only change rooms or uses the whites-only toilets. This story all happened to me in 1977.

'Fortunately a fellow worker found the union, which is the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. We as the workers went out in search of the union, the union didn't come to us.'

WORKERS TAKE THE INITIATIVE

The time came when we had to elect a liaison committee representative to represent us to management. The first time the elections were very fair and quite good. We elected people and at the end of the term of office we noted that these people were not taking any of our grievances up to management. So we as the workers of Colgate-Palmolive decided we should not elect any representatives, but management told us that it is law, that we must elect a person in the department to represent us on the committee. Management issued us with small papers to write down the names of the workers and the black personnel officer was sent around to make sure that workers wrote a name on the piece of paper, so we had to have something on the paper.

The liaison committee has proved to be a very useless body in the years that we have had it representing the workers in the company. At times we have had a grievance that we wanted to take up with management, such as one of our fellow workers being unfairly dismissed by management. This happened and we approached the representative in the detergent plant and related the whole story to him and his answer was that he was no lawyer for the workers and he was not going to take that grievance up for us. This built up the lack of confidence we had in the liaison committee. After that we started looking for a better help whereby we could voice our grievances and have an immediate effect taken on those grievances and be satisfied with what measures were taken, and with the outcome of the whole issue. That was the time when we started going out and looking for a trade union.

Fortunately a fellow worker found the union, which is the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. We as the workers went out in search of the union, the union didn't come to us. From there I spread the rumour in the company to the workers who I trusted would keep the secret to themselves, because the liaison committee was still in existence and we didn't want them to know about this matter before we had organised the majority of our workers. I then started organising workers and when I had found a worker who would join in I would tell him not to tell the other people and then I would go on to all the other workers bit by bit, bit by bit, and tell them not to tell the others. It went on and on like this and the liaison committee guys, the ones who heard I was organising workers for the union, did not like it for they did not care anything about them. I had one confidence that even if the company could fire me, as long as the union would be in the company then it would mean a lot of relief for all the workers because there would be a body to solve all their problems within the company.

Once we were organised, we wanted management to know that we were now members of a chemical workers' union and we made management aware through a petition which was signed by all the workers who were members of the union. By this time it was the majority of the workers, more than half, who were members and so what management did was to call all the workers to the training centre. Workers were interviewed one by one as to whether it was the true signature of the worker that appeared on the petition. If it was, the other questions would be, what is the name of the union, how much subscription did we pay, how did we pay the subscription fees, where do we pay the subscription fees, and how often do we have meetings, etc. Now the workers in the company viewed that as a sort of victimization. It was bad for management to call in the workers one by one for something which they had formed on their own or belonged to.

Later, workers understood that in the United States it was bad practice for a United States company to interview workers one by one for being members of a trade union.

Poetry

Gottschalk, Mokoena

(By way of explanation)

'At dawn they came and took you away
You were my dead: I walked behind . . . '
– Anna Akhmatova: Requiem

HOW MUCH LONGER MUST WE FEEL THEIR PAIN?

like battered birds with broken wing
torn with pain, unable to flee
they hide, silent, under shadowed perch
through the pain-wracked night
through the empty lonely longing
void of twenty years
pleading with the sun, that it rise

look:
a widower, veteran of 1914
who sees his son, entombed alive, through glass;

a psychologist, freckled
whose voice suddenly falters, then broods;

a black-haired widow
whose olive eyes watch the grave mound subside;

a librarian
who tended her dying father's tumoured days;

& this quiet one
the autumn yellow of her napalmed land
who flutters, wounded
around the caged flame of her love.

You!
you see their pain – and watch?
tear down this night!
command the sun to rise!
shatter this ersatz granite
with burning furnace red of molten lava
annealing our sun in the crucible of events

a real creation:
where all walk free
joy sings in the streets
& every mouth eats bread!

Keith Gottschalk

SMILE AT DAYLIGHT

It's coal-dark as dawn creeps along:
One by one inhabitants of slumberland
Peep through their window panes
To jeer at the villain night and to welcome the new day.

Bakithi! This has been a long and hazardous night
Next of kin were lost through nocturnal barbarism
It has left the inhabitants in a post-coital position
Hence they drag their feet and salute the new day with yawns.
Nonetheless everyone shall wake up and smile at the daylight.

Zakes Mokoena

Daniel Kunene

A Seed Must Seem to Die

I, more cleverer than you

They say they gone to school
they know new things
lots of things

Me too, I gone to school
I gone to school when I's born
an' I learn new things
which I never see in my mother's womb

Yesterday
I see a man shoot another man
not look in his eyes to read question
Why my brother
as wife and children and extended family
and all of life pass quickly in dying man's eyes

He shove his hands in pockets of dying man
he pull out a dime
he pull out a shilling
he cuss on this fuckin' fool
why don't he carry more bread in his pants
Ah, ten dollars, good for a fifth of whisky
You no die for nothin' brother
I gonna think of you as I drink my fifth
pushing the dying man's weight off him
and the earth also
it pull the man down

My school is better
I see a man killed
to buy a fifth of whisky

I, more cleverer than you

They say they gone to school
they know everything

Me too I gone to school
I gone to school the day I's born
Yeah, I never see these things
in my mother's womb

Yesterday
I see a big man
very big
He take baby from mother's breast
He smash its head on the ground
He grab mother's nipple with his long teeth
and he bite and suck milk mixed with blood

Mother cry
Mother cry
But man with long teeth he suck and suck
while baby dying
mother crying

Man with long teeth
He rape mother with his teeth and his penis
Mother die
Baby die
But big man's stomach full of milk
and he laughing

Baby dead
no milk
milk for monster only

My school is better
I see baby killed for milk from mother's breasts
foul semen of monster planted
inside womb of beautiful woman
crying

I, more cleverer than you

They say they gone to university
They know knowledge of big books

I was in my school yesterday
I see them catch a man without papers
Those papers they call passes
Oh, those passes can kill a man

They say to the man
Those papers are your balls kaffir
Ever see a man leave his balls at home
Come kaffir
You going to jail
No, we will not take you to the judge
If we took you to the judge he'd kill you

Better we take you to Baas Potgieter's farm
O, some have died there, we know,
But u-h you may be lucky who knows
Come on kaffir, get into that fuckin' van
Baas Potgieter is a good man
If he thinks you're unhappy
He takes you out of your misery

My school is better
I see a man sentenced to die on Potgieter's farm
When they tell him his papers were so bad . . .

I, more cleverer than you

They say they graduated
They got Ph.D.
They know psychology and philosophy
They gon' teach me 'bout life

Oho, what they know
I tell you
Yesterday
I see a man raping his daughter
she say Father what 'you doing
He say Shut up I'm strong you weak
that's all I know
I take what I want
He throw her down and she cry
But he ravage and he ravage
and she cry tears
and she bleed much blood
But he ravage and ravage
till his heart was full of beastly joy

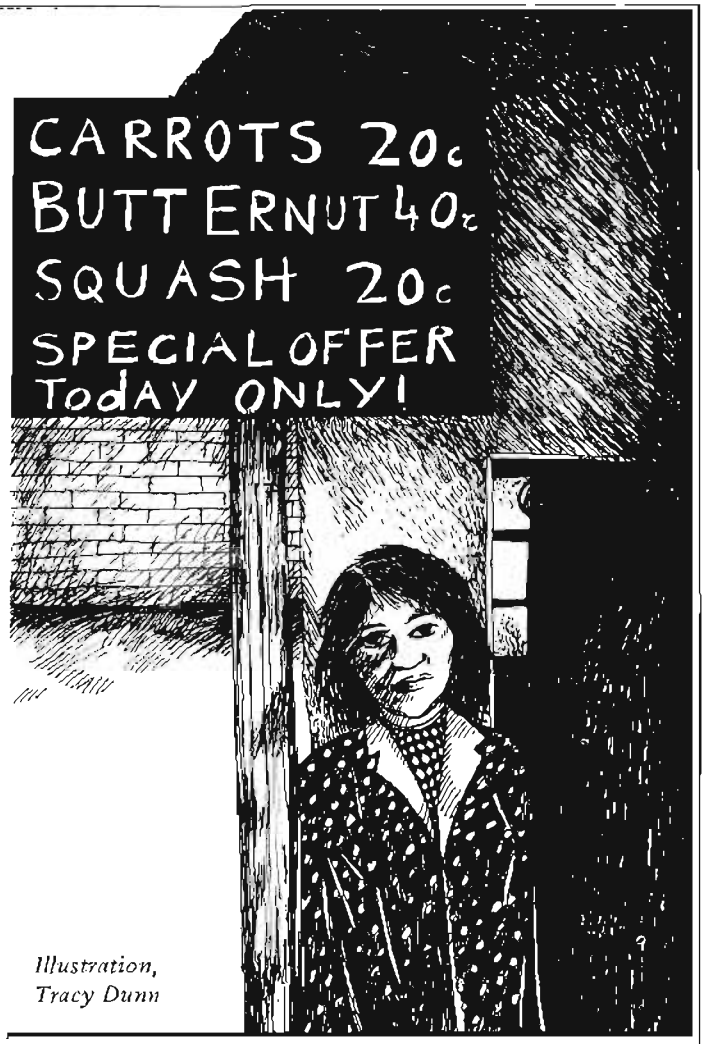
His daughter she die
but man jus' grin
full of the joy of the beast

My school is better
I see a man rape his daughter
then throw her on a rubbish pile
weeping and disgraced
and she die
on the rubbish pile

D. Kunene

The Promise

by Gladys Thomas



Illustration, Tracy Dunn

I, Maria Klaasen, came from the Swartland to this city. I remember when it all happened so suddenly on that beautiful farm-fresh morning. I was busy making the morning mieliepap for the children who were hungry and restless. Beta was lucky to be at school still, and so was little Mannetjie, my baby brother, the apple of my father's eye. Mama worked over at the big house as a housemaid.

When I think back I remember her often saying, 'You're not going to be no maid, Maria. You've got your Standard Six and you are a smart girl. You're going back to school as soon as Mannetjie is bigger.'

To return to school became my only wish! I often prayed to God to help me. Papa worked in the fields, leaving at four o'clock every morning. On that particular morning I was woken by the clanging sound of the labourers' spades.

I remember that the atmosphere was tense between Mama and Papa. I overheard her say, 'Where do we go from here? You know you cannot do any other work except work in the fields. Even if you had grown up in the big house and your mother had been their maid like me, our days here are numbered. It cuts no ice! Why must your mouth always run away with you when you're drunk?'

'But it's the truth.'

'I know it is the truth. But these people don't like it!'

It all happened the previous Saturday when the 'Oubaas' took the farmworkers on their monthly outing to the dorp. The children would run around and the wine flowed freely. The teenagers preferred the cinema and had to hike back at night to the farm. Wives would sit and breastfeed their babies unashamedly while the men had a good time in the small country bar. The young girls would do the shopping and be on the lookout for rummage sales. I remember the town square being packed on these outings with babies' bare bums and mothers with their exposed breasts; the rummage sales, purchased meat and groceries, and drunk men urinating in the side streets. Who cares, they seemed to think we were away from the farm for a holiday.

That morning Papa got drunk and started swearing at the passing whites. Said they're all a lot of slave drivers and told them to look at our women in their rags and at the near-naked babies. Someone shouted that he needed a soapbox and the people laughed at the suggestion.

One of the neighbouring farmers quietly went over to the Hotel and called out the 'Oubaas' who came rushing out, red up to his ears. He took Papa by the scruff of his neck and threw him into the truck and shouted at him, 'Sit op jou gat totdat ons huistoe gaan, verdomde dônner.' Papa struck his head against the side of the truck and I was so upset at the punishment meted out to him that I stood crying near the truck until we moved off.

When we arrived back at the farm the 'Oubaas' asked the others to hold Papa, but they pretended to be too drunk and attempted to stumble off to their shacks. He called them back and told them to see what would happen to people who liked to make political speeches. He called his son, who had returned recently from army training, to help hold Papa. My mother pleaded with the 'Oubaas' but he was determined to use his whip.

'Hy praat nie op so 'n manier van die dusvolk nie!'

'Asseblief, Oubaas,' my mother pleaded.

'Wat gaan aan in jou gedagtes? Ek neem vir hulle dorp toe and hy wil politiek praat!'

The whip came cracking down over my father's back. After I don't know how many strokes, the children became hysterical. He stopped finally with the sweat streaming down his face, told us that it was his teatime and walked back to the big house. The other workers, by now sober, carried Papa inside and I washed his face.

Mama had to go back to the old house to serve tea to the 'Oubaas'. It was then that I made my decision to get the hell out of there and move to the city. I kept on patting the wet facecloth over the wrinkled face and tried to cheer him up.

'I'll read for you tonight, Papa.'

'I'll be alright, child,' he said softly.

My mother always brought reading matter from the big house; magazines, with beautiful fashions that I dreamt of wearing, and other books. At night I would lie between them and read in the candle light: love stories, fiction, articles, anything that happened to take Papa's fancy. He and Mama liked to listen to the stories that I read them and he often remarked that he never dreamt that one of his children would one day be able to read and write. He looked real proud during our reading sessions.

'Go sleep now, Papa, so that the swelling can go down.'

'What do you think of me, Maria?'

'I love you, Papa.' I closed the door and went to feed the chickens and look for Beta who had run away when she saw the whip.

The following morning the children ate their mieliepap and Beta left for school which was miles away from the farm. Mannetjie was having his afternoon nap and I was

washing napkins. I looked down the road opposite our shack and saw a car approaching. That road, I was told, would take you all the way to Johannesburg. While hanging up the napkins I saw the big silver car stop near our shack. A man and a woman got out and walked towards me. She wore a flowing sari of floral chiffon and he a safari suit, just like those the friends of 'Oubaas' wore when they came to visit on Sundays.

She was smiling in a very friendly way and asked my name. I told her, and she asked if I would like to come to Cape Town to help her. She explained that they owned a large supermarket near the city and needed help. She asked if she could speak to Mama. I told her that Mama would be back soon and that Papa would be coming for his bread and coffee soon as it was almost lunch time. I took them inside and she sat down on the old wooden chair in our little kitchen while he stood arms folded, looking around. He said, 'Look, we have no time to waste. Get done with your business quickly as we have a long journey back and you know what happens when I'm not at the shop.'

Finally I had to call Mama and tell her what the people wanted. At first she was adamant: 'Not on your life. You're not leaving here.' I begged and pleaded with her to let me go. Mama greeted them and they told her about the help they needed. She offered them tea but he refused. She said she could do with a cup. Papa came in from the fields and the man told him about their proposition for me. Papa didn't agree either, saying that the City was wicked and that I was only seventeen.

'I promise we will look after her and let her finish her schooling. That's a promise,' he said. Papa showed interest at this suggestion and enquired, 'But how can she go to school and work?'

'There are many schools in our area. She can go to night school. I promise we will treat her like one of the family.'

'I like her,' the woman said, 'Don't stand in her way. You won't regret it.'

Papa finally agreed and the man gave him twenty rands which he could not resist. God, how he must work a whole month for that sort of money!

While Mama was weeping silently, Papa asked, 'Do you rather want her to spend her young life here on this fucking farm like me? Since my childhood I've worked for them. Come now, it's best for her.'

'She can come home once a month, that's a promise.'

'I'm only glad that she can go to school. Look after my girl!' Mama assented.

I got into the big silver car and after all the goodbyes we slid away from

> ' I remembered the twenty Rands which Papa could not resist. '

the farm which I haven't seen again. For a long while I could still hear Mannetjie crying for me. I really loved that child with his fat chubby cheeks. I sat back in the car and thought my whole life was going to change and silently thanked God. I prayed to Him to keep my family safe, and that there would be no more whippings. We drove on what seemed to be an endless road while the two in the front seats spoke about their friends, their new houses, and about new schemes to make more money.

We arrived at a large house with a shopping complex attached. I read the name 'Allie's Supermarket' written large across the front of the building. It looked grand with all the good fresh fruit displayed on the pavement and the pretty dresses in the windows. I thought that I would get a smart dress like those that I had seen in the magazines back home. He came round to her side and opened the car door for her. She told me that this was their shop. I stood on the pavement not knowing what to do. 'You go round the back and I'll come to show you around soon. Go through that big gate.'

I carried my case through the back gate and came face to face with a huge Alsatian dog. At first I wanted to scream with fright but I talked to him softly. 'Hello, boy. Hello, hello boy.' The dog wagged his tail and followed me to the back door. I sat on my case and waited and waited and became hungry. The dog remained sitting at my feet. The yard was wet and cold and the broken cement patches formed puddles of water. There were fruit boxes piled high. They smelled mouldy. I looked at my surroundings and felt like crying when I heard footsteps coming down the lane.

A man appeared with a heavy bag on his back. After he put the load down I saw this tall, black and handsome figure. He came towards me and said, 'Hello. You're coming to stay here?'

'Yes,' I whispered, the tears stinging my eyes. He saw this and became very sympathetic.

'Don't cry. What is your name?'

'Maria,' I answered and started weeping again. He took out a clean white handkerchief, as white as his strong teeth, and his lovely smile disarmed me. I wiped my tears shyly.

'Don't cry. I'll help you.' We heard footsteps approaching.

'Ben! Where the fucking hell are you?'

'Coming, baas. I was drinking water.'

'Now shake your arse, man,' the voice said angrily.

Ben wiped his face with the handkerchief which was now wet with my tears.

To pass the time I patted the dog and spoke to it. As Ben walked off he said, 'That's funny. That dog doesn't like strangers but he likes you.'

I sat in the wet yard for what seemed hours. Eventually she came out. 'My God, child! I was so busy behind the counter. Come, I'll show you your room. Here we are. This is not the farm so see that you keep it clean.' When she left I wanted to shout to her that I was hungry but she had disappeared.

It was a dull tiny room with a single iron bed, and a fruitbox with a vase on it. I hung my jacket on a wire hanger and it was obvious that someone had lived here recently. She returned and said that Ben would have to sleep in the fruitshed. 'Can't trust these kaffirs. Come to the kitchen and eat something. You must be starved. My mother runs the house and she'll give you supper. What standard did you pass at school?'

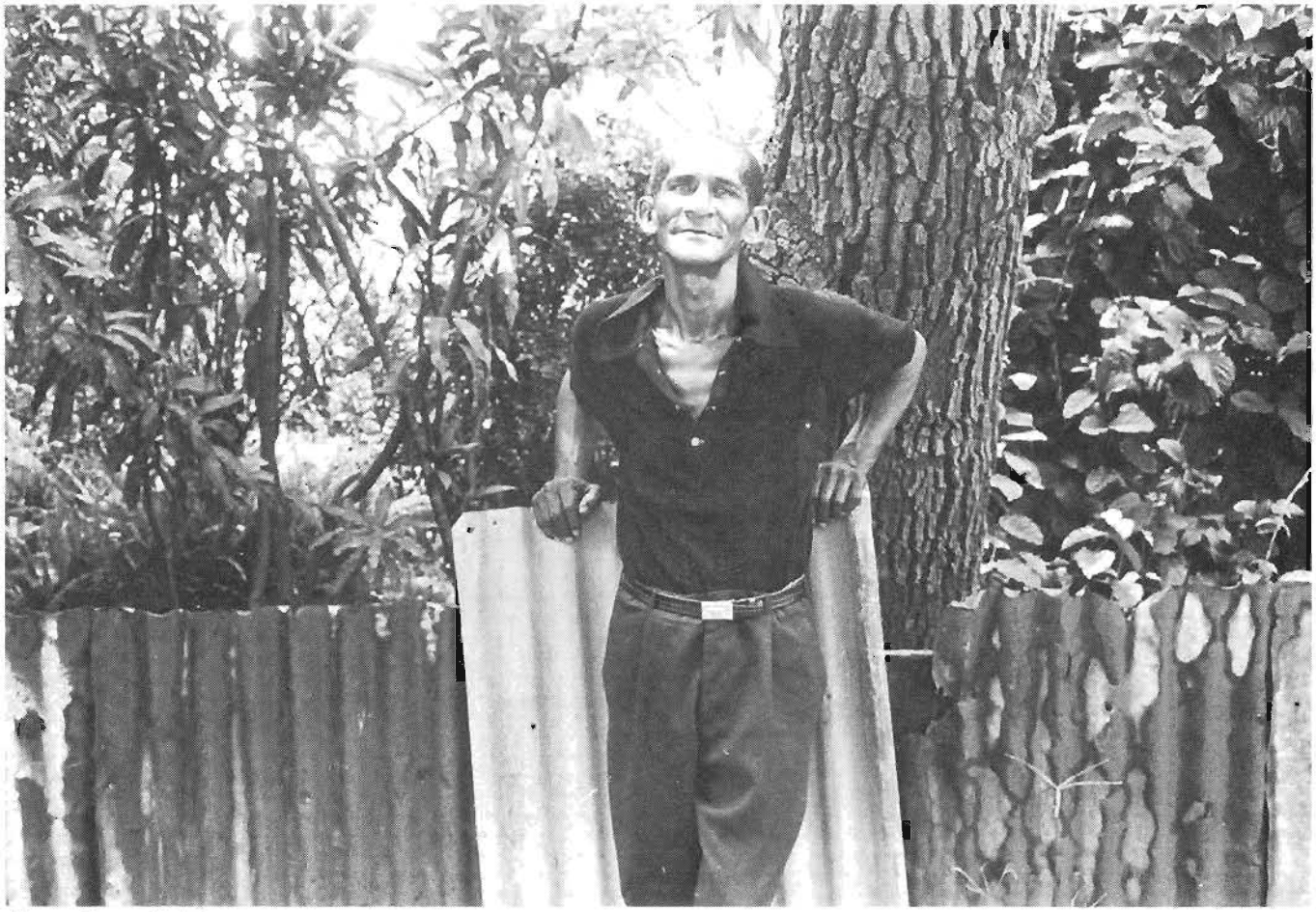
'Standard Six, Missis.' Immediately I thought, here comes the shop assistant job and the night school. I felt relieved and glad as I entered the kitchen for my first meal in the city.

In the large American kitchen on a small table in the corner stood a plate of curry and a mug of tea. The food was strong but I was hungry. I sat looking around the big tiled kitchen with cupboards all matched in colour, like in the books back home.

> ' If people stole they must be hungry, I reasoned. '

The two teenage girls of the family came into the kitchen. They were about my age. One was so fat that she even had droopy cheeks and I could not see her neck. They walked past me as if I didn't exist, and opened the fridge, taking two bottles of cool-drink and opening them next to the table where I was eating. What a luxury, I thought, for the only cool-drinks I knew of came from a packet of powder that makes ten glasses. We only had the drinks on Sundays and I remember Mannetjie gulping down one glass after another, hoping to fill his stomach to last till next Sunday, the little glutton!

The girls drank half of the bottles and dumped them on the main table. Their grandmother asked them to clear the dinner table but they walked out grumbling, 'That will be the day,' and 'We've got homework to do.' The fat one opened the fridge again and I peeped inside and was amazed by so much food and drink. Only the whites have fridges like this one back home on the farm. We used to keep our food in a gauze wire cupboard which hung on a tree outside.



Photo, Omar Badsha

'Come, girl. I haven't got all night.'

I said grace and thanked the old lady.

'Here's the dishcloth. You can dry the dishes for me,' the old lady said in a frustrated voice. 'I don't know why they did not bring two girls. Expect me, with my old body, to be busy all day.'

I went on with the dishes.

'You're going to work in the shop. There's a lot of shoplifting going on lately. But they could've brought another girl to help me.'

I remembered the twenty Rands which Papa could not resist. I bade her goodnight after I had finished the dishes and went through the wet yard to my room with the dog following me. Ben saw me passing and brought me a candle. I thanked him and asked him for something to read. He brought me the *Sunday Post*. The dog whined at the door until I let him in. I felt homesick when I read the depressing news of how people lived in Johannesburg. I dropped off to sleep with the newspaper in my hands.

The next morning I awoke to someone calling my name. 'Maria! Maria! Come, get up. Come clean the girls' shoes. You *must* wake up earlier. The girls must get to school in time.' The word school reminded me of her promise.

I sat at the back door cleaning their shoes which they took from me without even a thank you or a nod. My mind strayed to the previous night and to the cool drinks which they had wasted.

Ben passed me with brooms and buckets and called me over to him.

'I hear you must stand guard for the day.'

'What does that mean?' I enquired.

'While I pack all the goods outside you must stand there and watch if anyone steals. There are a lot of people passing by. This is a busy area what with all the schools and the bus terminus and station nearby.'

'You mean I must stand there all day and just watch if people steal?'

'They trust no one,' Ben replied knowingly.

Every morning thereafter, after a mug of hot coffee and bread, I would wash off the pavement. Ben had his section and I had mine. Buckets of soapy water was splashed over the pavement and then swept down the gutter. Then I was posted in front of the shop, begging people to come in to see the 'bargains' inside. I also had to look out for shoplifters. I hated every moment of this work. Some days the sun blazed down so fiercely that I felt faint. I watched with envy the girls from the different schools passing in the afternoons, wondering when I would be sent to school.

She fetched her daughters from school in the afternoon. They would get out of the big silver car and bang the doors shut. Running past me they would rush to the icecream counter inside the shop and come out licking large pink icecreams or suckers. Sometimes I felt hungry and tired but lunch often was just leftovers.

Sometimes Ben would pass me a sweet secretly and whisper, 'Don't let them see you eat.' He always came to talk to me or to give me something which he had taken in the shop without them noticing. I shall always remember him carrying the heavy sugar bags on his back.

One afternoon he came over and said, 'You look pale. Are you sick?'

'Yes,' I said, embarrassed.

'Don't let them see you cry like that. What is the matter?'

'My stomach is cramping so,' I replied.

He disappeared into the shop and after a while returned with a pack of sanitary towels. The blood had started to run down my legs. I was so grateful to him. I had to go inside the shop to ask permission to go to the toilet.

'Yes, and don't be long,' he said.

After I had cleaned myself up I walked back to the cursed job, watching people. If people stole they must be hungry, I reasoned. Standing in that busy street and watching everyone going somewhere. That night I felt so sick that I fell down on the bed into a deep sleep. I was sure that I was suffering from

sunstroke. The dog slept in his usual place and I dreamt about Papa, Mama, Beta and Mannetjie. I was woken by a faint knocking at my door. I immediately knew it was Ben and I was glad of the opportunity to speak to someone again.

'Come in, Ben,' I said softly.

'How're you feeling now?'

'Fine, thanks. What is the time? You're still up? I've slept already.'

'Eleven o'clock. I had to pack the shelves in the shop. During the day it is too full of people.'

'They pay you well, Ben?'

'Not a damn. Here's a chocolate for you. Have it.'

'Thanks. You must be careful, Ben. I don't like these people. They'll send you to jail even for a chocolate bar.'

'I know. I want you to have it. I'm going to look after you.'

'I'm not a child, Ben.'

'Who cried like a big baby today?' he laughed. 'Why did you come to this place?'

'I thought it better than the farm and she promised to send me to High School. I want to learn more, Ben. That's why I came.'

'My girl, you won't even reach a schoolgate. These people don't keep their promises.'

After that night he came every evening and I loved him when he kissed me. He was so big and strong. We spoke about how much we loved each and he even said that I was as pure as a lily. He always brought me little things from the shop. One night he brought me lipstick and mascara and held the mirror for me to make up my face. I was as thrilled as he for that was the first time I had used make-up. I knew I looked attractive and was shy when he said, 'Hell, you are beautiful.' That night we made love for the first time and fell fast asleep, oblivious of the danger of being found together. Later he woke me and said that we must get the hell out of that place.

'We can't get away from them, Ben. Don't talk about my family. I will have to learn to forget about them. I've got no money even to go and visit them. Besides, she doesn't let me off, even on Sundays.'

One night after a long day in the sun, I washed and got to bed early. He came in and pulled open the blankets and looking at my body he said, 'I've never seen such curves.' We laughed and read the newspaper.

'I must wake up at four o'clock tomorrow. It's market day and that man mustn't find me here. He asked me today why you never catch anyone stealing.'

'Must I say people steal if they don't? Don't worry, I'll wake you, Ben.' Then we fell asleep but our happiness was short-lived. The next morning we were woken to loud banging at the door.

'Come out of there, kaffir! And you, farm-bitch. Get out this minute. You can both go back to where you come from.'

We jumped up and dressed in a hurry. Ben looked worried.

'Don't worry,' I said kissing him and peeped through the window. It was still dark and the stars were still glowing brightly. The yard lights were on when we came out of the room.

'Pack your things and go,' he commanded.

'Where can we go?' Ben asked.

'You had time to think of that before.'

When we left he searched our bundles and locked the yard gate behind us.

'You can collect your papers at the Bantu Administration,' he sneered through the gate. 'You know what *that* means!'

We walked out of that cold wet yard into the cold misty dawn like two thieves. The lights in the huge house were still not switched on. The dog followed us as we walked towards the station. We avoided the main road because of the patrolling vans. We had no papers and the bundles made it obvious that we were now vagrants. We sat cuddled up, shivering with cold in the waiting room, hoping that the Railway Police wouldn't find us.

When the first train came along I said, 'Ben, where do we go from here?' He replied that he had friends at the Epping vegetable market and that I must wait for him on Cape Town station. I said that I would miss the dog and wondered if he wouldn't be killed by a car before he reached home or whether that damp wet yard wouldn't eventually claim him. Ben reassured me, saying that he would get me a dog when we had a place to stay. I knew that those two fat girls would not feed the dog. Even in the train I was still worried about the dog. It was then that Ben realised that he had left his passbook in his white jacket, in the fruitshed.

'I don't want to see that man again. Let the book rot there! I hate that book!'

We reached Cape Town and Ben said I should wait for him until he returned from Epping. I sat till lunch time thinking, what if he doesn't come back? Where will I get money to go back to the farm? I watched the throngs of people coming and going. They all looked so serious; everyone seemed to know where they were going. I wished I was one of them.

Ben finally returned soon after lunch time. I saw from his worried face that his journey had been in vain. He bought a packet of fish and chips and we ate hungrily.

'I found nothing. The shanties were all numbered last week and the people are afraid of taking in others for fear of having their homes bulldozed.'

We roamed the streets of Cape Town day after day, sleeping in servants' rooms at night. Ben knew a lot of people, friends he had made when he used to come to Cape Town to the wholesalers for Allie's Supermarket. Days turned into months and we moved from place to place until we met his friend, Lucas. He pitied us as he felt we were so young. 'To live like this! I stay near the mountain. Come and live with me,' he told Ben.

We arrived at the mountain home which was just a large hole like a cave, with mattresses on the floor, but it was clean. 'This is better than the streets,' Ben said. That night Ben asked me if I'd rather go home to the farm or live there with him like this. Because I loved him I told him that I couldn't leave him. There were many others who lived like us. Outcasts of the city. Lucas had lost his wife a while back and I was accepted as the lady of the house.

One day while I was busy cleaning out our hole, making the beds and sweeping, Lucas came to tell me that they had arrested Ben. 'I expected something like this to happen,' he said.

'But why?' I asked unbelievingly.

'Pass! He's got no papers!' Lucas replied.

I wept for a long time but I am still waiting for him. I lay down on the mattress and sobbed my heart out. Rita, one of the friends I came to know, tried to comfort me. 'Alright, my girl. Don't cry. Come let's have a drink.' I followed her and got drunk for the first time.

I lay on the grass in a drunken stupor and hated the nauseous feeling of everything revolving around me. In my drunken dream I saw his outstretched arms reaching for me: 'Ben. Ben? You've come to take me away from here?' Instead the dull pain of a fist smashing into the side of my face confused and alarmed me. I opened my eyes but could not focus properly nor could I lift my arms, which seemed so heavy, to protect myself. Vaguely in the distance I was sure I heard Rita's high-pitched sensual laughter. I shouted for assistance in the direction of the voice but received no answer.

Then I realised that the figure standing over me was not Ben's. He hit out at my face again. As I slipped into unconsciousness, I felt him tearing at my underwear and his heavy weight on me muffled my screams. No one heard or cared.

Antonio Jacinto, Antonio Cardoso, Gasmin Rodrigues

Poems from Angola

Three poems taken from a collection of Angolan poetry selected and translated by Michael Wolfers.

LETTER FROM A CONTRACT WORKER

I wanted to write you a letter
my love,
a letter that would tell
of this desire
to see you
of this fear
of losing you
of this more than benevolence that I feel
of this indefinable ill that pursues me
of this yearning to which I live in total surrender . . .

I wanted to write you a letter
my love,
a letter of intimate secrets,
a letter of memories of you,
of you
of your lips red as henna
of your hair black as mud
of your eyes sweet as honey
of your breasts hard as wild oranges
of your lynx gait
and of your caresses
such that I can find no better here . . .
I wanted to write you a letter
my love,
that would recall the days in our haunts
our nights lost in the long grass
that would recall the shade falling on us from the plum trees
the moon filtering through the endless palm trees
that would recall the madness
of our passion
and the bitterness
of our separation . . .

I wanted to write you a letter
my love,
a letter that would be brought to you by the passing wind
a letter that the cashews and coffee trees
the hyenas and buffaloes
the alligators and grayling
could understand
so that if the wind should lose it on the way
the beasts and plants
with pity for our sharp suffering
from song to song
lament to lament
gabble to gabble
would bring you pure and hot
the burning words
the sorrowful words of the letter
I wanted to write to you my love . . .

I wanted to write you a letter . . .
But oh my love, I cannot understand
why it is, why it is, why it is, my dear
that you cannot read
and I — Oh the hopelessness! — cannot write!

Antonio Jacinto

SARITA

Sarita dwells in the township,
suffers in the township,
but flaunts herself downtown
all scarlet and azure,
all ivory white smile,
and the whites stop to gaze,
lost in her gaze.
Sarita has yellow earrings of tin
coiffure of an Egyptian goddess
gait of a bush gazelle,
comes down to the city
and smiles at everyone.
Then, at half past six,
Sarita goes to live in the township
with the whites lost from her gaze!

Antonio Cardoso

I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO WEEP

I do not know how to weep
I have not learned to mourn for griefs
born on the dismal altar of powerlessness
praying over rigours without justice

I know how to pluck from fingers twisted in pain
the defenceless heat of the weapon abandoned
in the bleeding trunk of a farewell
from the dead born into eternity

I do not know how to weep
I do not know how to shed funeral tears
I have not learned how to scatter nothings
in the bitter shell of abandoned space

Without studying the black ashes of death
over the shattered body of a friend,
in the certainty of mankind's triumph
over the charred distruction of man.

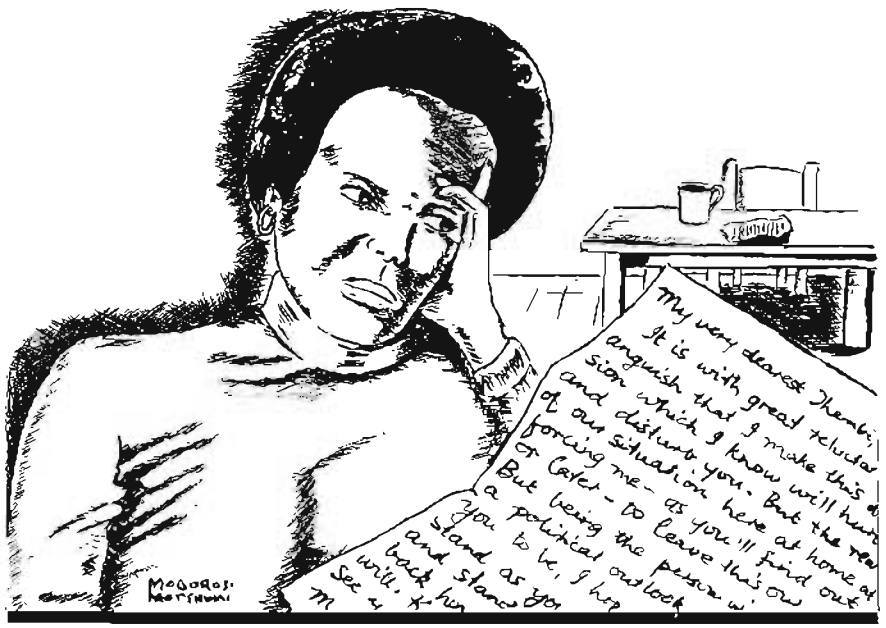
I do not know how to weep!

Gasmin Rodrigues

It's Necessary

A Story by Papa Siluma

Illustrated by Mogorosi Motshumi



The rain fell in torrents. It was a rain of dark menacing clouds, violent winds, lightning and rumbling thunder. In its aftermath there would be mourning for those struck by lightning and lamenting for lost stock and for fields devastated by raging floods. Yet, on the whole the rain remained an undisputable godsend, bringing life and jubilation to this drought-stricken tropical region of the country.

From the sofa on which she had slumped for hours she stared blankly at the window panes being pounded by the driving rain. Her very soul was pained but no tears welled in her eyes now for she had cried for the better part of the previous night after receiving the news.

When she had tried to sleep, thoughts — tragic and confused thoughts — would flash in her head like the emergency lights of an ambulance carrying a patient whose life is imperilled. She was forced to stay awake and stare into the dark night — the longest and most agonising she could remember.

Now it was well after noon. But she had not had a nap. She had not eaten anything since the previous night. To her food had become inedible. The cup of tea she had poured herself in the morning still stood on the table and was now cold and discoloured. With the rain falling outside, the house was like an ice-chest, but she had not bothered to make a fire.

The thoughts kept flashing in her head. Maqhawe dead? How could her Maqhawe die when they were still so much in love? Just how could he? She could not bring herself to believe it even though she knew it was true. It was too tragic to be true. Maqhawe. So loving; so patient; so reliable . . . Just what would life mean without him? At this thought she was enveloped with apprehension and despair; her heart sank.

They had been married only for a year when Maqhawe disappeared from home. Prior to that he had been in and out of jail for his political beliefs so often he himself had lost count. They had shared the same political beliefs and throughout she had supported him to the hilt. They were agreed that the government that oppressed their people had to go.

This, however, did not mean that she did not care when her husband went to jail. These were some of the sacrifices which had to be made if their people were to be free. Besides, although his incarceration had never gone down well with her she had always consoled herself with the knowledge that whatever happened to him in jail the chances were good that he would ultimately come out.

Maqhawe had always told her that for the people to be free there would have to be suffering and sacrifice, and that included death. At times she had told him that much as the people had to be free and much as she appreciated his dedication to the struggle she would not, because of her love for him, like to see him die.

To this he had replied that much as death was such an unpleasant thing it remained a necessity if there was to be freedom. 'Look at it this way, Thembi. For us to be able to till our fields and get food, and for our stock to survive, we need rain. But rain brings with it the misery of death and destruction through floods and lightning. Do we, therefore, say we don't want rain because of the misery it brings? Surely we don't, love. Despite the misfortunes it brings with it rain remains indispensable to us. And so it is with our war,' he had explained to his wife.

Initially Thembi had just had to accept it. But she had gradually grown to adapt to the situation, largely due to that wish and hope she had, which sometimes made her feel really guilty, that her husband's life would be spared since she could not bear to lose him.

He must have known that the police would come for him again, for the day after his disappearance they raided his home.

Maqhawe had always told her that for the people to be free there would have to be suffering and sacrifice, and that included death.

He had left Thembi a brief letter when he went away and she remembered it clearly. 'My very dearest Thembi,' he had written. 'It is with great reluctance and anguish that I make this decision which I know will hurt and disturb you. But the realities of our situation here at home are forcing me — as you'll find out sooner or later — to leave this our motherland. But being a person with a political outlook, which I know you to be, I hope you will understand as you have always done and stand by me. I hope to be back home one day. I certainly will. Keep strong, love. Hope to see you again. Your very dearest, Maqhawe.'

She had repeated the contents of the letter to herself so often she now knew them by heart and would have repeated them to herself aloud had she not felt choked with anguish.

But now with the news of his death on a mission it was clear that Maqhawe would not come back as they had both hoped. Maqhawe was dead and she would never see him again.

The lights in her head flashed incessantly. Now she imagined his once-handsome face having been blasted beyond recognition into a bloody mess of broken bone and pulped flesh. Now she imagined his body lying in the bush being eaten away by thousands of shiny, slothful and wriggling white worms until what was left of him was a snow-white

But the struggle could not wait for individuals to fulfil their ambitions, no matter how noble, honest or well-meaning.

skeleton. No! Her Maqhawe did not deserve to die and be eaten by worms! He didn't!

The lump in her throat grew bigger and she felt like crying aloud and screaming: 'Maqhawe! Please wake up and come back to me, Maqhawe, please!' But no tears came from her eyes, no voice from her throat.

But if Maqhawe did not deserve to die, whose husband, son or daughter did? If everyone's loved ones did not participate then the struggle would come to a halt, and clearly that meant giving a free hand to the oppressor. This was the last thing she wished to see happening. The situation prevailing in her country remained unacceptable to her. It was out-and-out evil.

Maqhawe. Her husband of a year-old marriage. Great things had awaited them in their marriage. They had planned to buy a house soon, and then a car. Then they would raise a happy family. With the money they earned all this would not have been impossible. She felt that

life had been rather harsh on her and her husband. At least couldn't they have been given a chance to fulfil their ambition in their marriage? If death had to strike at all couldn't it have done so later, some few years after they were married?

But the struggle could not wait for individuals to fulfil their ambitions, no matter how noble, honest or well-meaning. Not that she was not prepared to make sacrifices. She understood only too well the need for that. But would it have been asking too much to have her husband coming out of it alive, even if it meant with very serious injuries? She knew she would still have loved him even if he were blind or without limbs. She was prepared to lose everything if only to have him alive.

The only thing she had valued in life had been taken from her. It was only now that she understood fully the meaning of sacrifice — losing the very things one valued most, the ones one did not wish to lose for anything.

Maqhawe was gone. She could do nothing about it. The sombre sky, the thunder, whose rumbling reverberated into unfathomable distances, and the rain pounding away on the roof of the house seemed to deepen her sorrow. For sometime to come life to her would be a river full of whirlpools of destructive self-pity. It would be a painful longing for Maqhawe and the happy times they had had together. She as a swimmer would have to constantly strive to steer clear of these whirlpools if she were not to be sucked under and submerged.

Poetry

Essop Patel, Yousuf Minty

DID OUR BROTHERS HAVE A CHOICE?
(To James Matthew)

Did our brothers have a choice
between
the thorn of the barbed wire
and
the needle of the mimosa tree?

Did our brothers have a choice
between
the window in the blue sky
and
the trap door in the earth?

Did our brothers have a choice
between
the gunman's bullet in Maputo
and
subjugation on bended knees?

Essop Patel

WHERE HAVE THE POETS GONE?
(after a folk song)

Where have the poets gone?
To their shatterproof offices
in highrise university blocks.

Where have the poets gone?
To caress their metallic golfballs
and their darling-slim typewriters.

Where have the poets gone?
To intellectualise their apolitical
poems about pretty little snowflakes.

When will they ever learn
that simple words
make simple poems
for the people . . .

Essop Patel

TANKS

I've seen them in the pictures brother
grey tanks rolling
into Afghanistan
green tanks tumbling
into Angola
penile projections
eagerly violating victims
of psychopathic fantasies

I've seen them in real life brother
yellow tanks rolling
into Pietas
yellow tanks crunching
into my home
steel fangs
fervently tearing walls
that impede Aryan delusions

Yousuf Minty

Poetry

Sipho Sepamla, Macbanai B. Zimunya, Peter C. Chipeya

STOP THE LIE

I've always wished
you would listen
not to the cries of despair
but the substance of words
read from the frown of my brow
because those twists of flesh
carry the shouting of a new voice

I want you to stop the lie
don't tell me how much you feed the poor
because you made hunger
when you dropped those of my blood into the hole
of gold

I want you to stop the lie
don't tell me of the schools you've built
because you made ignorance
by creating an education only for my kind

I want you to stop the lie
don't tell me of numbers of clinics and hospitals
operating
because you made disease
when you paid pittance for all my labour

I've always wished
you would see me
not by the exaggerations of the eye
but in the shape of God's creation
seen in the fulness of my being
because I stand complete on earth
like men in the whole universe.

Sipho Sepamla

NIGHT FALLS

I've heard the cry of bullets
from the dum-dums of Sharpeville
to the rumoured nuclear blasts of Namibia
sounds of old men who groan of wasted time
moans from widowed mothers
wails of betrothed sweethearts
children orphaned by stubborn arrogance
I've heard them all
as time ticked away
my voice tells the man
let's talk
let's talk
before the big shit starts to shoot rounds
louder than the cries
at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange
for the gold scramble
is a hustler's game
there's big shit coming man
so big daddy
there'll be no time to scuttle to Jan Smuts
listen man
listen man
bullets can turn to water
like Makana said the other day
especially as night falls
it did over Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Sipho Sepamla

THE SOLILOQUY OF A TRADITIONAL DANCER

Muchato muchato muchato
my legs and feet
sunk in gumboots
ring of rattles
crackling in my ankles
I have outdanced men
of great magic
Muchato muchato muchato

Once a woman
filled with girlhood
feeling the drum
'dumming' inside her
these feet thudding
and digging water-wells
swam through the crowd
arm by arm
and blinded another girl with her spear-like finger.

When I raised my foot
aloft and bombed
the hard rocky earth
men and women
beheld a spring
of sparkling water
Gone ancestors!
with merry frogs in it
while sexy ululations were tickling me

Muchato muchato muchato
women offered me
their pumpkin breasts
and promised their hips
for all my dance!
yet old and rigid
have grown those jests
knees are heavy
brittle as egg-shell

False lips! you all sneer
but that which grows
into the sky —
O young blossoms
of the tribe —
once shaken with
the elephant strength of time
bows down from high
like the old iron-wood tree.

Macbanai Bonus Zimunya

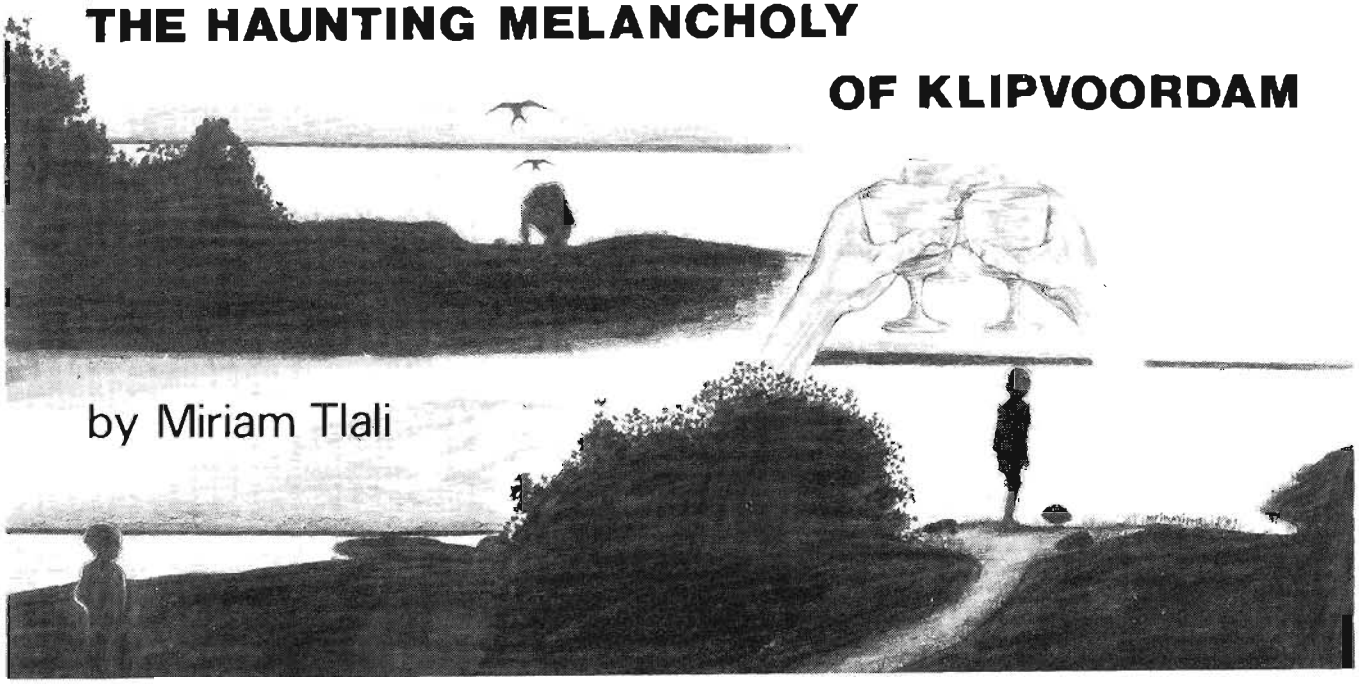
another son buried

another son
bidden farewell
questions . . .
and protests
tributes flow
a song
remembrance
then looking back at the expanse of time

a history of immortals!

Peter C. Chipeya

THE HAUNTING MELANCHOLY OF KLIPVOORDAM



by Miriam Tlali

It will take me a long long time to forget that New Year's eve — the last day of the year 1979. On that morning, we left Soweto bound for what was to all of us a unique experience. By 'us' I mean Donald, his wife Pauline, their two nieces (Mpho and Mmaphuthi), my daughter Moleboheng and myself. We were a happy lot, all the six of us, packed and cramped into the Volkswagen Combi with provisions, blankets, mats, tents, umbrellas etc., the typical camping equipment the devoted couple had accumulated over the years. Peeping into the vehicle, I gasped with astonishment at the sight of all the paraphernalia when our hostess opened the door to us. She had earlier in the week invited us saying: 'Come. You'll be our guests'. And, needless to say, their hospitality throughout was something one can only marvel at.

I take the liberty of calling them 'Don' and 'Paul' — the way *they* so fondly refer to each other. The like of them in a place like Soweto should be protected from extinction; they should be honoured and revered. They are like a rare and endangered species of God's creation. They are among the few who still strive to bring about order where there is only chaos and despair. In the jumbled shattered existence of the Soweto Ghetto, they hanker after the sustaining force of mother nature. For does nature's eternal seasonal cycle not offer the propagation of new life in place of the withering and dying and hence hope for the future?

It was early in the morning, and the cheerful crowds of people determined to make the most of the holidays were not yet roaming the streets when we left. There was little traffic all along the Soweto Highway right up to Booysens where we joined the M1 Pretoria Highway. Soon, we were traversing the tree-lined affluent 'white' northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The scantily-populated vast countryside on the way towards Pretoria district looked green and peaceful. We detoured into the Hammanskraal main road and followed the signs pointing to the small 'dorpie' of Brits where we stopped to refuel and buy refreshments. Then we set out eagerly on the road again.

One would have expected that we would arrive at some border post, some line; a river or a bridge, at the end of which would be stationed a pair of stern-looking uniformed guards. That these honourable gentlemen would be wearing labelled epaulettes over their proud shoulders, or even medals on their lapels. I had looked around expecting to see sign-posts along the road reading: 'Welcome To The Sovereign State of Bophuthatswana'.

Yet we knew that by leaving Brits behind and taking a turn away from the smoothly-tarred road, onto the gravel one, we had in fact departed from the so-called 'white' South Africa. We had left behind all the comfort that goes with that part of this land. We were now part of the so-called Bophuthatswana self-governing black state, having automatically relinquished all that was of merit. The whole transition had been as easy as taking candy from a child. Just like that. No lines of demarcation had been drawn, no signs, nothing.

It would have been redundant. We knew it; our bodies *felt* it. We were all aware that the one world had come to an end and a new one had begun. The dry dust, the thorny scrub on either side of the uneven road had warned us. Our driver — 'Ntate Dono' as little thumb-sucking Mpho called him — had to dodge and meander around heaps and heaps of sand. It lay all over as if it had been transported in truckloads straight from the Sahara Desert. And no one had bothered to scrape it off. The Volkswagen bumped and joggled; it twisted this way and that, all the way kept under control by the driver's able dexterity. I wiped the sweat from my brow with a piece of tissue paper. It was a sweltering hot day. In fact, it was later reported to have been the hottest day that summer. Looking around at my co-travellers, I wondered whether their clammy foreheads were due to the weather or to the taxing drive.

I decided to stop reflecting on the rather sudden transformation; to indulge in no thoughts of the past or the future, but rather to try to enjoy what the present brought before me, and be thankful for it. We all sighed with relief when we realised that we were nearing the end of the hazardous journey. Our combi entered the bushy settlement and went on for a short while along the dusty road. Further on, there was a sharp bend where we came to an abrupt halt. The few scattered brick and corrugated iron structures were the offices of the holiday resort. Mpho, Mmaphuthi and Moleboheng (who had cuddled together right at the rear of the vehicle) jumped happily out, enjoying the cool shadows of the trees. They scampered around the place laughing and frolicking in anticipation. The beautiful unfamiliar trees nearby attracted our attention. Their patulous yellow flowers broadened out in full bloom and sparkled in the piercing sunshine. The kind smiling officials at the offices welcomed us happily. One of

them came over to us and greeted us while 'Ntate Dono' went on to the 'stately' building to announce the arrival of our party and receive formal permission to enter and camp there. Paul and I decided to go for a short exploratory walk in the vicinity. It was the first time I had the honour of visiting a 'black' recreational area in a so-called independent state in my own country and naturally I was curious. The official who accompanied us during our brief walk was willing to answer the numerous questions we asked, but he frankly admitted that he could not enlighten us on many of them. What were the names of the lovely trees with the yellow flowers dotted all around? Could we grow them in Soweto? Were there many different kinds of wild birds and animals, and what varieties were there? And the fish . . . would we be fortunate enough to catch many of them? The whole prospect of what lay ahead for us on the eve of the new year seemed fascinating and exciting. There was ever so much to learn. He informed us that we were amongst the few earliest holiday makers who had come, and the choice of where we would pitch our tent and settle down for the duration of our stay would be all ours. There were also rooms to hire for those who did not have their own camping equipment and many were still vacant, our guide said, but these were nearer the offices and far from the beautiful dam.

And what about all the rolls of steel wires, the poles and the enormous heavy concrete cylinders lying around . . . What was about to be constructed, I asked expectantly. 'Nothing,' the man explained, 'there's no money. The Bophuthatswana authorities must still get the money to develop the new improvement projects. So much was still to be achieved. The place is there waiting. The land with all its potential resources. But there is no money. The whites were going to develop this place into a really fine holiday resort, but they stopped when Bophuthatswana was handed over to the blacks. They left everything as it was and took away the money!' 'And what about the big imposing iron casements standing upright with the thick wiring?' we asked, and he replied: 'Those were to be parts of a huge plant; an electricity generating machine which was to supply power to the entire concourse but that too has come to an untimely stop.' No money. The poor skeletal left-overs. We looked at them, quietly reflecting. It dampened our spirits. The whole business of the poverty — the ever-present legacy always so readily bequeathed to the 'honourable' inheritors of the so-called free black states. Who bothers about freedom in a deprived desert anyway, I wondered. I was happy to say goodbye to the kind guide with the parched lips and the worn uniform. And I wondered just how far 'our' contribution of fifty cents for our stay there would go towards 'improving the quality of life' in Klipvoordam Holiday Resort.

Little eight-year-old Mpho and her 'Ntate Dono' immediately started to work. She momentarily abandoned her favourite pastime of thumb-sucking and demonstrated to all of us her expert knowledge of the camping and angling 'trade'. She had accompanied Ntate Dono on many previous occasions ever since she was a mere four-year-old. After the two had chosen what they considered to be the best spot to plant the three pairs of steel pegs to support the fishing rods in position, Mmaphuthi and Moleboheng joined them in digging, in anchoring posts and pitching the rectangular tent. Everything seemed perfect. We would all cast glances now and again at the vertically-suspended red and white spherical plastic balls (which Mpho and Don referred to as the 'policemen') and which would show any slight movement, suggesting the presence of a 'catch' at the immersed end of the line. I assisted Paul with the preparation of our lunch and the kids stripped and garbed themselves in the swim-suits they had brought along with them. Moleboheng, being of the same height and stature as Mmaphuthi, easily fitted into the extra pair the latter had had the presence of mind to provide. They wasted no time in plunging into the cool beckoning waters and we could hear their deafening hilarious cries as they swam and threw sandballs into the air. I envied them. I had never possessed a swim-suit. All my life I had yearned to go for a holiday at the coast; anywhere away from the hustle and bustle of the city, but I could never afford it. How many of us are so fortunate in Soweto anyway? It struck me that it would be quite preposterous and shocking for me to do what I learnt was the common alternative to having no swim-suit to wear — like the majority of those of my fellow Sowetans and other blacks who managed to find themselves at the Klipvoor Dam — to strip to the underwear and just have a good swim anyway! Finally, tired of 'ho lebella ngoale ha e khiba' — (of watching the initiation girl do her dance) as we say in our vernacular, Paul and I decided to indulge in the more 'acceptable' alternative we could manage — that of sitting on the edge of the dam and only immersing our legs and thighs into the inviting cool water — shame.

The tall trees behind us were throwing their shadows further and further into the middle of the dam. We watched the images as they grew longer and longer, bringing with them the mind-refreshing air of late afternoon.

About the possibility of catching any fish, our angling expert had not been optimistic. Paul had earlier intimated to me: 'You know, Don said to me last night at home that because there was a full moon, for some reason or other, the fishes would not be easy to catch. That made me feel disappointed because I would have liked you to enjoy with us the excitement of pulling out a fish from the water.' Don had been right after all. So far, ever since our arrival before lunch-time, the 'policemen' had only quavered slightly, indicating that the fish had merely got near the bait to gnaw at them and then withdraw to their 'hiding places'. It struck me that these aquatic creatures must be very very intelligent indeed, after all. The slowly rising full moon was rosy and majestic. I wondered why the fish would want to shy away from it at all. For hours since we first sat there, not one of them had even leapt over the surface of the water, whose gentle waves the moon kept touching slightly with her crimson glow.

The arrival of one more group of holiday-makers in a convoy of one big American car and a packed panel van, made me believe what Paul had said soon after we had settled down near the 'deserted' resort. She had observed: 'It's so quiet and lonely now; but by midday tomorrow — New Year's Day — this place will be so congested that there'll not even be enough space to move.' I had not taken her seriously then because to me the likelihood of such an occurrence seemed quite remote. We watched them from time to time as they pitched tent a good distance away from us, and observed that their huge van-load consisted of many cases of beer, wine, and all types of intoxicating spirits. To them, the arrival of the expected multitudes would mean a good share of their holiday pay. In the scorching heat of the Klipvoor Dam, with its vegetation of spiky-leafed scattered trees with hardly any shade at all, the visitors would drink more and more to try and quench their thirsts. It would be business and more business!

Two more flickering lights on the far-off bank diagonally opposite to where we were announced the arrival of two more camping companions.

We had left Soweto behind. There were no loud sounds of exhilaration and shouting. No cheap screechy turn-tables incessantly and noisily blaring away the latest Bob Marley or Jimmy Cliff reggae hits to echo and accommodate the eager throbbing souls of Soweto's jolling,

body-wiggling young and old. Here was peace and quiet; something we had come a long way to enjoy. There were only the sounds of the birds and the mysterious low moaning and subdued grunting and snarling of what our expert angler said were the wild animals in the vicinity. Don, being the devout naturalist he is, was the only one who could distinguish the various calls of the wild. Had it not been for our complete reliance on his very excellent knowledge of the behaviour of the beasts and the fluttering yellow flames of our neighbours' lamps, the somewhat disturbing low cries in our immediate proximity would have driven me crazy with fright. It required real courage on my part to ignore the recurring wailings.

I had remembered to bring my tape-recorder with me. The soothing, reassuring voice of Brook Benton – one of our favourite Gospel and Ballad singers – seemed to me to be the best way of easing my nerves. I turned the volume knob on more to drown the sounds emerging from the dark forest all around . . .

If you think God is dead, just look around.
I look at the sea and realise no man can drain it.
We've all got to die one day but no one can time it.

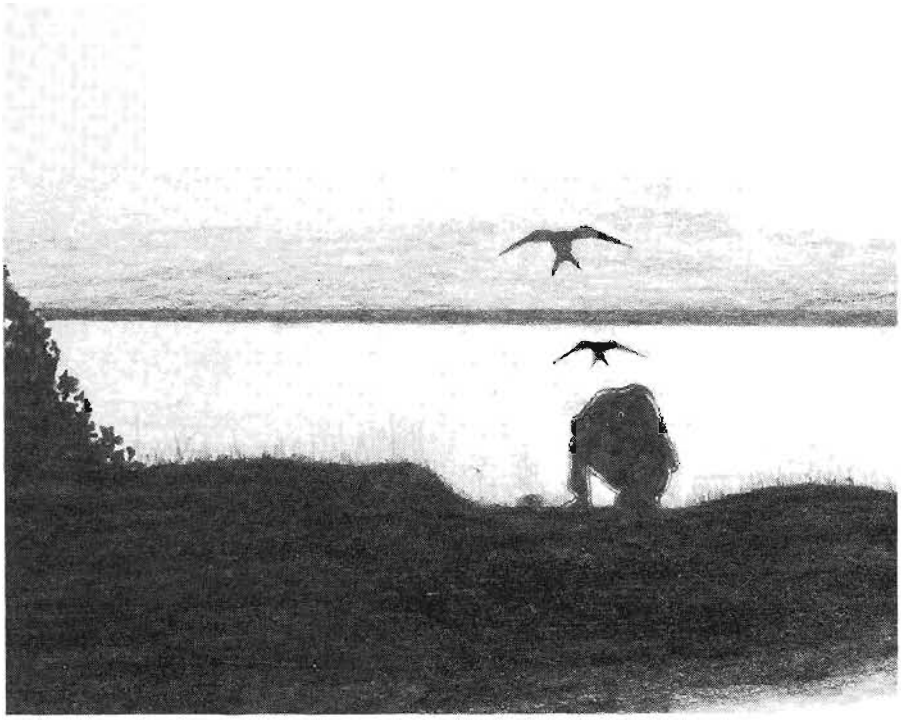
Who else could make the moon and the sun shine over every city and every town?
If you think God is dead, then you haven't looked around . . .

As if aware of our peculiar setting and environment, the singer's solemn hushed tone insisted, inspiring us and providing a firm background to our feelings. We chatted on softly, listening, assimilating and enjoying the free endowments of nature. The cool breeze fanning the waves; the moon, the stars, the stillness. And all the time, the music . . .

Look at the sea
Look at the trees
I guess you can hear the breeze
Look at each other.

So you see, God is not dead
If you don't want to see Him,
you won't see Him
But if you want to see Him,
You look around . . .

We spoke of death. Each one of us remembered our dear departed ones. I thought of my mother's passing, and the hollow emptiness, the loneliness I experienced at the time, came back vividly and I held back the tears which



came flooding into my eyes.

We spoke of happiness . . . of Zimbabwe and the prospect of the end to long-raging war and the imminent 'uhuru' for that country so close to 'ours'. 'Just think what it will mean!' we kept remarking. To the Zimbabweans it was certain that the new year would bring freedom, peace and prosperity for all. It would bring hope. Was there any hope for us, we wondered.

We looked around. There was a narrow winding path leading from the hedges at the back of us to the edge of the dam. Pieces of rock were lined at regular intervals along the edge of the water. The fast-approaching midnight brought with it isolated human calls of, 'Happy! Happy!' from somewhere behind the trees. They seemed to come from far away. An eerie, sombre undertone lurked and echoed after every cry. It was evident that enthusiastic late night arrivals had shown up and they had hired rooms in the resort. Dark figures kept emerging from the bushes one by one, walking slowly along the worn footpath. On reaching the end of the road near the rocks, each figure would straddle over a rock or just stand there and look into the dark far-off end of the still water and the distant horizon. Without saying a word, the lone viewer would saunter slowly back into the spiky grove. This rather striking behaviour of these holiday-makers did not disturb nor surprise us. Except for the progressively-waning lonesome screams of 'Happy! Happy!' the solitude was complete. There is something haunting and mysterious about the sight of wide expanses of the moving waters, the gentle ebb and flow of the waves, which never fails to make the mind wander away into deep thought and marvel at the miracle of creation.

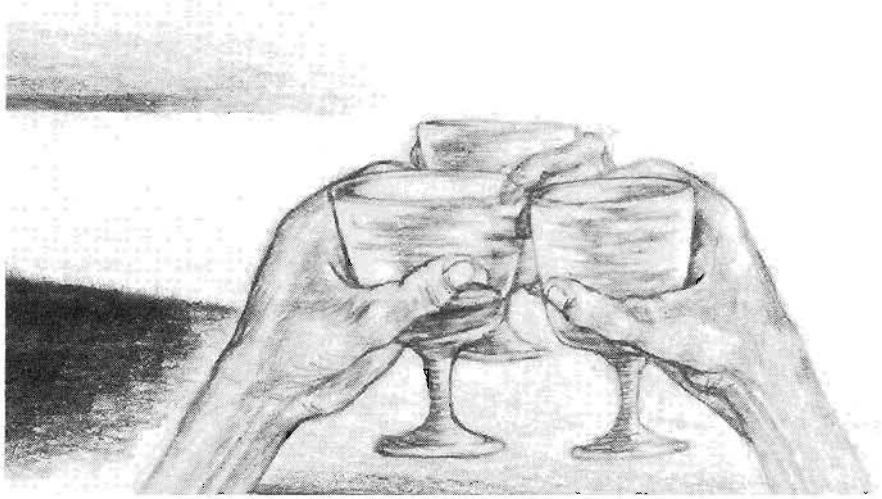
We talked about the approaching midnight and the end of the year, every year, and the birth of another one in 'our' Soweto. How different it *was* then. There was, we knew, all the euphoria and exaltation; the singing, ululating and dancing; the beating of drums and chiming of bells; the crackling and bursting of crackers and explosives. And, as the bustling finally wears itself out, the great excursion would begin in earnest. Busloads, truckloads, hooting cars adorned with colourful ribbons, carrying hundreds of eager men and women (mostly teenagers) dancing to the rhythm of thunderous portable radios, stereos and tape-recorders. These would be speeding through the grey townships to anywhere – all corners, nooks and crevices; to any 'available', 'permitted' or 'open' picnic spots – where blacks may be 'allowed' to relax for the day. These would be somewhere well out of the way of the 'whites only' reserved luxury spots of course: something like 'our' Klipvoordam . . out of *their* line of vision.

Minutes before the decisive hour struck, Don announced, smiling and looking at us: 'I have a surprise for you two.'

We watched him curiously and were puzzled as he looked at his wristwatch.

He explained: 'I have a bottle of wine for all of us to drink a toast to the New Year of 1980.'

He then went over to the the portable cooler and brought a bottle of wine and three glasses. All three of us pronounced the toast simultaneously, raising our glasses and letting them touch lightly in the cool air as we dec-



clared: 'To the New Year . . . May it bring hope, peace and prosperity to all mankind . . . And to the liberation of Azania!'

'Tsogang tlheng bathong! Tlayang tlheng le tlo bonang!' (Oh wake up, people, please! Oh please do come and see!)

The first to respond to the urgent call was Mphonyana (little Mpho). Ntate Dono had been calling; he had been trying to rouse us. He had never slept. The patient wakefulness he had developed over many years as an angler, had come as second nature to him. He once quoted James Rennie who in 1823 had said: 'Angling is a sport that requires as much enthusiasm as poetry, as much patience as mathematics and as much caution as house-breaking.'

He had failed to lure the fish to his hook – an eventuality he had predicted even before we started on our trip. He had therefore not been disheartened by the extent to which a novice would have been.

When the sun's first rays touched the clouds over the horizon, his keen fisherman's eye spotted them. He had not been able to resist the overwhelming magic of it all, and the desire to share the experience had overpowered him. He called to us all to come and witness the fascinating spectacle.

'Mafube . . . ' I deliberately choose to make use of this word in our African vernacular because to my mind, in the English medium in which I am writing, no word that I can think of describes adequately the whole mesmerising excellence of the break of dawn than 'mafube', especially when seen in the clear open emptiness of unspoilt nature. The word – pronounced with the middle syllable rather drawn out – captures, expresses and implies the presence of the varying hues and their related spectral shades; the reds, yellows, pinks and so on.

It must have been in the hypnotising spell of those magical moments that little Mpho reiterated Ntate Dono's pleadings. It was not easy to be persuaded to leave our comfortable floor beds. We were not as quick and alert as Mpho, the aspirant angler. The urgency in her voice was what made me shake off my inertia. She was peeping in at the tent-door calling us to join them outside. Determined to make the most of my stay there, I snatched the pocket camera next to my pillow and stormed out.

I shall not try to describe the whole tantalising scenery but will leave it to the imagination of the reader because I know that I shall fail in my attempt. The three of us stood there amazed. Through the corner of my eye, I could see Mpho sucking more vigorously at her thumb. We just stared and said nothing. 'Even attempting to describe all this would be destructive – it would spoil it.' Don sighed.

Our attention was distracted by the appearance from the thicket of a tall dark figure. He came walking slowly along the footpath. He had his hands tucked into his trouser pockets and plodded his way towards the end of the path. He seemed not to be aware of our presence, but only of the glow over the horizon, which was casting a golden aura all around. He crouched on the piece of rock near him, all the time staring ahead. Perhaps, like most of us, he was in pursuit of deliverance from boredom; to understand the mysteries of 'truth', of 'being', which the ancient scholars like Pythagoras and Socrates had tried to fathom and unravel. Two raven-like birds with long wings fluttered above his head and headed towards the sun's rays. The man lowered his head (probably from exhaustion) and sank it into the angle between his forearm and the biceps and remained in that position like a weeping child. It was almost tear-provoking. So moved by the spectacle was Mpho that she remarked: 'Look, he looks like someone removed his head!' To me the whole spectacle suggested the perfect illustration of loneliness. The man was very likely trying to escape from the helplessness of a lifetime of unfulfilled aspirations – an existence where hopes and dreams remain forever a receding mirage. The opportunity had availed itself and he had come to the dam, even if like so many of us he could not afford a swimsuit. The melancholy of the entire episode of going and never arriving; of ever approaching and desiring seemed to be embodied and finalised in those moments. I looked away and focussed my eyes on another area far from the man. I remembered the lines in one of the songs we played over and over again:

Heaven help the child who never had a home.
Heaven help us all.
Heaven help the black man
If he struggles one more day
Heaven help the white man
If he turns his back away
Heaven help the man
who kicks a man and makes him crawl
Heaven help us all
who won't reach twenty-one
Heaven help the people
with their backs against the wall . . .

Brook Benton's voice kept haunting me. I turned my head and looked at the dejected 'headless' outline of the man. Even the intrusion of another figure, a woman, who must have decided to interrupt the sad-looking crouching form by walking fully-clad right into the still calm water did not seem to shake him into any response. Soon after the sun had shown its tip above the surface of the water, he raised his head slowly, listening and looking into the waves which were drifting in bigger and bigger circles away from the woman's legs. I had only taken a picture of the stooping frame, but I knew then that I would have been happier if I had possessed the skills of an expert artist.

The three of us watched the man as he stood up and turned back into the narrow path by which he had come, still looking as unaware of our presence as when he first appeared. He trudged on and vanished into the shades, leaving us wondering. Who knows, it could be that he had come to catch a glimpse of, and draw strength from the magic of the gathering 'mafube'.

And the words of the ballad singer's song kept on lingering in my mind:

Keep hatred from the mighty
And the mighty from the strong . . .
Heaven help us all.

'People of Crossroads', lino-cut , Mphathi Gocini

'Encounter at Rorkes Drift', lino-cut, K.D. Mantloa

Art and Misconception

by Bicca Muntu Maseko

illustrated by Mpikayipheli

The Caveman, like later man, had two major problems to solve: the first was man versus the forces of nature; the other was a need to cater to his emotional ups and downs, a diversion.

Man's environmental problems, his quest for food, its distribution and preservation, has been the basis of history. Extreme climate killed man, as it does wild animals, before he discovered fire. He was prey to wild animals. Natural disasters threatened his life more acutely, epidemics decimated him.

Ignorance of phenomena in his environment caused him countless fears. He selected certain forces in nature for his protection: the sun, the moon, certain rivers, animals, ancestors, present day religion. Engulfed by spirits, by the unknown, he created gods for his own preservation. This is how religion came about. The germination of crops was attributed to certain songs and rituals. People were killed in order to enrich agricultural produce. In a similar manner birth and death were interpreted in a thousand and one ways through various stages of human history. To this day it is difficult for some of us to believe that sickness is caused by anything other than an external force such as witchcraft. We attribute losses and wins in sport to ointments and potions. These are remnants of old beliefs.

Science looks into the earth's past, present, and future. It focuses its lenses on the universe, deep into the sea and earth, casting light on it. Man has travelled a long distance from his problems in the cave.

But we still have the caveman's spiritual problems to look at. He woke some mornings despondent. He had love problems; loneliness prayed on him occasionally; he needed something to occupy him when he was not hunting, so he drew buck on his cave wall, sang and danced. The aesthetic effect on him was the same as a person appreciating a Fikile or responding to the music of Joy. There are emotional tensions in us that cry out for release. Today we have painting, sculpture, music, dancing, literature, drama and so on to choose from. A young lady played a record over and over again. It took some time for me to realise that she was in fact weeping. I wanted to know what was wrong. She answered 'It's the record, I love it.' I left it at that. I could have asked, 'But if it makes you weep, why play it?' She felt relieved, not sad, after weeping.

Apart from being an emotional outlet, art appeals to the mind, setting it to think. Some artists argue that their inspiration comes through their imagination not perception. Most artists today do not do representational art as such. With most artists the image and the general subject matter is an exaggeration of real life, in one way or another. Neolithic art, American Indian art and African art, with the exception of that of Benin and Yoruba, stems in the main from the imagination. A human face was not carved or sculptured in a lifelike manner; take for example the African masks. Paleolithic cave dwellers, Pompeian muralists and Europeans painted and sculpted what they saw with their retinal vision; it was representational. The meeting point between the two resulted in later influences in the world of art that were free from lifelike images. The demarcation between imagination and perception is imaginary, to say the least.

A good work of art is inspired and in turn it inspires. One might remember seeing a work of art that reaffirms one's rusting ideals. At times one comes out of an art exhibition feeling: 'I must do something with my life too.' Drama, dance, music and the movies are the most effective examples of what inspires people; they come out of a good theatre performance or film feeling really good. Two artist friends of mine decided on a portrait competition. A young lady modelled for them. The first one completed his portrait within an hour. The second one struggled on until sunset, and the picture bore no resemblance to the model. He tried to explain it away by saying his inspiration had not come. Some artists want to make us believe that inspiration comes from above, like the Biblical dove. Inspiration is an intuitive spell that is not completely under one's conscious control.

The other stereotyped concept of inspiration dates back with me to at least Secondary School, when we were told that Coleridge wrote 'Kubla Khan', an inspired poem, whilst under the influence of opium. We believed, therefore, that inspiration had to do with the drugging of the mind. A friend of mine, a band leader of a disco group, was looking for a lead guitarist, preferably one who could compose as well. He told me of a young man he had almost decided to take on. On further discussion it turned out that he wanted this particular guitarist simply because he was a dagga smoker. According to my friend people who 'smoke' have additional inspiration. This is too simple to be true. There are certain individuals, I can imagine, who, on smoking dagga, may find that their 'intuitive spell' is easier to recall. But then this is more of an exception than the rule. It is like the proverbial genius we hear so much about who gets distinctions in maths after good dagga pulls. Without sounding like a preacher, my point is that the best works of art in the world were a creation of sober minds. Woe unto the artist who cannot create until he or she has had stimulants.

Western society has passed on to our artists a set of myths, some of them very difficult to get rid of. For instance, in the west the artist is said to be on the fringes of society. By virtue of his creative impulse he is supposed to compare very favourably with a criminal and is set against society. Here, in South Africa, some black artists have nestled into this position of irresponsibility so that nothing serious should be expected of them. I am not talking merely of unwashed hair, strange clothes and deliberate foreign accents. They have a positive role to play, an important contribution to make within our dynamic society. I do not believe that artists have to be eccentric for the sake of eccentricity. We should desist from comparing our lifestyle as artists to those of European and American artists who are responding to their respective environments which are completely different from ours. To cite an example in the performing arts: some of our jazz musicians believe they should come to shows late, in a drunk and unruly state. If you try to take it up with them, you will be told that Charlie Parker used to come to shows dead drunk, that Fats Waller sold some of his compositions for bottles of whisky and that Miles . . . After this, if you are wise, chum, you are going to sit quietly and watch them do like Charlie Parker.

The artist leads his society in his creative field, he holds the compass. If he opens new avenues of self-expression, we say he is a genius. We look to him

and his contemporaries to show us the way. In turn, artists are led by their society and its moods. They have to follow up and record this. In independent Africa more and more artists are accepting their historic role, namely that an artist has to be involved in the problems of his society. By this it is not meant that he should make artless posters. His social awareness should not mar the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms.

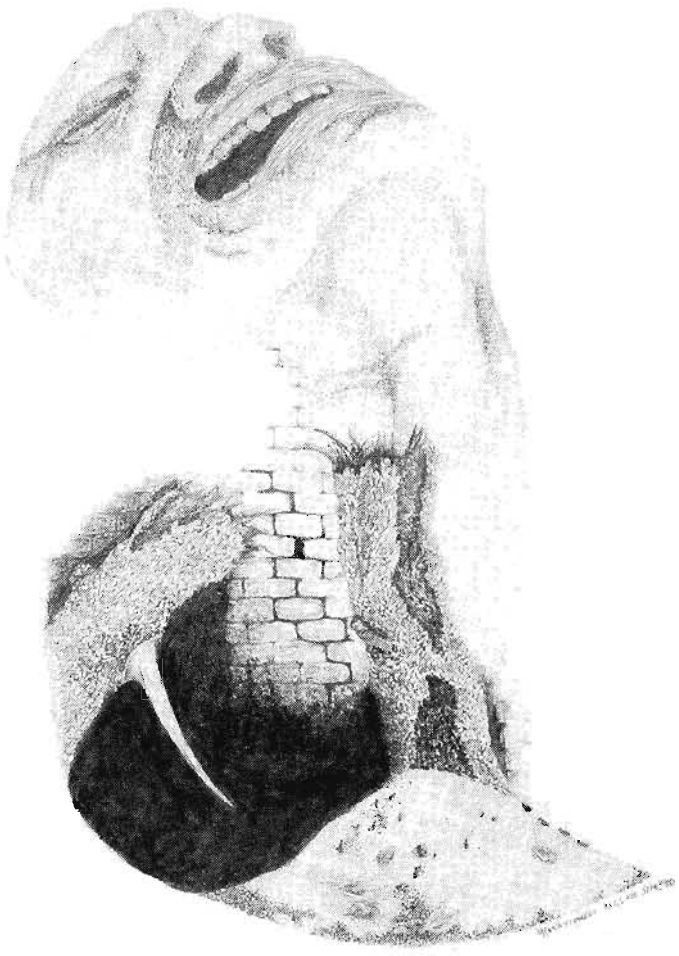
The foreign critic, including the culturally-foreign local who applies his standards and values to our art, often rocks the boat, for there are no black critics to give a fair balance. This is unfair to the artists especially the young self-taught artists who have not yet found their bearings. The critic tells the art collector, who is often white, what to buy. The patrons are often ignorant investors who 'buy names'. I remember at one art exhibition I was approached by a suburban lady. She wanted the opinion of an innocent bystander: 'Which of these works is beautiful enough for me to buy?' she wanted to know. More often an artist is judged — and he chooses to be judged — by the number of exhibitions he has held. Yet sales do not in any way relate to aesthetics. Under such circumstances critics and buyers are not necessarily decisive.

The kings of old, in Europe for example, would get wind of a good singer or dancer in the village and summon him or her. If they liked the singing or dancing she or he would remain in the king's court to entertain him and his guests. In the same way poets wrote poetry for the king; painters and sculptors painted or made busts of the king's household, and so on. In this manner the arts have always been in the hands of the ruling classes. As payers of the piper, they have always called the tune. Works of art today are sold for millions of pounds. Only the very rich can afford this. From the townships the best works by our artists disappear into the city suburbs, where they hang as investment items on lounge walls. The best art collections in the world are private collections of billionaires. The common man from whom art originates is left, thumb in mouth. We are thus led to believe that the rich have the prerogative of culture and taste.

Some of our artists, particularly those who are not established yet, have difficulties managing the business aspect of their work. They therefore get whites to do public relations work for them. At times one is not sure who employs whom or for what. Some of our artists' masterpieces go out of South Africa. There is no control whatsoever by the authorities like there is in some countries. On the other hand, a control on the free outflow of works of genius by our artists would be detrimental to African art in this country, since the government would do it without African participation in government. After settling the political score the government in power would have to look into this question more seriously. Some art works bought in this country are sold overseas from ten times their original price up to a hundred times more. Meantime the artists struggle for means of subsistence. Most artists only work part-time at their art. They are often forced by conditions in this country to go commercial. The only alternative is a nation-wide artists' union that would be in a position to bargain on behalf of the artists, even with the art galleries that suck so painfully on a bleeding community of artists. For the past twenty years artists in this country have had difficulty in establishing such a union, which they had always wanted. Whenever something like this seemed imminent, some individual artists on the fringes of society disrupted everything.

The older community of artists stood the tests and strains of being artists in such an abnormal situation. They gave us a tradition and thus inspired a generation of younger artists. The fact that South Africa at the moment is a country in Africa with the largest number of practising artists, is due to their effort. For those of our artists who can afford it, it is worthwhile visiting art museums and galleries abroad. Seeing those works of art affirms art's universality and particularity. There are artists who feel they need a quieter place to work in and they think of settling permanently abroad. This brings to mind the old story of a ship that had run out of fresh water. It moved up the Mississippi river. The crew, apparently, were not aware they were on fresh water. They shouted, 'Water! Water!' The men on the river bank shouted back, 'You are on fresh water, dip your buckets in where you are!' The men on the ship just did not understand.

For any of our artists to leave home permanently is out of the question. The games children play at school, you have also played; the Zionists on their night session; sangomas on their night rhythms; the dogs pulling down dustbins and so on — all this makes you what you are. Two months in a Paris suburb would make you feel what it is to be home. Ten years in Norway would freeze all your links with home. In spite of all the difficulties experienced by a black in this country, I implore our artists to remain here. Yes! Just dip your buckets in where you are.



Jobman

A Short Story by Achmat Dangor

Karel de Ras dropped the hammer and kicked the split-pole he had knocked into the hard ground to test its sturdiness. He mopped his forehead with a greasy cloth, cursing the heat with gutteral mutterings.

'Toe Pyp, are you ready with that wire? Pyp? Where the duiwel are you?'

His handyman, Pyp Green, stood staring intently into the distance, oblivious of the beads of stinging sweat that rolled into his eyes. The strands of uncoiled fencing-wire lay limply at his feet.

'Hey, are you bleddy dreaming? What's wrong with you?'

Pyp pointed mutely into the distance, where someone was running across the veld, gesticulating frantically.

'Who's that?' De Ras asked, shading his eyes and looking to where Pyp's finger indicated.

'My son,' Pyp answered, trepidation in his voice.

'Got! What's wrong now? You people have always got some sort of trouble.'

A boy of about seven came running up to the two immobile figures, and collapsed, out of breath, at Pyp's feet.

'What is it, what is it?' Pyp asked.

'The bleddy dommie, Pa,' the boy gasped, 'Anna . . . '

'Toe nou, toe nou klonkie, first get your breath back.'

The boy, in automatic acquiescence to seniority, now addressed De Ras in a voice of lilting supplication.

'Baas, it's the dommie, Jobman. He took Anna. Just came and took her.'

'Anna's your daughter, nê?' De Ras asked Pyp.

Pyp nodded, his eyes mutely imploring.

'Ja alright. Go and see what's going on.'

Pyp uttered a hasty thanks and ran off, his son at his heels. De Ras beat the dust off his broad-brimmed hat, muttering.

'Trouble, always trouble, bleddy people.'

The rest of the workmen had gathered into an immobile group. They stared silently at the two rapidly receding figures. One of them stepped forward, half mindful of his master.

De Ras flung his hat into the dust in exasperation.

'Where the bliksem do you think you're going? Who told you lot to stop working? Kom jong! Get back to work.'

He picked his hat up and repeated the dusting process.

'What can you do anyway? The lot of you. Even Pyp. That dommie thing is cleverer than the whole lot. The sly bastard.'

De Ras was muttering to himself, not condescending to speak to his workers, who had by now resumed their digging and carting away of rocks.

'I had better go and see what's going on.' He donned his hat. 'And don't let me come back and find you lazy boggers loafing!' He got into his small bakkie and disappeared up the sand road in a cloud of dust.

The turmoil in Pyp's mind subsided as he ran, and gradually his thoughts attuned to the soft rustling of his bare feet on the scrubby ground.

The wind was gathering in the hills and behind it, Pyp knew, were the rain-clouds. It had been raining a lot in the Karoo, far more in the last two months than in ten years. The scrub was soft beneath his feet; enough grazing for the sheep. We will not become prosperous, but at least we will not be hungry when the winter comes. Fewer young men would leave for the cities, some would even return.

And Jobman had returned.

When Pyp entered the settlement, he stopped to rest before going to his house. There was a sharp burning pain in his side. Getting old, he thought.

He could hear the cars on the national road which the settlement of concrete houses and corrugated-iron roofs bordered, going to Beaufort West, and beyond to Cape Town.

One of those cars had dropped Jobman, in his ancient corduroy jacket, at the roadside.

'The dog!' Pyp muttered to himself and started running again, although his house was now only a short distance away. When he entered the house his wife looked at him searchingly but paused only briefly in her work.

'Mary, Jobman took Anna?'

'Yes.'

'And the child?.'

'Yes.'

'The bleddy dog!'

'It is his child.'

'But he can't just come into my house and take Anna.'

'She went with him.'

'Didn't he force her?'

'She didn't argue.'

No, he would have to find a way by himself.

Pyp's disordered thoughts were disturbed by the sound of bare feet on the doorstep. Pyp rose and quietly picked up the iron poker from the stove.

'Pa? Pa?' His son Paul peered enquiringly into the gloom. A look of fear briefly crossed his face when he saw his father brandishing the poker.

'Are you going to fetch Anna?'

'Yes, in a little while.'

'Pa, Baas Karel picked me up. He says he'll take you.'

Pyp felt both relieved and anxious. Jobman would not resist if Baas Karel was with him. But afterwards? He knew De Ras did not like involving himself in these matters. He would not always protect Pyp and his family. Yet he could not tell his boss that he had stopped work, and had brought De Ras up here in the process, only to leave the whole matter there. An impatient hoot made Pyp's decision for him.

'Well, do you want to go and get your daughter back?'

'Yes, thank you, Meester. Sorry for the trouble. You know what a troublemaker that dommie is.' Again that lilting subservience.

'Ja. Ja. Get on at the back.'

As Pyp clambered onto the back of the bakkie, he saw a silent curse forming on De Ras's lips. Pyp blanched and clung onto the van as it moved off across the bumpy road.

Jobman busied himself with the kindling of a fire in the old combustion stove while, under the silent command of his eyes, Anna swept the dusty floor. The child, named Daniel after his grandfather, squatted in the corner, watching Jobman's lithe movements in bewilderment.

Their 'home' was a crumbling corrugated-iron structure that had been used as a mission school in the days of Johan de Ras. Jobman's father, Piet Jobman, had been the schoolmaster and priest. 'Converted' to Christianity and the Dutch Reformed Church by Johan de Ras, the late Jobman in his youth had shown such zealous dedication to his religion, that Johan had allowed him

Illustration, Farouk Stemmet

to assume the role reserved by tradition for the benevolent 'white father'.

Piet Jobman, under the patronage of Johan de Ras, led a life of blissful fanaticism, combining his frenetic religious activities with the role of foreman on the De Ras estates. The bane of widower Jobman's life was his son's dumbness. Young Jobman, in addition to his critical physical defect, also displayed a demonic stubbornness. Wild and undisciplined, he roamed the vast emptiness of the Karoo. He neither schooled nor prayed, and despite many savage beatings, he resisted both Jobman's and De Ras's desperate efforts to teach him to read.

He was still enclosed by the wall of impenetrable silence that had brought his father to his knees, begging the Lord to relieve life, Jobman and his son of the collective burden.

'He is better off dead, Meester,' Piet Jobman would often say to Johan de Ras. The latter's death preceded Piet Jobman's by three years, during which time young Karel de Ras, brimming with new ideas gleaned at University, relieved Piet of his friendship and his captive religious following. Karel arranged for the young 'coloureds' to attend a government school in Demas. And a properly ordained Minister was given a district parish in a brick church on the estate.

Piet Jobman was allowed to pine away in his empty church and school. His well-fed stomach could not comprehend the minds of these new young white Gods, who gave Jobman's people greater opportunities, more freedom and destroyed in the process their fundamental right to simplicity and the fostering of their own pioneer spirit.

Piet Jobman died, unlamented by the labourers who now lived in concrete huts and whose children went to school and spoke Afrikaans without the lilting pureness of their forefathers. Young Jobman displayed no grief at his father's graveside, inscrutably accepting the condolences of the community.

Before the customary and numerous graveside eulogies began, young Jobman walked away from the grave and returned to his home, the mission-school. The school was built on rocky grounds, unsuitable for either grazing or cultivation. But Jobman did not consciously think of the economics, nor of why the derelict structures were allowed to stand.

The land and home was his; he had lived there for as long as he could remember. The matter of legal possession was irrelevant. Jobman was part of the land, shaped and moulded by its silences and its harshness. It was also part of him, hence it was his.

His sharp ears picked up the sound of a dull drone. Outside the wind had picked up, blowing freshly across the flatness of the Karoo and settling dust in the hills. It will not rain, the wind told him, not until tomorrow, when the wind subsides.

He raised his hand and stilled the swish of Anna's broom.

De Ras's van came bumping up the steep road, reduced by overgrowth to a mere path. His agitation was growing. Although he was vaguely aware that, faced by the intransigence of this harsh land and its people, his innovations had not performed the miracles his youthful innocence had hoped they would, he still regarded the methods and the principles employed by his father as archaic and self-defeating. He cursed the fact that seven years ago he allowed this vestige of his father's paternalistic and misguided benevolence to survive.

He should have demolished the mission-school. He should not have allowed this sense of ownership to grow in Piet Jobman's son. There would have been none of this trouble. But there they stood, both the school and Jobman, waiting for them.

De Ras brought the van, in a cloud of dust, to a violent halt a few yards away from where Jobman now squatted, his arms locked around his knees.

'Jobman – you have Anna here,' De Ras fought back the anger surging up in him. He knew Jobman could not answer him.

'Sit! Pyp, you'd better speak to this dumb hond. I'll blerry kill him.'

'Job, is Anna here? My daughter? You know my blerry daughter.' Pyp, unconsciously emulating De Ras's tone, instilled a note of anger into his voice.

Still Jobman squatted, his arms folded.

'Anna! Are you in there?' De Ras shouted. 'Wait Pyp, let me go and see.'

Jobman rose as De Ras moved forward. For a second they stared at each other, the huge farmer towering over the shorter, small-built Jobman.

Anna shuffled out of the hut, holding the child by the hand.

'Yes, Baas Karel.'

De Ras stepped past Jobman, but made no move either to enter the hut or go nearer to Anna.

'Come Anna, we're going home,' Pyp said.

Anna cast her eyes down without answering.

'Got, meidjie, you heard your father speak,' De Ras growled.

'I'm not going back, Baas,' Anna answered hesitantly.

De Ras threw his hands up in the air. 'Got!'

'Anna, look, I said you must come home.'

Anna leaving the child's hand, twisting her scarf into a knot, looked bewildered from De Ras to Jobman. Jobman stiffened, almost perceptibly, and Anna drew back. Taking the child by the hand she went back inside the hut. The three men stood silently for a moment, De Ras glowering with rage while Jobman stood quietly, immobile. Pyp vacillated between the two in a state of utter confusion.

'Pyp, if she wants to stay with him you can't force her to go back,' De Ras said curtly.

'Yes,' Pyp said weakly.

'I want you off my blerry farm by tomorrow morning. Understand? You dumb hond! Come Pyp.'

Pyp clambered onto the back of the van and collapsed into a silent, heaving heap. De Ras stood by the open door of his vehicle, glaring at Jobman.

'At sun-up my workers are going to break this blerry pondok down. Make sure you're not inside when we get here. God help you, hotnot, if you are.'

The wind's hissing over the scrubby grasslands subsided, and at dusk the rain came; the type of 'mot-reën' that lasted for days.

Jobman stared out through the rain-streaked window; never had he seen the Karoo so green and lush. Not the rolling opulence of the Transvaal nor the staggering beauty of the winelands beyond the Drakensberg. Here the greenness, though young and hardy, could crumble back into parched dust without warning.

'Jobman, where will we take the child in the rain?'

Jobman turned slowly, and motioned to Anna to rekindle the fire. In the far corner of the hut he lifted a floor-board and commenced unpacking a number of bundles wrapped in plastic. He brought out a sheepskin, an ancient overcoat, grey faded blankets and knee-high boots. This hoard was an inheritance that had constituted his father's worldly possessions: cast-offs from the De Ras family. Lying flat on his stomach, his hands groping in the darkness of the hole, he finally produced a curious metal contraption, carefully wrapped in oil-cloth.

Communication between Anna and Jobman was confined to simple gestures on Jobman's part. Anna understood, and unquestioningly obeyed each of Jobman's signals. She gathered the sheep-skin and blankets, and proceeded to prepare a bed for the child, while Jobman unpacked his contraption, handling it as gently as if it were a child.

Anna watched with consternation as he slowly and carefully assembled a crude but deadly home-made rifle. The barrel had once belonged to an air-gun, the butt he had fashioned from the seat of an oak chair. Using his pocket knife he screwed the parts together. The chamber, which could only load one bullet at a time, was from an old muzzle-loader he had modified by laborious filing.

For an hour he examined each part carefully, oiling the metallic parts and polishing the butt. From the farthest recess of his treasure-hole he produced a metal cigar-box which contained a dozen shells.

Jobman was sitting close to the crackling fire, sweating profusely. As he lifted his face momentarily to wipe his brow, Anna saw a strange glint in his eyes.

'Jobman, are we going to leave?'

Jobman nodded his assent.

'Then why are you fiddling with that gun?'

Using his fingers, Jobman demonstrated flight, and pursuit. Slowly, agonisingly, their mute conversation grew. Both of them used sign-language now, for Anna found her voice strange and eerie before the gesticulating man.

'Why will they follow us? You are leaving the Meester's farm. And my mother will stop my father from coming after us.'

'They don't only want me off this place, or you back home. They want me dead.'

'Why?'

'Because I defied them. I am dumb and I can't read or write, but I don't need them. They hate people who do not need them.'

'Why did you come back? For me?'

A thread snapped. Jobman folded his arms and with his eyes told Anna to go and sleep.

Why had he come back? For his frivolous young girl? For his son?

He watched the face of the sleeping child, and that of Anna, beneath the cloistered burden of sheepskin and rough blankets. He, too, fleetingly experienced the illusory sense of refuge that the humble dwellings of our kind are endowed with. The smell of perspiration, of cold and left-over cooking-fat, familiar odours clinging torpidly to one's hands and clothes. The cloying warmth of the safety that transcends the ravages of our lives, that becalms old men into dreamless slumber, tired, tired of growing old.

Outside, the wind was unpacking in the vast empty veld, the daily carnage of my kind.

Long after Jobman had fallen, exhausted, into a deep sleep, a figure walked hastily between the darkened windows of the 'settlement' huts. Pyp pulled his overcoat tighter to ward off the icy wind, and the cold words of his wife that rankled in his mind.

He had accused her of encouraging Anna to go into a life of destitution with that 'dumb hond'.

'We are all poor people. There's nothing he can't give her that we haven't given her, or that she couldn't give herself. At least he wants her enough to defy even a white man. Why didn't you take her from him? Are you not strong enough?'

Already the recriminations were starting. The mockery in downcast, seemingly sympathetic eyes.

Pyp reached the corrugated iron huts where the single men were quartered. He entered without knocking and amidst the maze of sleeping bodies he sought out Jan's bed. The young man was not asleep. He sat by the stove with two of his companions. Their conversation ceased abruptly when Pyp approached.

'Jan, I want to talk to you.'

'Ja,' Jan said without moving.

Pyp cleared his throat in embarrassment, and Jan's companions rose. But they were waved back into their seats by Jan.

'Oom Pyp, you can speak in front of my friends.'

'Well, Jan, you know what it's about.'

'Ja.'

'I want to go and get Anna back. She's my daughter.'

'Ja, Oom Pyp.'

'Well . . . '

'You don't have to ask for help, Oom Pyp. We three are going when everybody's asleep.'

'We'll show that dommie something!' said one of Jan's companions.

'Ja. I'm not afraid of him,' said Jan.

'Come, have something to warm you, Oom Pyp.' Pyp accepted the anaemic but potent wine and drank deeply.

Jobman woke, body numb with cold. The fire had gone out, and the room was in absolute darkness. Again, he heard the muffled scream. His hands searched beside him in the darkness, and were reassured by the coldness of gun-metal.

Anna! Anna and the child were gone. The wind swung the door on its creaking hinges.

Fool! Fool! To have fallen asleep!

The first blow from Jan's stick struck him between the shoulderblades and sent him sprawling across the floor. The second blow was on the barrel of the rifle, for Jobman had twisted around to face his opponent. Jobman fired at the perceptible shadow hovering over him. By the time Jan's screams subsided, Jobman was leaning against the wall and had reloaded the rifle. Jan's companion was shot as he raised his crawling body in the doorway, making ready to run. Jobman, who had fallen asleep fully clad, now ran down the pathway leading to the settlement.

Jan's second companion had turned back to see why his two friends were delayed. He was still staring in stupefaction at the wild figure flying down the hillside when he was killed.

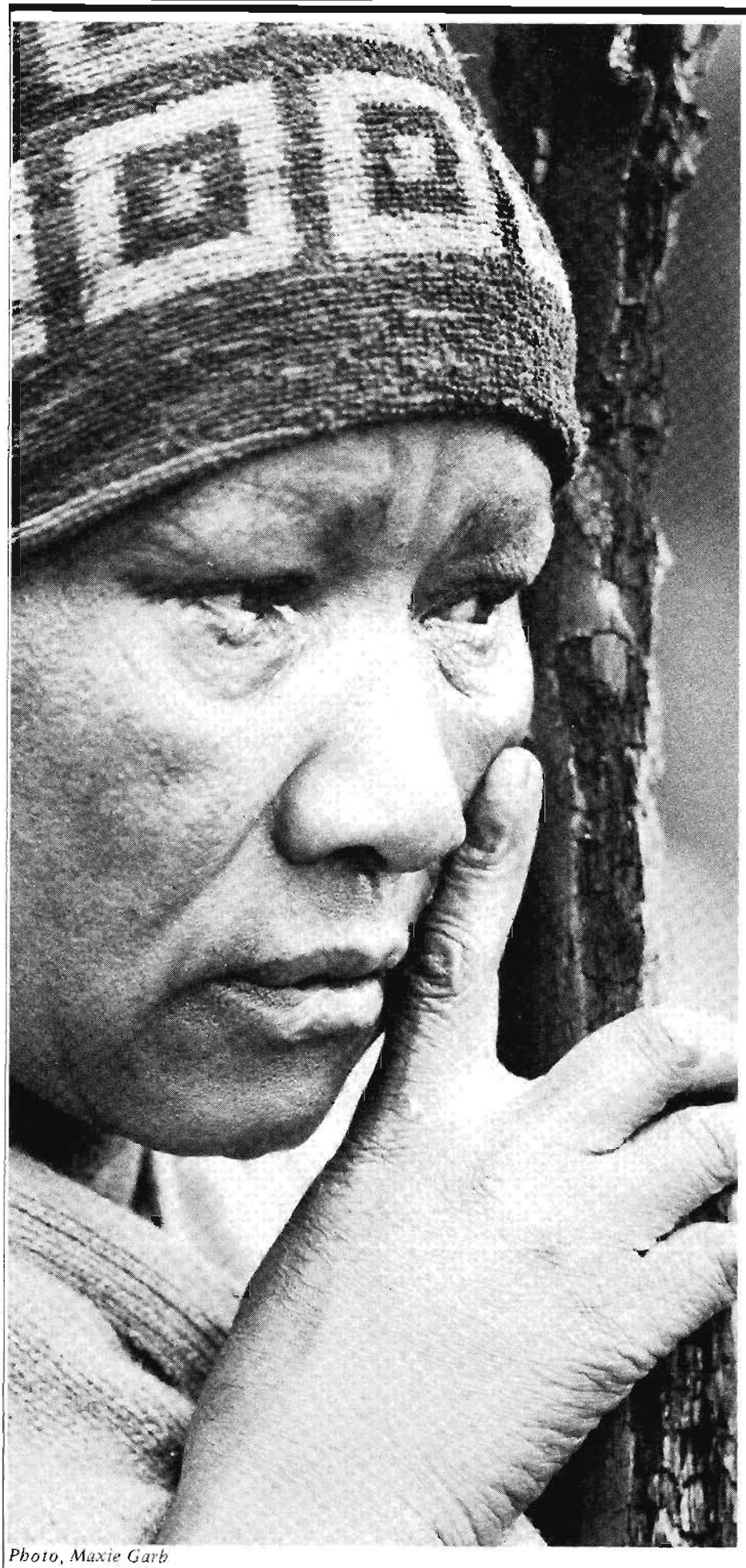
Pyp struggled vainly to hurry along the reluctant Anna. He heard the third shot long before they reached the fence at the commencement of the estate's cultivated land..

He handed the child to Anna and told her to run. 'He will kill all of us!'

Anna took the child who had by now

Continued on page 26

Kriben Pillay/Maxie Garb



Photo, Maxie Garb

ECHOES OF MY CRY

The land is dry
like the bones of the dead
too dry to feed
the seeds of life
and the dust
stops our cries
to our ancestors in the mountains

In the child's eyes
I see the cry —
mama where is the milk
which is mine —
and I give him breasts
of dust that is nothing
but a cow's hide at a feast

The child's eyes
ask also of his father
as he asks for milk
as he asks for love
and I sing to him
of the white man's god
who always hears
the white man's songs
for there is no dust to stop
the rising of his voice
and I sing to him
of the white god's place
for it is there that the father
has gone to seek his grace

In my dream my husband comes
he asks for me
and he asks for his child
and he cries the tears
of a lonely man

In the morning
I know that it is time
to say farewell to the mountains
for we must go to the white god's place
but I say to the spirits
we shall return
to raise cries
that will be heard
and you
our dead
will give the dust its rain

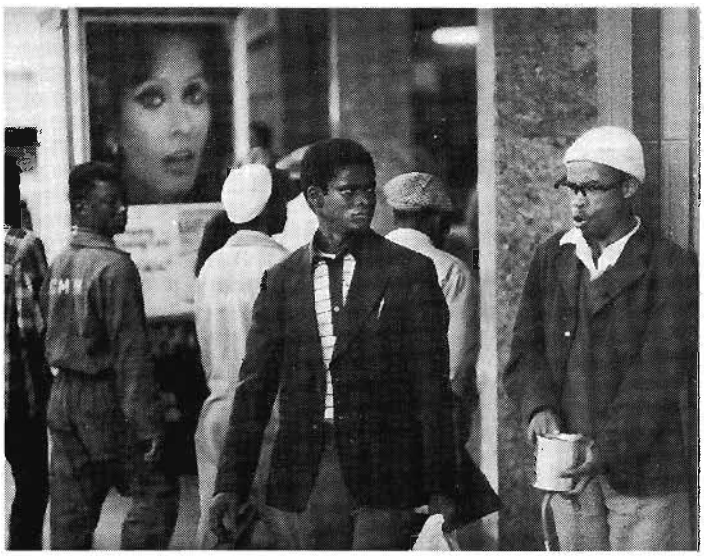
The land is dry
as the ash of the fire
that no longer burns
and in the heat of the sun
we remember the shack
in the trembling grass
we remember the smile
that did not come
we remember the one
who gives his sweat
we remember the pain of the storm
and we remember the end of a home
we remember

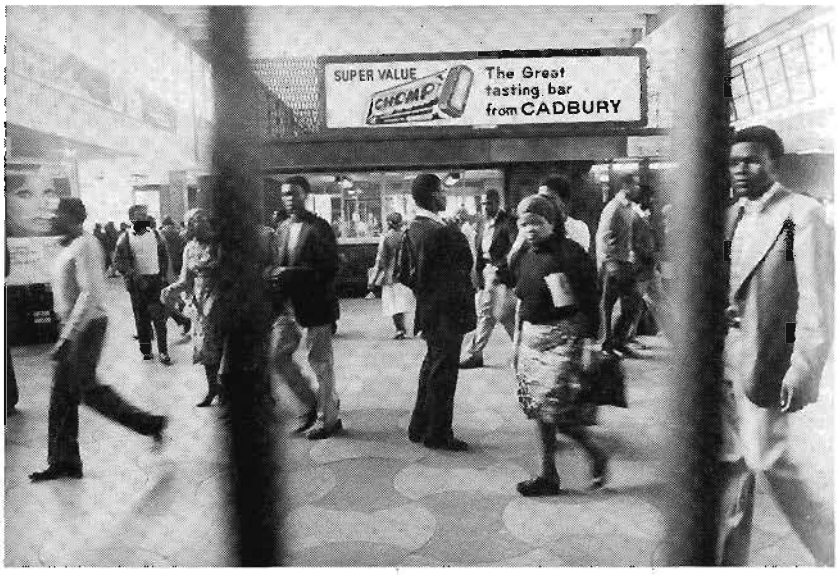
Kriben Pillay

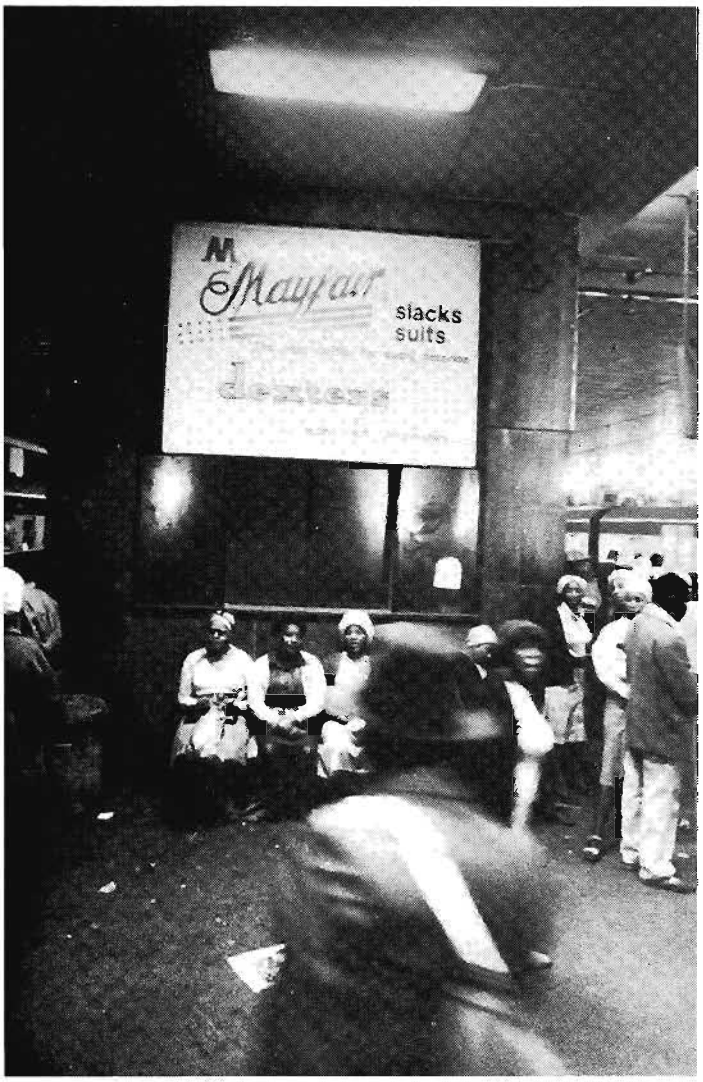
Stations & Staffriders

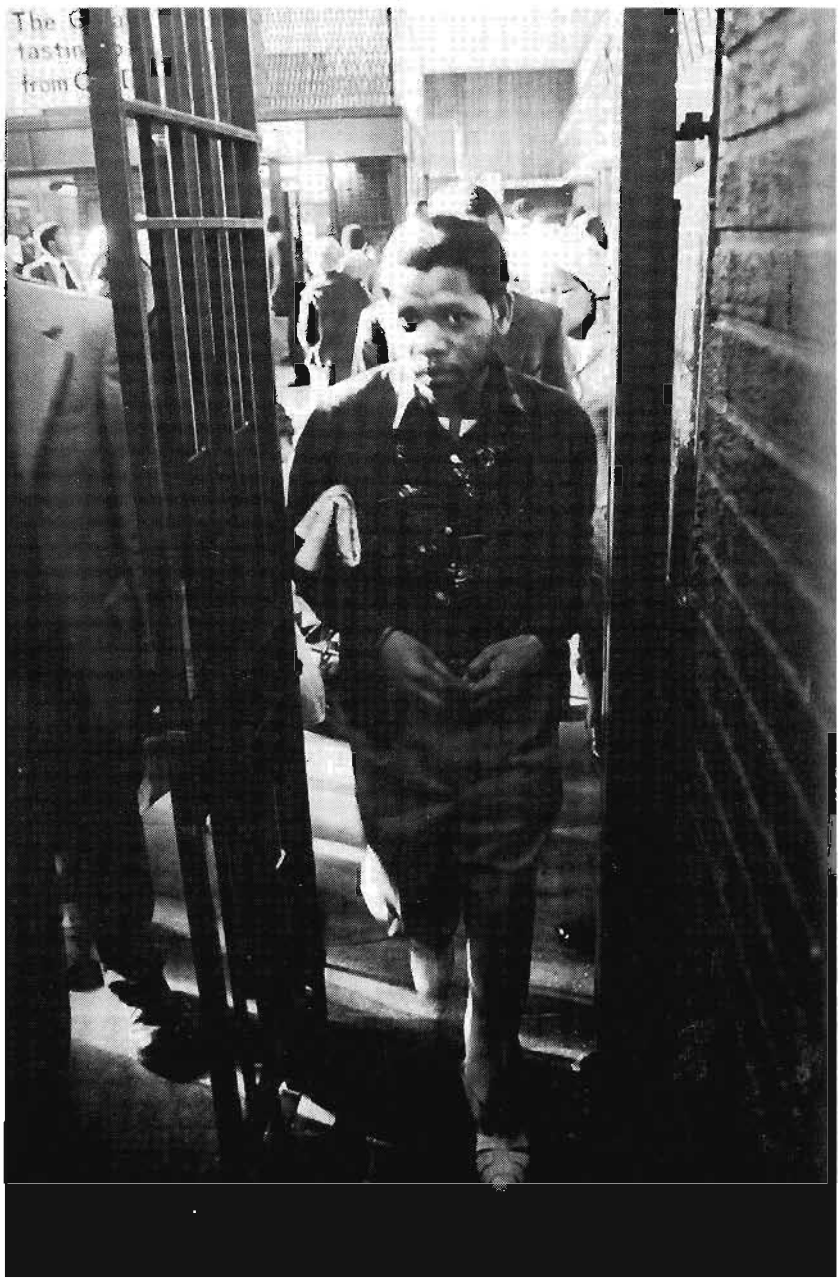
Photos: Paul Weinberg (this page; opposite page bottom left) and Mxolisi Moyo (opposite page).
Text: From a poem ('I Am Everything') Mohlahlana 'a Mongalo

I am the train/ The five-thirty from Park Station to Naledi/ I gobble up work-weary wretches/ From seven-to-five factories/ Those that put the gloss/ On Johannesburg's glittering reputation/ Yet get ulcers for remuneration . . . / Those who are immune to rejection/ I suck in/ And squeeze tight between free-sweating bulbous breasts/ Of a Church-In-Zion-In-South-Africa devotee/ And a smelly-and-mean miscreant from Zola's ghetto — / No breathing place and no place to focus/ Your strangled eyes . . . / I lure the bell-bottomed and the besuited/ Hesitant-bourgeoisie, and settle them in plush/ Polyurethane-vinyl seats and newspaper masks:/ I juggle this mixed rabble and regurgitate — / Not unlike a hung-over hostel-dweller on a Monday morning — / A thirsty, tired and insult-sated ignoramus/ Whose stray topics fuse in a clangorous lament about baas/ The racing rhythm lending conspiratorial cover/ Karda-karda! Karda-karda!/ I give unto you Soweto: your shiftless/ And day-by-day depressed denizens!







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begun to wail and held him protectively to her breast. She refused to flee any further. After a moment of frantic pleading Pyp gave up and fled himself. A bullet struck him in the shoulder as he clambered over the fence he had helped to erect only that day. He lay amidst the heavy stalks of the sunflower plant, listening to Jobman's ungentle search, slashing at the tall plants with his rifle.

Silently Pyp cursed his folly in going after Jobman. He realised now why even De Ras treated the tongueless dog with such circumspection and caution. He wondered vaguely what the fate of his other companions in misadventure had been. A quick silent death in the darkness, or mere wounding, with the prospect of facing the wrath of their employer for having disobeyed his distinct orders:

'Pyp, you listen to me. Don't any of you volkies try and do anything by yourselves, understand? I'll handle this my way. I want no more trouble on my farm!'

Trouble! Shooting, killing, wounding. A man like him, people like his, rarely encountered this kind of trouble. It was almost dawn when Pyp considered it safe to move. Weak from loss of blood and almost frozen, he staggered off in the vague direction of home and safety. An hour later he was found in the fields by one of the household servants, a hundred yards away from the De Ras estate house.

Karel nodded assent as the constable revealed the faces of each of the victims and showed him the name tags tied to their arms. Their faces had the expression of a vast grotesque peace. Pale-grey death-masks that only hours before had laughed and cursed, and with lowered eyes avoided his admonishments.

Karel felt a great need to summon up sympathy for the deceased men, whose lot it should have been to die deaths as insignificant as their lives had been. He felt only revulsion.

'Ja, Karel, you really gathered trouble for yourself these ten years.' In ten years he had inherited a huge farm, a widowed mother, a wife and sons, and three corpses. Or had he inherited? His family had owned the land for a hundred years – his father's father, then his father, and his progeny would own it one day.

Yet they owned it like transient overlords, generation after generation passing on its ownership, while these people never seemed to pass on. How their faces would wrinkle into furrows of sorrow as they dug their hands into the dry soil when the drought was severe and prolonged.

When the first rains came that year, they danced, his volkies, with outstretched arms, invoking their thanks to God.

'Dankie, Heer, dankie Heer.'

With a fierce joy, their muscles rippling beneath their blackened, sweating skin, they dug into the soft earth, as if it were the womb of a woman.

His earth! His soil! The scum! How easily they assumed ownership. An unspoken and undefined possession rendered him numb and helpless. He had often watched them, in the midst of the sunflower plants, swaying as the tall plants swayed in the wind, gnarling, growing old and rotting with the earth. They would be here long after he had passed on.

'Well, we had better get this dom hotnot of yours. A blerry rifle! Well, we'll get him in. I'm sending Venter and two 'coloured' constables after him.'

Jobman. Tongueless, as simple and hard as stone. He asserted himself, strived, even killed for the possession of what was his. He too, like me, thought De Ras, will lose it all. They will possess all, through reticence and by default.

'Ja. I'm going home, Sersant, I've got a farm to run.'

'Right. We'll let you know when they get back. And Karel, listen, check those volkies of yours, man. If there's one of them who even smells of trouble, get rid of him, man. Got, you'll never rest, man.'

The streets of the town of Demas were white and still in the mornings, like the streets of Karel's childhood. He had grown up there, living with his grandfather, while his father and the rest of his family lived on the estate, among the sheep, in the pockets of silence, becoming as unpredictable as the Karoo itself.

His father could not find expression for his missionary zeal in the midst of this town of upright burgers. Solitary Sunday spires, black suits burning in the turgid sun, clothed in immaculate Afrikaans.

His father preferred those eager brown faces, the wine-reddened eyes, the spectacle of 300 years of lineal shame, which many of his enemies had inferred was part of his own heritage.

'The madman! Look at what his "responsibility" has endowed me with. Three dead Hotnots, and another one, dangerous as a mad dog, somewhere on my farm with a rifle in his hands.'

They will come, driving slowly across the dirt track that bisected the farm. They will come: one white policeman and perhaps two or three 'coloured' constables. The white man will drive, while one of the 'coloureds' will sit next to him, solemnly conscious of the privilege. The others will be standing on the back of the empty truck, and with their hands shading their eyes, scan the vast and empty flatness of the land.

At most, the policeman expected the hunt to last no more than a few hours. Despite the heavy rains, the Karoo still remained sparsely vegetated, for even in nature barren habits are not easily overcome. There was very little that could provide refuge for a fugitive, especially when he was burdened with a young child and a woman.

Unless he left the open veld and went into the hills.

Jobman had left the track approximately two hours after dawn. By noon he had reached the rim of low hills that demarcated the end of the De Ras estate. Fifteen miles beyond lay the little town of Karakul. His uncle lived there. He would leave Anna and the child with him.

This old man, like Jobman's father, was not overly generous, but he would not refuse Anna and the child. Like most 'coloured' predikers, they heeded the ill-defined dictums of their religion. Compassion and pity was not an act of mere human kindness; it was an enactment of their simple faith.

'Die woord van God.'

Jobman observed the cloud of dust that heralded his pursuers, making its agonizing progress across the veld. The sun would be low by the time they realized he was in the hills. He had killed three 'coloured' men. There would thus be no full-scale search. They were people, nevertheless, and the law dictated pursuit and apprehension. But the manner of the pursuit and its urgency was left to the discretion of the uniformed man driving the van. Jobman had not, after all, shot three white men.

The van should swing towards Jobman's present location in about three hours, and two hours thereafter they would have to abandon the van and continue the pursuit on foot. By then it would be dark.

The boegoe-brandy burned fiercely into the laceration Jan's weapon had left on his back. The wound had been aggravated by chafing against the child's knees. He had carried the child strapped to his back while Anna was burdened with blankets and other paraphernalia necessary for survival.

Anna, seated in the shade of an overhanging rock, sang to the child, cheerful little psalms quaintly transformed by a tongue that found it difficult to grapple with the turgidity of Biblical language. There was a plaintive strain in her voice, an unconscious invocation of God's help in their plight.

His mother too had sung like that to her child whenever there was stress in

the house. His mother's beauty was one of sculptured emaciation.

'Teering,' the doctor had informed her husband and his master. Weak and emaciated by tuberculosis, she was spared the agony of wasting away by dying in childbirth. Jobman had not been allowed to see his brother who came, already dead, out of the womb of his mother. She too wore a mask of ready-made death. They were left to console each other, the father infected by the madness of zealotry, and the dumb son whose sickness drove the older man to fits of incensed violence.

Jobman, with a gesture of irritation, stopped Anna's singing. He felt no tenderness for either her or the child. As she strapped the child to his back, he recognised her knowledge of this in her sorrowful face.

It was dark by the time the three panting policemen reached the rocky hillside where the fugitives had been four hours ago. Constable Venter was on the point of turning back when one of the 'coloured' constables showed him the glimmer of a camp-fire further up on the hillside.

Despite exaggerated caution, their heavy boots stumbled over the loose stones, warning of their presence long before they reached what they thought was Jobman's campfire. Constable Venter, his pistol drawn, entered the circle of flickering light realising, too late, that they had been led into a trap.

His warning shout was pre-empted by a shot from Jobman's rifle, and one of the 'coloured' constables crumbled to the ground, his knee shattered.

Venter and the other constable threw themselves to the ground and crawled into the safety of darkness. They scanned the shadows around them, their eyes searching for Jobman's hiding place.

'Swine!' Venter cursed.

But Jobman was gone already, racing down the other side of the hill to join Anna and the child where he had left them, three miles away.

Slowly the two policemen rose and dragged their injured colleague out of the fire-light. As they carried their suffering comrade down the hillside, all thought of position, race or privilege was forgotten. They were conscious only of the darkness around them and of Jobman, who had suddenly acquired demonic proportions.

De Ras listened in silence to the sergeant's agitated recounting of the previous evening's encounter with Jobman.

Karel shrugged. 'I suppose you'll get him eventually.'

SERGEANT *(curtly)*: Yes. We'll get him. But you don't seem very interest-

ed.

DE RAS: Look, I won't interfere with your job.

SERGEANT: God, man, Karel! This man did all this killing on your property.

DE RAS: He did not harm my property or my family or me.

SERGEANT: So? Karel, I get the impression you don't want this blerry hotnot to be caught.

DE RAS: I did not say so. I don't want to interfere with your work, that's all.

SERGEANT: God, Karel! I want your help, man. I don't want this thing to become any bigger – help from Victoria-Wes, more police, dogs, a helicopter, you know.

DE RAS: It will be a reflection on you?

SERGEANT: One blerry hotnot, dumb on top of it. And I must ask Victoria-Wes for help?

DE RAS: I've got a farm to see to.

SERGEANT: Karel, it won't take more than a day. If you help, we can split and search this whole area. Venter with two 'coloureds', me, you. We'll get this bogger before tomorrow night.

DE RAS: We won't.

SERGEANT: *(vehemently)*: Not you too, Karel? Even Venter thinks this damn hotnot is some kind of devil, a real fighter or something. He's just another one of them, another blerry gangster. Only he knows the area and he's got a rifle. That's the difference. Incidentally, are you missing any firearms?

DE RAS: No. I've checked already.

SERGEANT: Karel, Karel. You've changed. You're not the Karel de Ras who grew up with me.

DE RAS: I am Karel de Ras.

SERGEANT: Yes, yes, the name is the same. What did they do to you in that Engelse university? Your fire is out, man. You look like you want to give up.

DE RAS: Give what up?

SERGEANT: All this. Not only the land, I mean. But your rights. Your right to own this land, to be master.

DE RAS: I think you're going a bit too far.

SERGEANT: Sorry Karel. It's just that you don't seem to care anymore. That's the difference.

DE RAS: You don't have to threaten me. I'll help you. But I work on my own; no constables, 'coloured' or otherwise.

SERGEANT: Alright, alright. It's Sunday today and we can't do anything. We start at sun-up tomorrow morning.

DE RAS: Fine.

SERGEANT: And Karel, this man is dangerous. Shoot on sight, alright?

DE RAS: Ja, ja.

De Ras wandered about the huge, rambling house in a state of moody agitation. He resisted his family's attempts to draw him into the camaraderie of the afternoon's family get-together. His aunts and uncles and their haughty young fair-haired sons and daughters had come to visit their 'rich relatives'.

He was ill at ease during the ritualistic Sunday lunch and his irritation doused the flames of that renowned rural conviviality. When the current subject of gossip about the now-notorious Jobman, that tongueless hotnot, came up he excused himself and retreated into the study.

'This business is giving Karel a lot of problems,' his wife said, belatedly excusing her husband's unsociable mood.

Soon, however, the company's spirit and composure was restored as each tried to outdo the other by relating, with ingenious imitations, tales from the lives of their 'volkies'.

From his study Karel listened to the roars of backslapping laughter which gradually subsided, and eventually degenerated into a political argument among the males. The younger members of the clan proposed solutions to the 'coloured problem' in language of such a radical colour that it drew heated and somewhat intemperate responses from their fathers.

'Let's ask Karel. After all, he went to an Engelse university,' he heard a voice say.

The door of his study burst open and Oom Hans, the eldest of his mother's brothers, entered. A florid man, whose humour and demeanor was as brash as his dress, he accosted Karel with a look of conspiratorial wickedness.

'Karel, ou seun, do you know what your cousins, all graduates from Stellenbosch, are saying? That these hotnots are Afrikaners!'

'So?'

'So? Afrikaners, man! Like you and me. Like your father and mine. Do you say they are Afrikaners?'

'No,' Karel said quietly.

His uncle left the study cock-a-hoop.

'Karel, the man from the Engelse university says "No!" And blerry hell, he's right. Afrikaner my foot!'

There followed a subdued response from the younger generations.

'You don't understand – you are too set in your ways – it does not mean they are our equals – we don't have to forfeit our heritage; they are Afrikaners, but brown ones.'

Karel's mother tactfully steered the gathering into the garden for tea, and the subject evaporated as the younger

ones went off to explore the farm.

A silence ensued. The clock ticked and the wind rustled in the neat row of trees that Karel's father had so carefully nurtured as a wind-breaker to protect the farmhouse from the wind as it swept across the Karoo.

Karel left the house and took a round-about way to the settlement, ostensibly to arrange for some able-bodied men to accompany him in the morning.

He heard the party of young adventurers talking about the mist that hung over the hills. It would be cold tonight. The wind would drive the mists across the veld and leave it hanging there, torporously. Their voices faded into the quickening dusk, like extinguished lanterns.

Above the settlement hung a pall of smoke. The families were making fires, for they too recognised the signs of a bitterly cold night.

Had he taught them to see these things, or had they taught him? He had often heard the phrase 'being close to the earth'. He had heard it from those misty-eyed young people he had left behind.

It was miserable, close to the earth. Cold and forlorn, a state of nothingness, a life expiring within the confines of a smoke-filled hovel.

'And who am I to disturb this filthy closeness?'

' 'Naand, Baas.'

' 'Naand.'

'Pyp, Pyp, are you there?'

The door opened and Pyp emerged together with a gust of smoke.

'Pyp, leave the door open, so the smoke can go out,' a woman's voice called after him.

'How's your arm?'

'Alright, Baas. Alright.'

'Listen, I want four young fellows. We're going into the veld tomorrow. Tell them to be down there by five o'clock. But not you. You take the rest and repair the fence near the road.'

'Alright Baas. 'Naand.'

' 'Naand.'

Despite the rapidly falling darkness Karel took a detour home. He paused in the midst of the sunflower field, listening to the rustle of the wind and the myriad unidentifiable noises of the Karoo.

As a child he had believed the old Hottentot legend that the wind was but a messenger of the rivers, carrying tidings from the small and frail Gamtoos to the mighty Vaal. Perhaps it dropped part of its burden of lyrical tidings here, over the Karoo. Now this arid place sounded like a river in flood. Yet who listened or spoke to it? Only he, De Ras, and somewhere out there, Jobman the dommie. He laughed.

'Perhaps that's your punishment for being black. He didn't give you a tongue, so you can't speak to the wind.'

Jobman was listening to the wind, its icy shrillness imparting the imponderable messages that only he, and perhaps De Ras, understood. No one would venture into the veld tonight. Furthermore, it was Sunday, and the Sabbath weighed upon his pious pursuers like an old puritan God, the defiance of which was more sinful than allowing a killer to escape.

He was exhausted and cold, and he needed rest. By dawn he must be out of the hills, making his way directly across the farm. Ten miles northwards he would meet the National Road to Kimberley.

He knew that the search would be intensified, but policemen work only on what they know, basing their action on the premise of probability. They would start their search at the point at which they last encountered him. By then he would be beyond the boundaries of the De Ras estate, across the wild, rocky uninhabited land to the north. Once he reached the gorge he would be safe.

He thought momentarily of Anna and the child whom he had left in the reluctant custody of his uncle. Their coming had not been enthusiastically greeted.

'He's bad news,' his uncle had said.

Because he could not make himself understood, he had communicated through a crestfallen Anna, who, dirty and weary from their strenuous journey, communicated Jobman's words in soft humble tones. This gave Jobman's uncle a feeling of authority which normally Jobman would not have permitted him. However, he prudently restrained himself.

'Ja, Ja. I can see this is my brother's son. Gave poor old Piet more trouble than his life was worth. What's his problem now?'

'He asks if we can stay here.'

'In trouble again, heh? What has he done now? Stolen another sheep?'

'He says only the child. And me.'

'So he wants to burden us with troubles, heh?'

'He says he will pay you.'

'Him pay? What with? But money is not the question. If it's trouble, I want to know what it is. Don't want the police at my door.'

The child had started to wail, and his aunt intervened.

'God! Is this child still alive? Ooh wee! Look how blue he is from the cold. Give him here,' she barked, freeing him from Jobman's back.

'Ja, you and the child can stay. But not him.'

Jobman left behind the piteous contents of his purse, and with a nod bade them goodbye. He did not acknowledge the look of yearning in Anna's troubled eyes.

Now as he built up the fire, he cast them from his mind.

Both Jobman and De Ras left on their journeys an hour before dawn. Jobman ran with a slow easy gait across the veld while De Ras drove across the dirt track towards the ravine. He would be there an hour before Jobman.

There was not much wind this morning and the mist hung over the low hills far later than it should. He had never seen the Karoo so green before. De Ras did not think of beauty as being 'exquisite'. It was something hard and real, something to be used, to be ploughed or sheared; something useful, a tangible entity that one could hold and feel. He scanned the veld through the telescope of his rifle: the softly contoured hills were like the breasts of a woman. There, in the mists, the Hottentot gods had gambolled, feasting with the same intentness as their mortal offspring.

Now it belonged to his kind, the white man.

As Jobman came into view, De Ras adjusted his telescope, coldly observing his quarry. The lithe wiry body glistening with sweat despite the coldness of the morning. And there was a content, almost peaceful expression on Jobman's face.

With deliberate measure, De Ras squeezed the trigger. Long after the echo of the shot had died, he continued to stare at the fallen figure through the telescope, as if it was part of the landscape. Just another fallen 'hotnotgot' that would become part of the pitiable legends these people created to glorify a forgotten past.

Anna eventually returned to her father, who very soon forced her to marry one of the farm workers. She bore him many children, and her life resumed the routine of dull safe drudgery, the lot of the rural labourer.

Not much is known of the fate of the son she bore Jobman. His uncle had persuaded her to leave the quiet, obedient boy in his care. Anna readily consented, realising that no prospective husband would want Jobman's son as part of the bargain of marrying her.

As for De Ras, he did not change outwardly. He still administered the farm with the robust efficiency that was his custom. Only those closest to him noticed the barely perceptible change. He frequently took long, solitary walks into the veld, and would be found staring into the vast emptiness, listening to the wind.

LIKE A FLOODED RIVER

we shall understand
when we see blood
thicker than pus spilling
from rotten wounds
the pus before it smelling
like the carcass of a dog
as the elongated shadows
approach the villages

shall we be standing
on the banks of a dry river
perhaps
immersed in sticky mud
hearing what the ghetto
and the dark villages say and do
listening to their screams
as they bleed through their pores

shall we be standing
on top of a mountain
witnessing the world ablaze
booysens
silverton
orlando
moroka — like i asked
shall we be standing there
on top of the mountain
or running away from the flames
remember change flows
like a flooded river

Nthambeleni Phalanndwa

BILTONG

The lean strips hang like
Dead faceless serpents on the slack washing line,
Waving like pliable branches.
The sun parches the biltong
With the patience of a housewife
And the wings of large flies
Sing continuously around the dangling strips
That are streaked with dark fat.

At dusk,
A large-mouthed woman emerges
From the house and stomps to the washing line,
snaps at a jerking biltong
as if it was bait,
And plucks the biltong like dry
washing from the washing line.

Inside the house
Four mounds of steaming porridge are ready,
And four lean-bodied children
Are squatting like sleepy frogs
With their eyes fixed on the biltong.

They gnaw on the biltong
With twisted faces
Grip and tear the biltong
With their half-rotten teeth.
What is not ground well,
Will be brought up
Deep in the night
To be chewed a second time
Like cows in their kraal.

James Twala

PREY . . .

We are the prey
Round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Forever hunted
Running afraid
Seeking the shadows of sanctuary.

We are the prey
Darkness is our bride
Together we suckle and nourish
Our agonising seed.

We are the prey:
But soon
We must stand
To face the man
Who holds the gun.

Omarrudin

THE TOOL-MAKER
(It's blues time again)

I sat down
a pen in my right hand
and a scribbler on the table
to write another poem
about the struggle
about its mother
— OPPRESSION
it's the blues

I dug my insides
the very depths of bother
sandwiched by slices of my will —
to be again as I was
when then I loitered — abhorred —
aimlessly in my mother's lap
— AZANIA
it's the blues

I then looked up
(as is my custom and practice!)
towards the horizon
from which clouds hurried away
to mar the sun
— my WARMTH
it's the blues

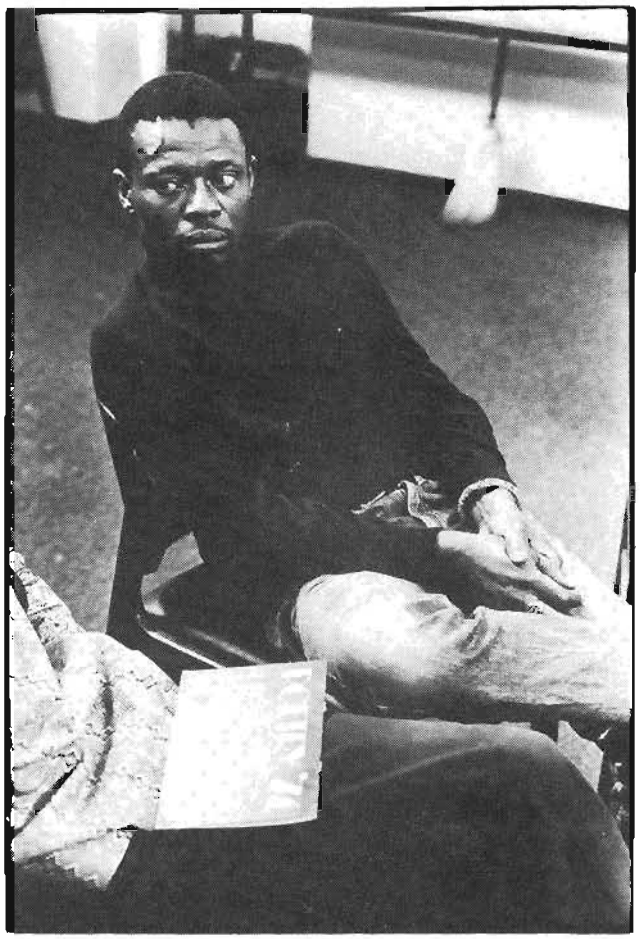
It's the blues
unless we all must die
from our own intricate inventions
our little pieces
our verbal packages
— BOMBS of POEMS
it's the blues.

Masilo Rabothata

Poet in Exile

An interview with Mongane Serote

by Jaki Seroke



Bra Wally, are you going to tell us about yourself, how you started writing?

Well, perhaps if I begin . . . I should say I was born in Sophiatown. But I know very little of the place. The only township I know is Alex. My whole school-life was primary and secondary schooling in Alexandra and a little in Lesotho. I went back to Alex and then to Morris Isaacson high school in Soweto. I did not complete my high school studies. In fact I failed my form five. I tried studying through correspondence.

Around this time I made a discovery: there was what is known as a book, which was in turn made by real people. Up until then these things were mysterious to me. A poet was mysterious because we hadn't seen a poet in our lives. We'd read Shakespeare, Wordsworth and the others, and all these people were dead. We also read what in school terms is known as 'vernacular poetry' by bo-Raditladi and so on. Somehow these things were distant. They did not contain any actual feeling which touched and directed your life on the spot.

It was during the time when I visited the Wits university library that I exposed myself to extensive reading. This led to an interest in writing. Basically I felt there were things I wanted to say. My background of Alex made me feel extremely disenchanted, like everybody else. I wanted to use writing as a medium to express this disenchantment. Alexandra was for me a definition of the way blacks lived in our country as a whole.

It becomes painful when you start comparing your life to that of others: 'coloureds', Indians and whites. Questions like why is it that where I come from people are living differently, that while some have so much others are so poor – these questions become unavoidable.

Why did you choose to write poetry?

I wrote poetry very incidentally. When I look back I still say I had more interest in being a writer than in being a poet. I would rather be controlled by circumstances than form. If I feel that a certain creative idea needs to be a play then a play it will be. But these forms make different demands on a person. I started writing plays although these were not staged.

I remember once we performed at Kings Theatre on a Sunday. We had a large turn-out. I forget what the name of the play was but it was primitive. Ja, in the sense that we took along with us grams, parts of broken motor-cars and so on.

I had already written essays and short stories before I came to poetry. The demands made by poetry are not, for me, as immense as prose writing. Generally, I still regard myself as 'a writer' rather than 'a poet'.

When you started writing there had been a lull in black literature. Most of the writers were either banned or had skipped the country . . .

I must say, yes, when we started writing most of the older writers had left. This presented us with a series of problems. Writing is a social affair – you would like to look out for people who had also written, who could act as a yardstick for the progress you are making. E'skia Mphahlele, Keorapetse Kgositsile and all the others had left. I could still read most of their works though. Perhaps this was because of the adventurous spirit I had. I found all sorts of ways to read this generation.

With other writers I kept closer contact formally and informally. We wrote letters to each other: Mafika Pascal Gwala, James Matthews, Richard Rive, Sipho Sepamla, Oswald Mtshali, etc. This was the time of the emergence of the black consciousness movement. The b.c. propounders were an extreme threat to the white public who to a very large extent owned the means of exposure for writers. Newspapers, magazines and publishers would ask whether you were a b.c. poet or not. If you were, you tended to be labelled a racist.

It was during these times that Oswald Mtshali published his *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* and I came out with *Yakhal' inkomo*. There has been this wedge that's driven between Oswald and me. Oswald was a poet launched from the white community, so to speak. This is what the papers said of him and this was the way they treated him. Whereas when I came out, there were no doubts: I was clearly associated with black consciousness. This is one matter I haven't made careful examination of.

Were you an activist in the cultural unit of SASO?

I worked with CULCOM (Cultural Committee). The way

black consciousness is espoused now not the way it was understood in those days. We had small units within the broad structure of SASO/BPC. I worked with Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper to form South African Black Theatre Union. I then went to Mihloti and later Mdali.

I remember in 1972 we organised a festival in Cape Town under SABTU. We had tried to bring together small and big groups like Mihloti and Mdali to take part in the festival. People felt we were working on a regional level, or an ethnic basis or some such social definition. We tried as much as we could to introduce poetry readings. People were not used to reading poetry publicly. We wanted to conscientize writers and the black public. At that time we had defined our audience as mainly the black community. I wonder if it would be right to say I was 'an activist'. It's a situation I found myself in and participated wholly.

In accordance with your writings we can easily detect that you are, comparatively speaking, from a close-knit family. You are closely attached to a ghetto like Alex.

. . . That's very difficult. It is true that I come from a close-knit family. It's also true that I feel very strongly about Alex. Perhaps one has to examine these two points. 'Mother' is used both literally and metaphorically. An issue like black family exists only in name. We are denied the benefits of belonging to a family by the oppressive and racist laws of the country. We are made to grow up in the world without our parents beside us most of the time. Social conditions take parents away from us. For instance, at a superficial level, there is the extreme violence in the streets. If you know that your mother comes home very late in the night, everybody in the house becomes worried. We are threatened all the time. Then you know that your father cannot protect you from being killed in the streets. It is normal to know that you have a father who will protect you. But he cannot protect you the day you are arrested for a pass 'offence'. These things are realities. They become very evident in your early life. Then it is that we realise how helpless we are before this situation.

The word *mother* which I use so often should be looked at in that context. Every person is very close to a mother. Our social life has been structured like that.

Between a mother and a daughter develops the question of rape. Between a father and his son there is fear and shame. It's unnatural, the way we grow up.

What problems did you meet when publishing your first collection of poems, Yakhal'inkomo?

I took the manuscript to Lionel Abrahams who was heading Renoster. I still hold a great respect for him as a writer and I am aware of the value of his experience as an editor. As far as that goes, he is very sensitive. We had many discussions together, and quarrelled a lot about changes he was suggesting. I remember at a certain time when I went to see him I took my manuscript back and left. After consulting Stephen Biko we decided that both of us should talk again with Lionel. I felt that if there were changes I did not trust the value of, there must be someone to help me decide. Steve was aware of the fact that, because of our youthfulness, whatever I wrote could be used against me in the future. There is nothing back home that says you must be a writer. We managed to convince Lionel that he should not change anything in the book. We all knew that the book was provocative – whatever we meant by that.

I asked Thami Mnyele (he was developing as a painter then) to illustrate the cover. Lionel had problems with the drawing though he eventually accepted it. Another problem arose and here I compromised. The publisher said that if the book was to be put on the shelves, who could know what *Yakhal'inkomo* means? I wanted to call the book *Yakhal'inkomo*, that's all. I didn't care what people felt about the name. The compromise we came to was that the name *Yakhal'inkomo* would be written in small letters and the word 'Poems' in big letters. These were matters of design which I knew very little about.

"To most of the white critics a very unusual thing had happened. A book had been written by a black man. The black man was put in a slot: radical poet. This was both reactionary and destructive."

Could people from your community immediately identify with your work?

I must confess some sort of pride. As soon as one paints a picture or writes a book the immediate reaction from the black community is to claim you. You become a daughter or son of the people. Which is good. *Yakhal'inkomo* did this to me. I was touched. To realise that in Alex where people, comparatively speaking, own nothing of the world such intense loving and protectiveness could be felt. What more could I ask for?

There was the worrying question of critics. Sentimentalities aside, our community lacks information and the ability to criticize. A book was written by a Mongane who lives down the street. This was fine and enough. Whether I said the right things or not, this was not a problem. In this way one can understand the way oppression works. People are denied extensive schooling. I craved development in the right direction. I wanted to know if what I was writing was okay. I listened to comments from students and from the b.c. circles. I only needed guidance from my own community.

On the other hand, what was the reaction like in white circles?

To most of the white critics a very unusual thing had happened. A book had been written by a black man. The black man was put in a slot: radical poet. These points were negative because they said nothing about what was written. People were worried about a writer with political vision. I know that a whole lot of things in writing and in the struggle had happened before me. Before I was even born. Which means I was only flexing a muscle. You cannot pin a label like that on a young poet. This was reactionary and extremely destructive.

I was suspicious. What do we say about white comment? Time is now that black literature be evaluated as it is. I view criticism very carefully. I read between the lines.

We would also like to know more about you, the poet in exile. It seems that most of the writers are inclined towards a Eurocentric education. What do you say to that?

I am from an oppressed community where we are told that our culture is backward. The only way out of barbarism, we are told, is to interact with 'civilised' communities. We are inescapably hammered to believe in this. I had this inclination when I left for the United States in 1974. Perhaps I should add here that I had read a lot about America and was extremely suspicious of influence from the western world. For the six years that I've been away from home my most valuable period has been since I came to Botswana. I feel that my stay in the USA was a total waste of time. I was not dedicated there at all. On the sideline I studied the art of film-making but realised that one could easily make pornographic films which had nothing to do with the life of people where I come from.

Because of the political role the United States is playing in the world, I became aware that my decision to go to America was extremely wrong. As a result I took it upon myself not to stay for long. I worked very hard to complete my studies within the given period of two and a half years. As soon as that was finished I packed my bags and I left. I do not regret that decision. I feel that it is one of the healthiest decisions I've ever made in my life.

Now I have come to Botswana and I have participated in cultural groups. In the sense of offering training and the wholehearted contribution of disseminating political aware-

ness, I think MEDU ART ENSEMBLE has performed very well. I value the experience of being in MEDU most. One most important thing in the group is the sense of working together. Where we say there is something called the arts – what is that? Collectively coming to the realization that in essence we can never separate the arts from political consciousness. We are still young to fully understand this theme. The fact of the matter is that most of the people in MEDU are putting everything in their power into understanding this and putting it into practice. We will learn by our mistakes when we come to express and execute this matter. The most important thing is that people have come together fully aware of these problems.

We are consciously saying we are going to understand and express our experiences in the arts. Time has run out on us, we must examine that, and put effort and energy into organising ourselves so that artists should cease to be just individuals seeking fame and fortune. While we are aware that we cannot escape being individuals, we must work as a collective. MEDU for us here represents that force which must resolve the elements of this conflict. There is a broad cultural expression in all art forms about people in Southern Africa. It is for us to define our lives to that.

Since there is much inflow of work from new writers, their writings banned and later unbanned, do you think African literature will survive the current status quo?

I can only dare and answer that. The situation in our country is very unnatural. Anything that is unnatural in South Africa will never survive. There is an intense need for self-expression among the oppressed in our country. When I say self-expression I don't mean people saying something about themselves. I mean people making history consciously.

There is one thing that time in exile has brought to my mind. When I reflect on some of the things we had done and written before, I realise that there is no way that you can defeat a people. Now if you look at our writings we treat things very superficially. We judge the results of oppression and exploitation. We neglect the creativity that has made the people able to survive extreme exploitation and oppression. People have survived extreme racism. It means our people have been creative about their lives. It is this creativity which is going to defeat the backward machinery of oppression. All of us who are in the arts should really take notice of this and take guidance for what we have to do. We must participate in smashing racism.

'HOME IS WHERE THE MUSIC IS'

an interview with Hugh Masekela by Mothobi Mutloatse

Photos of Hugh Masekela in Lesotho by Conan Mahlangu

The main thing in industry is to be able to make a profit. You acquire cheap labour and you also become a mogul. Whether it's a capitalist or socialist country they always look for cheap labour. Mining all over the world is shameful and next to it the recording industry is worst. The record companies are so greedy that if you make a record they try to get you as cheap as possible. The only time they compromise is when you are in demand.

I remember we used to live on isinkwa (bread). When you saw musicians eating fish and chips and being drunk in the streets of Johannesburg you could tell that something had been put on wax. We are laughing but it's a sad thing, y'know. Gallo makes millions of rands. But you may wonder if they know that it takes only eight thousand dollars for a student musician doing a degree course. If a recording company can make three million rand from Harari why don't they send Sipho Mabuse or someone else to Berkeley or maybe even open a music school in South Africa. We have super talent back home.

The opportunity I got, every musician deserves it. When I went to school in New York the fees were 900 dollars a year and my rent was 90 dollars a month. I also worked part-time. Compared to records which are sold, that's nothing. They also do not pay for radio plays and publishing. There is not even one artist who was sent to a music school by a South African recording company. Am I right? This is because they don't want another Miriam Makeba – who will talk all this stuff I'm saying.

We were able to meet artists in USA who fought against racialism despite the fact that they were in an industry that exploited to the hilt. People like Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and others fought the record companies. To their detriment for a long time but they fought, man, and they survived. They are not only a class in a clamour.

For black musicians ekhaya (at home) it is difficult to be an activist because in the end you no longer record. You close shop and then have to find a job as a backyard mechanic or something. I couldn't have survived in America without Chisa Records in which I partnered with a white businessman.

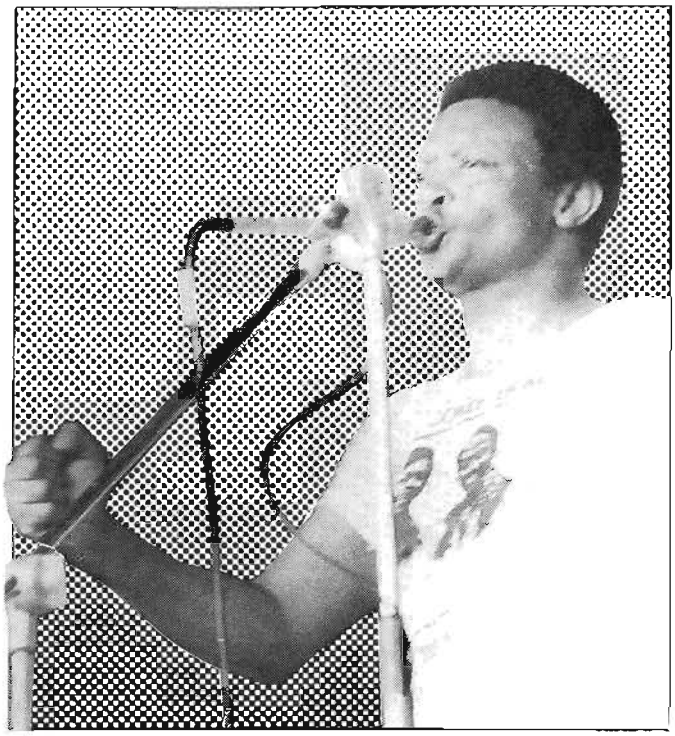
It is amazing that Kippie Moeketsi has been around for a long time and he has never made an LP on his own. It is only when Pat Matshikiza or Dollar Brand calls him that he's been able to do something. There's an image hanging around him that he is a drunkard. Truth is he has been frustrated in his attempts to set things straight for black artists. Bra Kippie is among the most brilliant musicians we've ever had and also a champion for the rights of his colleagues. Even militants used to call him a trouble-maker. Jy kom kry 'n man is kwaad over his royalties but in the end he says thanks mister Golembo! During those times Golembo was running Gallo. These were guys who ran away from Mussolini's fascism in Italy. The point I am making here is that these issues are never talked about. We never say that some white people who are hardly devoted to the field are hired to watch us.

I remember when I was a clerk at the Germiston administration offices a township superintendent would come all the way from Stellenbosch and learn the pass and permit issues from us. Six months later when he already knows the job he would jump on us, man. One way or another the system catches up with you.

It's a rough thing to minimise exploitation of musicians. I am not saying people should strike but if artists do not perform what will be done? It will be said that I reside in the United States. Some would say that's politics. But it is economics, man. People need to eat. If a man is making a million dollars and he pays you fifty dollars, there is something wrong. And if you accept it there's something wrong with you too.

I haven't had any regrets or set-backs in my music career. Coming from Alexandra township, mfowethu, and looking at what I am and what I've achieved – shit man, if I say I had setbacks I would be greedy. I only wish my fellow colleagues could have the same opportunities I had. It doesn't take going to America to be successful. If Rashid Vally can sell records, there's no reason why there shouldn't be a black recording company. All the entrepreneurs who own supermarkets blah, blah, blah should realise a challenge or even

"I remember we used to live on isinkwa. When you saw musicians eating fish and chips and being drunk in the streets of Johannesburg you could tell that something had been put on wax."



work as affiliates to big recording companies. All the profits come from black artists. You need something in favour of these artists, man. If Nico Carstens' is making millions with his boeremusiek how come Ntemi Piliso remains a pauper when his songs are for a much bigger segment of the population? I think the buying public should wear off the idea that musicians are irresponsible, immoral and drunkards. They must realise that these people represent their culture. They express their aspirations and inspiration. They are the chroniclers of their feelings.

It is not true that the buying public prefer overseas artists to the local ones. We were nurtured on Duke Ellington, Louis Jordan and Nat King Cole. There is always this slot which is exploited to the maximum to try and make a dispute. Agreeably it's a South African anomaly. Since we've developed this taste way back they are trying to make us look black American. Disco is everywhere in the world. Just like twist, it's a sickness. The only thing disco is all about is love. I love you baby. We'll boogie all night. Love is the thing. Shake your moneymaker. Do it to me tonight. Do it to me three times. Now, we are trapped, man. Disco is a social tranquillizer. You don't recognise other things. We can't boogie for the whole year.

The black artist must be his own master – not only as a producer but economically. They should take the ledger line. They must take partnership in distributing and calculate how much is needed to distribute widely. This, in ignorance, has always made musicians look like dried out drunks. For instance a buffer is created between blacks and whites. A sort of middle class. Some people who will aspire to live the white way. If we have cultural dominance, say, and they happen to like the Mahlathini groans, they'll turn out to be like us. They know that we look after their kids. So, a place like Beverley Hills (Orlando West) or Dube comes into being where those who are not driving a BMW are so backward. The real issue is not apartheid. If there's anything, we don't want to stay with whites. Apartheid yona itself is in our favour technically. We have nothing to lose – we are poor anyway.

Reflections in a Cell

A Short Story by Mafika Gwala

Illustration: Mzwakhe

Yesterday I felt like tearing the bars down with my bare hands. Now all that rage in me has been cooled by Mr Shezi's visit. Although I'm no VIP – actually I hate VIPs – this visit has done me good. I've been brought to my senses about that lousy term 'being a social problem'. Am I being a social problem? Hell, someone will have to tell him that guys like me are not going to be bullied by suckers like Mr Shezi into 'being a man'.

I can't be the man they want, sit in the pub the whole afternoon, fill my stomach with beer and talk a lot of tribal politics; or wear a suit, drive an American car and talk a lot of American-English garbage. Someone will have to tell Mr Shezi, I won't. All I can do is thump him. Man, I've got no time to open my mouth for suckers.

But I'm no social problem, really. I simply want to lead a full life without them sticking their dirty noses into it all the time. I'm sure Shezi is taking my story to those powdered bitches who'll be discussing it at some tea party. How they waste their time. They should be walking through their gardens and cuddling their pet dogs, that's what they're fit for.

I can still remember Mrs Lane at Eshowe. That's where I was sent to for juvenile deliquency, but I don't remember being a juvenile and this the suckers don't know. One day I was being exhibited to an overseas tourist who had just popped in to see how things were with us darkies. Hell, we were all glum. That's the game we played whenever any of these peacocks dared step into our yard. Several questions were fired at me (perhaps because I was the sulkiest). And I was not prepared to answer. I couldn't hold out any longer when this touring peacock says, 'Just think how much your parents could have done for you.' I snarled at her, that's what I did, and told her I didn't care a damn about them. (Of course I was lying). It just popped into my mind. When they granted us the kind favour of leaving, I heard Mrs Lane whispering to the visitor, shrugging her shoulders, 'Well, you see what a grey pride the Zulus have?' Maybe I should have kept my sour mind to myself. How could she compare me to a bloody Zulu boy of 'them' days? They all want us to be Zulu boys and then they can pour their pity on us.

> ' I can't be the man they want, sit in the pub the whole afternoon, fill my stomach with beer and talk a lot of tribal politics; or wear a suit, drive an American car and talk a lot of American-English garbage. '

And Shezi doesn't know this bit. I've known Shezi for five years now. He still harps on the old gospel – 'Be a man', when all he knows is carrying his big bag around and playing it to the professional standard. I was sent to the reformatory just for refusing to go to school. I mean, if a man gets bored to death, turning pages and cramming passages, he is not doing anything criminal. I wonder if you ever felt like that anytime. Me, the history class drove me mad, all that big talk on the Great Trek and inventions and the teacher only saying after each passage, 'You can imagine how things were in those days.' Nothing more than that, as if it were the only thing he caught at Training College.

I was doing JC at the time I started hanging around the local shop and killing time at the cinema. The serials were great in those days. I remember not missing one episode of 'Fu Manchu', you should know that one, 'The Drums of Fu Manchu'. My old lady bought me over with fags and bio-start so I could sell her dagga. I used to shayisa most of the stuff at the Scala. As long as my old barlly was out, I was boss at home, and the old lady did her washing on the Berea. Then one day the old barlly, my father, got even with me for a lousy ten bob. I don't know how he gripped me in the first place because I was having him for a long time. Hard luck, I think, but you see I don't believe in luck. The next day I was taken to the Police Station at Mayville. And the lynchings, whe-ew!

'Send him to the reformatory, Mr Zondi,' a lady with mannish looks advised my father, scrutinizing me as if I was a soldier on parade. The trousers still hurt my backside.

The boys did not ill-treat me at Eshowe. I only had to turn my eyes devilishly to make a man skrik and I kept them off. Then I met Joey. A guy with sharp features and a coldness that made others always feel his presence. Joey had been to Kimberley, there's a reformatory there too. And he had skipped it and managed to reach Sharpeville, his home town.

'Imagine coming home to find the place deserted and people weeping all over. I don't know what brought me home, to find my mother and father dead – gunfire. Just when I was going to make a fresh start and find myself a smart job and help my parents if they didn't send me back to the reformatory – I had it all planned. But there I was, with no place to go. Back into the streets of Vereeniging I went, bag snatching again and this is where I am today.' Joey was reading a Hadley Chase. Here was a guy with no guilt or pity for himself, or anything like that. We made a serious twosome, Joey and I.

'But sonny, I want to get into real money now, big money, in a grand style, like they do in here.' He hammered at the paperback cover. Novels were not allowed I should add. Newspapers and magazines were mostly in Afrikaans.

We got on very well, Joey and me: he

telling me all about Bloody Monday and fast life on the Reef and me loading it all on him, Mkhumbane – that's Cato Manor – Mayville and Durban life. He just wrote to me lately. He told me he's gone big time. I never believed he would try it. Anyway, I wish him all the best.

Back from the reformatory, I was a different man. In a way. And I couldn't stand any shit from another man. My family now lived at Kwa-Mashu. Shezi drove me home, that's how we met. This chap has been pestering me all along when I happen to 'waai' in.

The reception at home was cold. With mum and dad separated, I had to move away from the old barlly. The best thing for me was to walk out. Besides, a man couldn't stand the dull life at the new township, people not knowing one another. But the real reason was a term in jail.

I was new at Kwa-Mashu and a total stranger at home, except when my brother at University came home weekends. My father even told my kid brothers to keep an eye on me. Me a thief and the black sheep of the family. After three days I found a shebeen a street below my home. I had four rands in my pocket – I needn't say where I got it from. At first I called for Zulu beer, then a nip of cane and beer again. Hell, I was high. Now there were a few blokes jiving in the room, with two girls. Another one walked in, school-going (she had a uniform on and carried books). This one I hooked onto without much effort. It began with small talk. This was her sister's place and they were from the Reef. We switched to fly-taal; Joey had got me used to it. The girl jived so beautifully. The boys' jail had made me rusty.

Then one of these guys looks at me with contempt. I'm not used to that. With me it's a tooth for a tooth and I gave the swine a dirty look too. One to make him cringe inside. He then tried to impress with his Zulu tsotsi-taal. I ignored him. She wasn't pretty, but she wasn't bad either – she could be had. Now I can't remember if the guy caught up with what we were saying or if it was plain jealousy. For I heard him say, 'Here we roll "Kom Van's".' He thought I was a Transvaler. To drown him in more anger I offered the girl a drink. She had refused theirs, see. Hell, and the bloody thing swallowed it like it was lemonade. A stiff tot éh.

Since it was getting late I finished my cane and made plans to lay her. I was to wait outside, at the gate. The chaps followed me. Something told me to hop it, but then I wouldn't see the girl. The same sucker asked me where I lived.

'You got no right to ask me that, boeda.'

'Do you still leave him?'

One of them advanced. And within a few seconds I had taken out my McGregor. He hit out. Missed. I pinned him below his right shoulder. His friends fell back. I drilled another hole on his back and pulled out fast. I got six strokes for that, my first trouble with the law. After a six-month sentence for theft, I pushed off to Verulam. My granny's place.

I still wonder why my dad sent Shezi to check me. The fellow doesn't care. And it's almost seven weeks since I got pitched up here. Funny. As long as Dougie doesn't talk I'm not squealing about it either. This bloke's got guts and because I admire his guts I'm not going to betray him. A man values his gun and I like him for it.

It's a long rambling story about how I got into this dark cell.

Verulam is a small town so I soon learned my way about it. The guys here were nice, I mean nice. They could still afford a good laugh, something I had missed at the reformatory and at home. I got on easily with them when they saw I could light a pipe neatly and serve it equally well. My reading habits raised me a bit too. With a little discrimination I could level off the big guns without anybody biting his lips. That kind of thing. With me a bloke could spin a coin as best he could without a stir. My position was snug with these hustlers; we were all big battlers. Rolling a zol with mango leaves became my special interest too.

That's how I came to know Dougie. He had flunked his JC having learned busting a pipe and dodging school. We were in the same boat, like. I was one guy with whom he could enjoy scientific talk, as he put it. The guy is some kind of genius; the way he loves maths and engineering! He'll talk of shipbuilding and aircraft designing. Look at Tex, he'll say, the bastard never uses his brains. I don't know how he got through his nine. Dougie failed to conceal his dislike for 'educated bastards'. I hope this doesn't hurt you. You don't look the sort of guy to be easily hurt. His brother was a doctor, actually he still is, and they failed to see eye to eye. That could be the reason. Or maybe his brother is a bastard; there are so many of them.

Anyway, that has nothing to do with my being here.

We were gambling at Brime's tearoom. The whole crowd was there. A goofed lad with spitting cotton on the sides of his mouth – Sammy, who walked as if there was red-hot iron on the ground and could imitate any singer with his guitar and singing – Elvis, the Beatles, Otis Redding, Ray Charles. With him any number could win and that's the only reason anybody liked him. There was Micky Two who had switched from being a shoe-shine boy to washing taxis at the rank; Jack, who always had a football magazine shoved in the back pocket of his Levi's and dreamed of playing like Pèle – good as he is he drinks too much. And Jay Singh, a hawk-eyed and serious chap who made a point of seeing every Steve McQueen picture and talking about it. Everyone called him the Kid for his neck-or-nothing gambling habits. No man could lose like him.

And there was Alec, just from 'inside' after pulling eighteen months for a small part in an armed robbery. Alec was a new man now; the way he held the fag, the way he forced an angry look onto his baby-face. If there is anything good he inherited from his prison term, that's honesty. I mean honesty, not the blind honesty of the Bible. For the first time I heard him say 'no' when he wasn't sure of something. His loud-mouthed expression had also gone. He moved in a dignified manner, like a soldier who has won his first stripe in the army and has to play up to his new station.

There were many more guys there that afternoon, I can't count them all. There was also Ismail, a dirty fat slob and a police pimp.

Dougie's jalopy rattled onto the scene.

'Move one side, you sloppy head.' Dougie could bully anybody when he felt like it.

'Laaities, give us some air.' He was bellowing at a group of interested boys.

'What's all this conglomeration?' That was Micky Two.

'Congregation Micky, not conglomeration,' someone poked in.

'Conglomeration, who's talking of congregation? You can't tell me fuck-all, I go for big terms. I was once a tea-boy for a fuckin' lawyer, what are you telling me, a snaai like you.' The atmosphere was already hot; Sipho, a very rash gambler had lost two rands and his face was changing. But there was Dougie to handle him in case he tried funny tricks, so the game was safe. Jay was already pawning his jacket, just to lay a bet.

'Some ganja if a man smaaks any.' Dougie had several parcels in his hands.

'Ketna?' Harry wanted to buy.

'You know I slaat my zol bob-a-time, and I don't slaat jinks.'

'OK, gimi one kaatjie.' That's the way a man had to deal. You had to try one kaatjie first, that was the law of the game – know a guy's stuff well before you plunge in.

'Hell, Rooies, gimi another four kaatjies and keep the change.' He gives him a fifty-cent piece.

Dougie passed the start onto me. 'We

go it fifty-fifty.' Though he liked me, today Dougie was being unusually kind. We gambled and lost.

'You bloody gulls, fonky makes donky.' I was on the rocks, so we had to back out.

'You want to catch a nigh?' Dougie asks me. I say sure. Who doesn't like a nigh? That man must be a fool.

'Let's beat it then — Greenwood Park.' By this time I knew most of Dougie's connections at Greenwood and at Sydenham. He was their merchant, exchanging dagga for pinched stuff like copper, goods from the docks or any other gadget that brought him cash. I dived into the jalopy.

'No time to tune,' he told me as we parked before one big house. 'All you do is make eyes at her while I'm talking, if she raises her voice then I know you're in. I'll just slip into the next room with her sister. She won't let you tune, too stuck up.' So we ducked into the house. It worked out to the last figure.

'The jerries came here looking for Emmanuel. What's up?' the elder sister, the thin one with broad hips, asked Dougie.

'He hasn't registered for military training for all I know. And I can't understand why they want us 'coloureds' to fight for them, it's their little business they want to solve, not ours.'

We left after dusk. After a few more stops we headed for Verulam.

'I've got some thick soup for us two here Mike. Can I trust you?'

'You never doubted me in the first place, at least you didn't show it. But why buy me over with a fuck?'

'To open the deal in a clean way.'

'The deal is settled.' I guess I had no choice. Friendship for friendship. Dougie took from the back seat that queer parcel he had taken from the big house. Wrapped in brown paper was an FN rifle, two brownies and a .33.

There are customers in the reserves, I'm sure. You know the draads. We parted and I took the stuff home. I had reliable connections who could take the articles for the price I named. Two more days to go and I get rid of the bloody stuff. Buried them, that's what I did. I can afford to tell you this because you don't look like a pimp. You are an honest man, I can see it in your eyes. Too damned good to get into a fighting mood. You can't smack a fly, that is the trouble with you, man. Honest and educated, not many educated guys are honest these days.

So I had two days to go. Exactly two days. I was sure of my cards. Monday, and the cash comes in.

But on Sunday morning I was in for a surprise. Just coming from my girl's place and my granny's waiting for me.

Two cops, darkies, snatched me out the van. Giants, they set me thinking of a Tarzan colour film, smelling of an artificial jungle.

'Police were looking for you. They got Dougie. You still causing trouble? I thought you had changed.' I had changed, but a man is always a victim of circumstance.

'Circumstance! When you let it come into your way?' Granny was boiling. She forgets that once you're in, you're in for keeps. And I'm one guy who'll play the game to the end.

They nabbed me the following day. My blind move: I shouldn't have gone to the pictures. For the whole day I wasn't home on Sunday and I slept out at another girl's place. A man was moving on a moving target, see. Next day I thought I should straighten my limbs and the cinema was the natural thing for me. To blues my problems away in action. Maybe it's because I've got no ear for music. Too sentimental for me.

Even the film wasn't worth half the risk, that Costa Nostra type where the fellow joins them when he fails to beat them. A very lousy thing for a man who wants to live. Live, man, live. I hadn't checked the display casement. I just burrowed in.

When I sneaked out there was a white jerry at the door. Someone even said they were looking for a terrorist, silly things people can say at times about others. I can't figure myself being labelled a terrorist. Idea now was to walk slowly until I reached the opposite side of the street. I had gone past the cop; he didn't know me. That bastard Ismail — I have a feeling he burned my boats — the way he cast his dirty eyes at me when the jerry pounced on me. Then they brought me here in a dark van.

Two cops, darkies, snatched me out the van. Giants, they set me thinking of a Tarzan colour film, smelling of an artificial jungle.

'Nou praat, jou kaffer, daai boesman het alles belui.' Which boesman? The man was off his nuts. I know that dirty old trick. I put the see-saw together; even if Dougie had talked I had to deny it at first, to be one better than the buggers. Then why is he not here, or show me his statement, I mean his confession. Nothing. If he hasn't talked, he must be shading someone at the end of the line. The thin girl with broad hips only knew Dougie and me. Poor thing. She must have failed to stand the slaps.

'Meneer, ek is nie 'n kaffer.' First step towards baffling his jerry mentality. The bastard senses my defiant innocence as I pretend to study his callousness with self-pity. I have my conclusions about him and this he fails to see. They all fail.

'You're not going to co-operate with us?' Big jerry again.

'Where are the guns?'

'I'm co-operating, and you don't seem to appreciate my effort. That is the difference.' Of course, I'm lying.

'Hy gaan praat dié donner, Meneer.' A hefty Indian in plain clothes collars me. Buster you're wrong. Never mind the torture.

Do I have to go through the fistings and the kickings that first day? And the torture every third day since I'm here? I don't want to go in for contravening the Official Secrets Act or for Perjury, if you're going to report my story. And I wonder when will you get out of here.

I also hate taking oaths and abiding by them like a blaring sheep. There is a time when I've felt I couldn't take any more, but something told me, don't take it lying down and you've won.

'So, kaffer, you're not talking?' The officer with moustaches like Hitler's is trying to bully me. None of that 'kaffer' stunt with me.

'Well, my boy, since we can't get a thing out of you, we shall have to scratch it out. Is that what you want?' They all try to be innocent once you show your teeth. As if he cares a brass farthing for what I want.

'I want to get out of here, I know nothing about guns, can't your brains soak that in?' My turn to be aggressive now. One thing I learned from Joey is that a man should stick by his guns. And why are they so worried about three, four miserable guns? Why, you tell me?

Because I'm sure Dougie swore by all the gods, I had nothing to do with guns. So is he. That man's got guts. Guts to wipe me clean. Or they would have shown him to me. As long as he keeps his trap shut, I'm silent. Those two bitches. We shouldn't have got involved in this. Like I said, one can't blame female weakness at times.

'Well, I sympathise with you. You were helping a friend and you forgot it was criminal,' the Hitler is saying. They sympathise and yet tighten the screws: this I've learned.

'We are keeping you till you speak truth.' Truth, what truth? And the torture. All I know is because I didn't break that day, they'll keep on wasting their bloody time and breath.

So today they are turning the heat on me. Again. And again. I'll just have to pin my concentration on one thing: I'm not talking.

By the way, don't you think it's strange being shut in here with you? There are two possibilities, either you're a pimp or I've won. A clear win, that's what I think it is.

Bushcraft

A Chapter from the novel 'July's Children' by Nadine Gordimer

Illustration, Angelina Vermaak

The white man had watched the warthog family shifting through the grasses, appearing as the aerials of raised tails, then cropping nearer and nearer, each afternoon as they fed, the adults' coarse hairy backs gleaming with glistens of mud from the wallow. It was a sight for tourists in a game reserve; drink in hand, legs crossed at the picture window of an airconditioned bungalow.

There were five young, two grown females and the big male with his cowcatcher tusks on a snout that was, in fact, shaped rather like an old steam railway-engine. The blacks in the village had no guns and feared the tusks; the pigs concentrated on feeding and showed no more than the usual deep, general distrust of beasts for humans, following whatever it was, plant or grass, that attracted them nearer and nearer to the huts, and then, at the lift of a head (one of the sows or the boar) running up the pennant of tail and turning about to trot off swiftly. Their heavy bodies bounced like a corseted woman. At that tourists used to laugh; the ugliness clowns the dignity, the dainty trot the overweight — but there are no tourists anymore. They stopped coming when the guerilla fighters began to share the game parks with the animals; long before the rocket bomb destruction of Johannesburg and the closing of the airport sent Bamford Smales and his family to take refuge — temporarily, *of course* — in the distant home village of the black servant, July, who had worked for them in the city for fifteen years.

There had not been much time to think of material possessions, for people like themselves who had been born in the country and stayed too long. Bam had never owned a revolver, back there — didn't want to be in a position to take someone's life — but he did remember to bring his 12-bore shotgun and he kept it hidden, even in the cramped and primitive conditions under which they were living — and lucky to be alive.

Now he pulled the gun out of the rotten thatch of the hut allotted to the family and appeared with it before July's people. He did not know everyone knew he had the gun; that the children, who made free of every hut as the cockroaches did, knew everything and chattered of all. He walked among the villagers harmlessly; look, he and his gun were theirs. Some of the women smiled, most ignored him. There was a trail of children led by his own son Victor, ta-ra-ra-ing, banging tins and boasting. July had always kept superstitiously clear of shotguns; unpacking the hunting gear in the backyard after his employer returned from a guinea-fowl shoot, he would put the gun-cases straight into the hands of Bam with the slow, gingerly movements of fingertips singed by fear. All to the good, that way he didn't throw them about and damage them. But his friend showed the interest that claims some technical knowledge. This young man wanted to hold the gun; Bam corrected the way he approached the sights and explained how the barrels worked. — Have you ever fired a shot? —

The young man unnecessarily shook his head and either laughed at white ignorance or forgetfulness — no black had been given a licence to own a gun. — I read about it. —

So he could speak a little English. Whether he had read about shootings or read some crude clandestine sheet on handling firearms . . . such things had been circulating in the most unexpected, remote areas of the country over the past ten years — at every political trial of blacks the State produced them in evidence of subversion. But with the sweetness and freedom that came from powerlessness (for the time being, until they got out of here) Bam was almost flippant. — I'll let you try sometime. What's your name? —

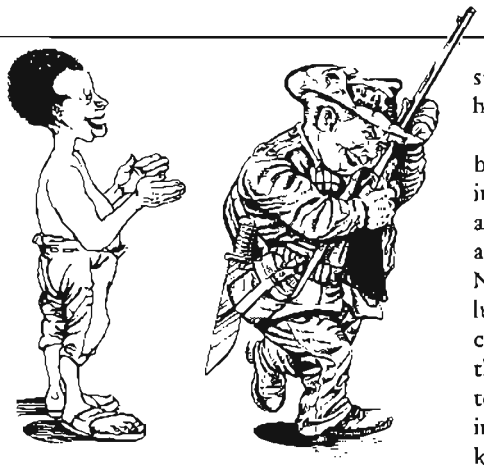
— Daniel. — He pointed towards himself the gun that was back in Bam's hands until the barrels were looking him right in the eyes, two blue-steel tunnels with an immaculate burnish, a precision of echoing roundness spinning away with the light that whirled along them — something more perfect than any object in the village or that he had ever seen, anywhere. He concentrated a long moment, imposing respect against frivolous interruption. Then he released himself with a small sound, inconclusive, disbelieving. Perhaps he didn't credit death could be so clean; perhaps he thought he had looked it back in the eye; perhaps he was too young to believe it existed.

Bam waited hidden near the hog wallow. He had with him one youngster of about fourteen he had appointed. He had had to cast about in his mind for something to threaten or promise that would keep Victor behind at the village — his kind did not strike their children and it was difficult to deprive the child of some treat or privilege here, in penalty for disobedience, as so easily could be done at home. — I promise you I'll let you have the skin. We'll get one of July's relations to teach us how to tan it. —

– And if you don't get anything? – The child yelled after him. – What'll you give me if you don't get anything? –

The father did not look up. Pushing through tongues of wet grasses, a youth metamorphosed into the quickness and hesitancy of a buck, beside him – half in the familiar experience of his weekend pleasures from back there, half in the jarring alertness of these days broken from the string of his life's continuity and range, living minute to minute, his legs taking him where a patrol or roving band might come upon him, about to risk shots by which he might give away the presence of a family of whites hidden in those huts – dislocated by the contrasting perceptions of habit and strangeness, he had a foretaste of the cold resentment he would feel towards his son sometimes when he grew to be a man; a presentiment of the expulsion from a paradise not of childhood, but of parenthood.

He waited in the reeds with the young black frowning in wretched endurance of the mosquitoes. The warthogs came and he fired at the nearest piglet when they were in the position from which they would have the least chance of getting away. All the old games, the titillation of killing-and-not-killing, the pretence of hide-and-seek, not shooting except on the wing etc., invented to make killing a pleasure, were in another kind of childhood he had been living in to the age of 39, back there. The first piglet dropped and he got another, fatally seconds slow to disappear after the adults into the bush. The boy who had been a buck became a predator, leaping onto the first piglet; then a hunter, tying its legs together with one of the bits of string, used over and over, that were treasured in every hut. The animal was quite still, already, dying fast with the settling of sight in its eyes on some point that wasn't there. The other piglet was hit in the body and lay kicking in a tantrum of pain; or thought its waving legs were carrying it after the big safe bodies of the adults. The black boy, with the first beast neatly trussed to his hand, squatted to wait for the other to die. Bam waved him aside and shot it through the head. Its young bones were so light that the snout smashed. It was horrible, the bloodied pig-face weeping blood and trailing blood-snot; the clean death from the chromed barrels that smelled aseptically of gun-oil. Game-birds (his usual prey) had no faces, really; thin aesthete's bony structure with its bloodless beak and no flesh, a scrap of horny skin, wrinkled paper eyelids – a guinea-fowl head doesn't look much different, dead, from alive. The shattered pig-face hung to the ground, dripping a trail all the



way back to the huts, where his function as a provider of meat settled upon him as a status.

He was aware his wife might remark upon or sympathize with the necessity. He put up an off-hand taciturnity against this. He understood, for the first time, that he was a killer. A butcher like any other in rubber boots among the slush of guts, urine and blood at the abattoir, although July and his kin would do the skinning and quartering. The acceptance was a kind of relief he didn't want to discuss or communicate.

But Maureen stood by with her hands on her hips. Her calves and feet, below rolled-up jeans, showed the dirt the way blacks' didn't. – Give them the bigger one. –

He didn't need advice on justice or the protocol of survival.

She murmured for his ear alone. – The small one will be more tender. –

He took a side of the smaller pig, and the skin for Victor, neatly headless. A man whose oedematous flesh kept him immobile, standing shaped like a black snowman outside a hut (he always wore a dirty muffler against a bubbling chest ailment) or propped in an old chair, an effigy of straw stuffed in old clothes, had come to life and chopped off the broken head. He looked around jealously and bore it away, his great soft thighs shuffling as the breasts of the women did while they pounded mealies.

Bam rigged up a spit. Without herbs, onion or pepper – only the salt Maureen massaged over the firm skin – the meat was a feast never tasted before. They and their children had not eaten warthog, and they had never before gone weeks, as they had now, without tasting meat. The incense of roasting flesh – there was not much fat, only the domestic swine runs to that – rose from the cooking-fire. There were dog-fights roused by the mere smell. The half-wild, half-craven cats clamoured incessantly on the periphery of Maureen's preparations. She squatted, carefully basting the carcase with the juices it gave off into an old powdered-milk tin she held, a stick's length away from her, among the flames. Sweat and smoke swam across her vision and now and then she staggered up for a respite, laughing at herself, while Bam took over.

They had not known that meat can be intoxicating. Eating animated them in the way they attributed to wine, among friends, around a table. Bam sang a comic song for the youngest, Royce. Nine-year-old Gina wavered through a lullaby she had learnt from the black children who were her companions, in their language. Victor became a raconteur, past, present and distance resolved in the best tradition of anecdote: – You know what we do at school? On Fridays when the big boys go to cadets, and they're not there to boss us around in the playground –

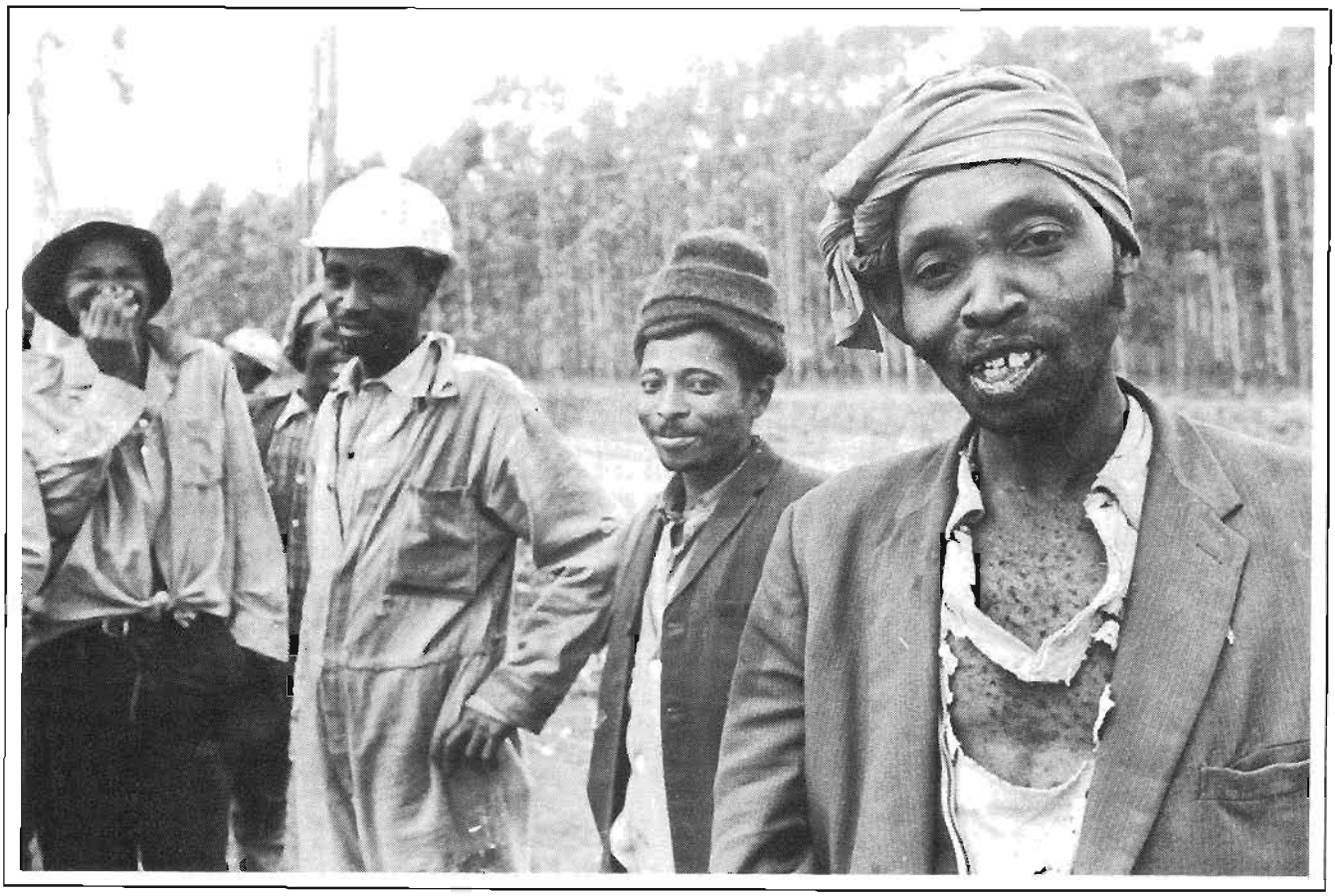
There were drunken, giggling accusations of boasting, lying; and swaggering denials. The children made the grown-ups laugh. Royce hummed and sucked on the pipe-stem of a rib-bone; was almost asleep. Carried off in a state of unprotesting confusion to be bedded down, he spoke with content. – There's no school tomorrow, is there? – It was what he would ask, sometimes, on a Friday evening when he was allowed to stay up late.

They had not made love since they left behind them the master bedroom *en suite* in their suburb. Unthinkable, living and sleeping with the three children in a hut. A place with a piece of sacking for a door. Lack of privacy killed desire; if there had been any to feel – the preoccupation with daily physical survival, so strange to them, probably had crowded that out, anyway. Tension between them took the form of the expectation of hearing a burst of martial music – that would announce the end of everything, the beginning of everything, the victory of the black forces – when they turned on the radio he had remembered to snatch up along with the gun. Tension subdued into the awkward sense of disbelief, foreboding, and yet immediate salvation (lucky to be alive, even here) that came from the reports of the battle for the city that was continuing, back there.

They were conscious of the smell of grease and meat clinging to their fingers. It was difficult to balance, in the space each kept to of the narrow iron bedstead on which they were crowded together, without folding elbows and resting hands near one's face. They made love, wrestling together with deep resonance through each other's bodies, in the presence of their children breathing close around them and the nightly intimacy of cockroaches, crickets and mice, feeling out the darkness of the hut; of the sleeping settlement; of the bush.

In the morning he had a moment of hallucinatory horror when he saw the blood of the pig on his penis – then understood it was hers.

Biddy Crewe, Omar Badsha



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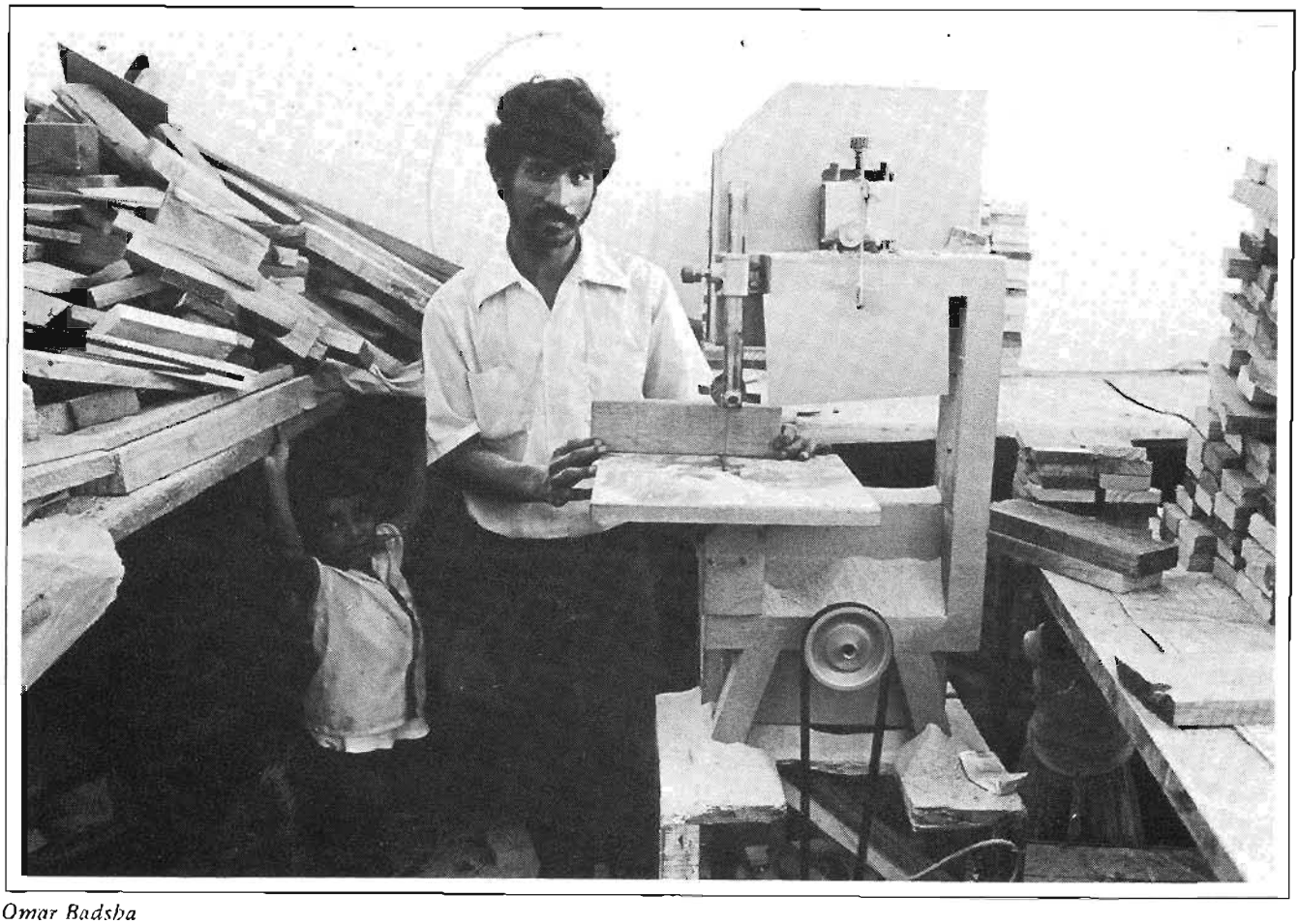


Omar Badsha

THE WINDFLOWER

A CHILDREN'S STORY BY MARGUERITE POLAND

Illustrated by Des Smart

'Once at KwaFubesi', a new collection of stories for the Children of Africa by Marguerite Poland, is now available.

Lwembu the brown jumping spider swung round the stem of the weed and peered up at the sudden brightness. Was it the moon — round as a wagon-wheel, spoked with the spurs of the blackjack seeds silhouetted against it? Oh, if it was the moon . . . to see a clear sky, heavy with stars! But no — it was only a street lamp, brighter than the dull smoke-smudge of lights which pushed up into the night.

Lwembu listened to the sounds of the rubble-heap — the rustle of dry wings as night-workers made their way out of holes and loud darting beetles flew by. Strange . . . to long for moonlight and a clean wind! But she remembered being small, when her eight curved legs were quite transparent and only the fine tracing of her body showed up against the sand.

The grass of the hillside where she had lived was always damp with morning dew. Beetles and brown wasps hunted through it and there was food for everyone. She could hang, weighting the bouncing end of a grass, dangling upside down in the sunshine while small red ants hurried along the ground beneath her.

At night she would return to the windflower where she was born and hide among its pink-tipped petals, high above her world, ringed by the horizon of hills and shadowy ravines.

But then another jumper had passed by. He had stopped and looked at her with his great round eyes. He was dark and glossy and sprang with electric speed, alarming her with his brashness. He waved his pedipalps, flexed his legs and curved himself this way and that so she could admire the sleek designs on his body. He laughed at the cumbersome dungbeetles that plodded by, rolling their harvest up the slope and he darted at Lwembu's sisters who peered curiously at him from the leaves of the windflower.

'My name is Tsiba,' said the stranger to Lwembu. 'You must come with me. Life seems very dull here and there is so much I can show you.'

Being young, Lwembu admired his swagger, and when he jeered at the dungbeetles and laughed at her sisters, she scoffed too. She scuttled after him as he sauntered off, without glancing back at the windflower which had been her home.

It was a long journey and Lwembu had none of the quick energy of her companion. But she dared not rest, for he hurried on, paying little attention to her questions about the things they saw along the way.

Lwembu became more and more startled by the throngs of creatures which they met. In the shadow of each stone hid yet another fly or beetle, mite or ant. And the smells of the rubble-heap were pungent and strange.

'Why is everyone hurrying?' she whispered.

'There are things to do here,' answered her companion, a little condescendingly.

A strand of grass bent across their path. A slug hung on the stem, her squat shadow dangling listlessly over them as they passed. 'The Zindlavini!' shrieked the slug and Lwembu cried out in fright as the black jumping spider dragged her under a stone.

The insects which crowded the path scuttled in all directions. Lwembu heard the tramp of feet and crouched down, not daring to move. Six large spiders slouched by. Their legs were banded black and yellow and bristled with stiff spines. They had fierce jaws and they glanced about with a multitude of hooded eyes, snapping up moths and flies with frightening ease and talking to each other in the cool banter of those who are afraid of no one.

'Who are they?' whispered Lwembu.

'The Zindlavini,' muttered Tsiba, not quite as brash as before. 'They do as they like here. They don't even care about the Maphela.'

'What are they?' asked Lwembu. But her companion did not bother to answer — she would know about the Maphela soon enough.

So it was that Lwembu came to live with Tsiba in the rubbleheap in a dark, damp cranny among the rocks. She tried to build a nest — a white silk pouch in which to lay her eggs, but a green trail of water, slimey as a snail's track, crept down the wall and loosened the threads. Every other place was occupied. There was nowhere to sit quietly, for no matter where she turned, eyes watched her.

'We must go somewhere else,' said Lwembu to the black jumping spider.

'This is where I was born — why can't we stay here?' he inquired peevishly, inspecting the wall.

'If you could find somewhere just a little drier . . . '

'Alright, alright,' he cried, annoyed.

Lwembu sat among the heap of tangled web while the other occupants of the crevice edged closer, hostile but curious, watching as she tried to unravel the ruins of her nest.

Tsiba returned at last. 'I have found something,' he announced. 'It is cramped but you had better be satisfied . . . and he looked around meaningfully at the watchers who nudged each other and laughed among themselves.

Lwembu stared in dismay at her new home. She followed reluctantly as Tsiba climbed towards a mass of matted grey webbing which hung between two rocks. She could see the movement of smaller creatures going up and down the dusty interior. Every now and then the whole structure shuddered as something heavier, hidden from view, walked across it.

'Surely we can't live in there with all those others,' she began.

'Yes we can! There is nowhere else to go,' snapped Tsiba. 'Besides, we'll have interesting company and there's space to build our nest,' he added, crawling in among the debris.

Suddenly the web heaved and shook and Lwembu clutched Tsiba who had raised his forelegs in defence.

'What was that?' she cried.

'The spider who spun this web,' he replied. 'You had better hurry and build our nest. We need somewhere to escape if she comes. She is very big.'

'What will she do to us?' whispered Lwembu.

'Eat us if she can,' answered Tsiba, matter-of-factly. 'Although others usually don't like the taste of jumpers.'

But Lwembu was not listening. Frantically she wove a small white cell, pushing the silk out of her spinnerets and fastening it deftly to the bobbing walls of the larger spider's web.

She sealed the edges of the pouch, leaving a small, flat doorway. No sooner had they gone inside than the web shuddered and swayed again.

'Who's in there?' demanded a rough voice and someone probed the entrance with a hairy leg.

Lwembu retreated in horror, but Tsiba darted up and nipped it.

'Who gave you permission to invade my nest?' cried the intruder, withdrawing sharply.

Tsiba poked out his head and glared at the huge hunting spider which squatted outside.

'Oh why must it be jumpers!' she exclaimed in exasperation. 'I am plagued by jumpers! Now are they any good to eat – noisy, troublesome boarders! I'll find a way to throw you out,' she shouted, and Tsiba sprang after her, jeering as she waddled away.

Each day Tsiba polished his legs and went out. He lounged about the rubble-heap, boasting to his friends, sometimes returning with them to the hunting spider's big, untidy nest and goading her with taunts. She retreated before so many, threatening vengeance. Lwembu trembled when she heard her – the hunting spider would not be afraid of one so brown and small as she.

The time came for Lwembu to lay her eggs. She lined the silk pouch with them and sat turning them over, searching for a tiny form inside.

Tsiba returned from the rubble-heap, looked about and said roughly, 'Hmmmm, there is no room for me with all these in here,' and he pushed the eggs aside.

'Leave those!' cried Lwembu. 'Go away! Go away!' she shouted, jumping towards him, too angry to be afraid.

'What?' he sneered. 'Once you begged me to stay in the nest. Now you say I must go!'

'Yes – go! Go!' she cried. 'You brought me to this rubbleheap and now I'll have dozens of spiderlings to care for and keep away from the Zindlavini.'

'Of course, one as ignorant as you would rather keep company with dung-beetles,' remarked Tsiba disdainfully.

'Yes I would!'

'Then go back where you came from!' he retorted, stalking out.

'If I only knew the way . . .' she whispered.

Lwembu gathered her scattered eggs and rearranged then. Then she crept out and climbed the blackjack weed that grew near the web – following the brightness of a streetlamp . . . looking for the moon.

At last she slid back into the web, returning cautiously to her nest. She stopped in dismay. The hunting spider crouched outside the doorway. She was muttering to herself as she scooped out Lwembu's eggs with her foreleg.

'My eggs!' shrieked Lwembu.

The hunting spider spun round and laughed, clutching her prize. 'I'll teach you jumpers!' she said hoarsely. 'Where is your mate? I'll eat him before I'm finished.'

'He's gone,' blazed Lwembu. 'Give me my eggs.'

'Do you think I want more jumpers living in my web?' she retorted.

'Just give them to me and I'll move somewhere else,' begged Lwembu.

'No!' cried the big hunting spider. '*You* may go somewhere else, but *these* will be sure to return sometime –

always finding a corner in the homes of others and pushing them out . . . ' and Lwembu leapt out of reach as the big spider lunged at her.

'I'll catch you yet,' she shouted as she stamped off, carrying Lwembu's eggs wrapped carelessly in a net of thread.

Lwembu crawled into the nest and stared round. She collected what remained of her brood and moved them to a far corner. She crouched on the floor and listened to the sounds outside – the faint scufflings of feet, cries and voices, and the hunting spider complaining somewhere in the distance. Later she heard the dull thud of rain. Dusty grey drops slid down the walls of the web, making them clammy and damp.

Lwembu went out early the next day. It was a cold morning, sour with the smell of wet ash. She joined a group of spiders like herself while they probed and inspected the bare stones for prey.

'Let us go and hunt in the milkweed,' suggested a companion.

'I haven't been there before,' said Lwembu.

'It's a long way, but there's more to eat. We must be home by dark or the Maphela might catch us.'

'Who are the Maphela?' asked Lwembu.

'Don't you know about the Maphela?' cried the others in astonishment.

'The Maphela are cockroaches,' said a small black spider. 'They go about at night harassing those who aren't at home. If they catch you they will imprison you in the old drain where they live.'

'It's a terrible place,' remarked another. 'It's dark and slimy and a few of the Zindlavini have been thrown in there as well.'

Lwembu shuddered. 'Why do you live here?' she asked. 'Where I came from there was food and sunlight and it was peaceful.'

'Hah!' said the small dark spider acidly. 'You came from a place of dungbeetles and dung-flies where no one knows anything.'

'That's not so!' retorted Lwembu. 'Who of you have lived in a windflower, where there are no hunting spiders to shake you awake or Zindlavini to devour you?'

'A windflower?' said one vaguely. 'It would be lonely there.'

'A windflower indeed!' snorted another. 'There's no such thing!'

The group of spiders reached the edge of the rubble-heap where milkweed and small shrivelled shrubs clung to the slope. Beyond this grew a stretch of grass crossed by a fence. The wind gusted sharply, tossing shreds of paper against the wire, crucifying them till they fell twitching to the ground.

They were chased under a stone by a crab-spider with elegantly curved forelegs and a green-tinged body.

'Crab-spiders are insufferable.' muttered one of Lwembu's companions. 'They think they have the rights to all the flowering bushes.'

'Just because she is green like the milkweed – why should it belong to her?' said another, glaring at the crab-spider who languidly ascended her safety thread to settle back in the sunlight at the top of the bush.

They turned home in the late afternoon. They hurried along, staying close together, bumping into each other in their haste. But as they pushed through a gap in the narrow pathway the Zindlavini sauntered out in front of them, bright against the shadow of the wall.

The jumpers stopped, forelegs raised, easing onto their back legs, ready to spring.

How slowly the big spiders seemed to approach, mesmerizing the small jumpers with their gaze. A gecko, disturbed from his sleep on the wall, bobbed up and down in alarm. 'Gick, gick, gick! The Zindlavini!' he cried.

Lwembu was pinned at the end of a leg. She lay quite still. But the greedy spider reached for another jumper and her weight shifted. Lwembu scurried and leapt for the wall.

'Gick, gick,' cried the gecko, scurry-

ing across her path and knocking the indlavini spider back.

Lwembu slid into a shallow crack in the bricks. She could hear the shouts and scuffling below her and the Zindlavini laughing together, but she dared not creep out in case her pursuer was waiting.

At last she slid cautiously to the ground. The path was empty, the light was fading and the wind had died. She was confused by the dark and she turned this way and that, looking for a direction. She went further and further into the unfamiliar centre of the rubble-heap.

She came to a clearing, lit by the cold brightness of a streetlamp. The shadows of the bushes and stones were tall and sharp and her own shadow grew beside her, long-legged and menacing. She backed away in alarm.

She waited under a stone, unsure of what to do. Then she heard an unfamiliar rustling. Glancing around nervously, she saw seven strange, whip-feelered silhouettes creeping towards her in single file. The light glinted on the smooth brown plates of their wing-shields.

Lwembu crouched back on her jumping legs. She did not have to be told that these were the Maphela patrolling the rubble-heap. She knew they would find her, feeling for her movements with the curved tips of their antennae. She waited for them.

They came up behind her and pounced on her rear legs knowing she could not jump without them. They inspected her carefully with small, hard eyes and then they marched her away – looking, always looking for another victim.

They caught a fly who had been sleeping in the open and a rain-spider with only six legs who tried to hobble out of reach. A small hawk-moth was bundled into the centre of the column as it hurried along to the place where the Maphela kept their prisoners.

At last they reached their destination and Lwembu and the others were lined up in the damp grass at the edge of a gridded drain. One by one they were driven through the bars. Eyes watched as Lwembu crawled down into the darkness, prodded impatiently by one of the Maphela.

'In here, in here,' urged a voice from somewhere in the gloom. 'If you go further the Zindlavini will eat you.'

Lwembu hesitated and the cockroach pushed her, but she was anchored by her safety thread and she pulled herself up to the lip of a ledge. Two spikey legs reached out to her and a small dung-beetle dragged her into a crack in the side of the drain. 'If you stay here, the bigger spiders won't be able to catch you and the Maphela are too fat to squeeze in,' he said.

The dungbeetle looked at Lwembu earnestly. 'Now you are here, you won't eat the others, will you?'

'Which others?' asked Lwembu.

The dungbeetle whispered into the shadows. Cautiously, suspiciously, a thin old long-legged spider and a grey crab-spider crept out and stood behind him, watching Lwembu.

'We call the old one Milenze,' began the dungbeetle.

'The last jumper we helped ate one of us,' interrupted Milenze querulously.

'We should chase her away,' whispered the crab-spider. 'You shouldn't trust a jumper. They will eat anything.'

'Leave her,' said the dungbeetle. 'We are all prisoners.'

Lwembu wedged herself into the crack and waited in the darkness. She thought of the small silk cell where her eggs were laid and she listened to the Zindlavini far below, taunting the Maphela who patrolled the drain.

When day broke a dull light crept through the grid and Lwembu could see other insects clinging to the rough ridges of the walls. The dungbeetle crawled towards her.

'How can we get out of here?' said Lwembu.

'We can't.'

'Surely there's a way to escape.'

'The Maphela keep guard all the time,' he replied. 'Sometimes, when the place fills up too much they let out the more troublesome – like the Zindlavini. The Maphela are bullies and cowards. Not one of them will go near an indlavini spider alone. They're too afraid.'

'Just dart at one and see how it runs!' remarked the crab-spider joining them.

'How did they catch you?' asked Lwembu. 'I've never met a crab-spider in the rubble-heap.'

'I should think not!' exclaimed the crab-spider. 'I lived among the milkweed with my own kind – not like the riff-raff here,' she added, disdainfully. 'I was chased into the rubble-heap by a bird and had to hide. The Maphela found me. Oh, how this place has ruined my skin! I used to be a leafy sort of colour. I had a bright sheen on my legs – but look at me now . . . '

'There she goes again,' said Milenze, the old spider. 'It's all we ever hear – how colourful she was!'

'Well it's true,' snapped the crab-spider. 'And now I have to live with creatures like you!' And she flounced off.

The dungbeetle smiled. 'Leave her, Milenze,' he said. 'She hasn't been here long. She'll soon forget and be as drab as the rest of us. That's what happens here. We all become the same – just drab. And after a while the Maphela can do what they like with us.'

'Let us dig a little way into the wall of the drain,' suggested Lwembu one day. 'There are places where the cracks go through to the earth. If we hollowed out a small hiding place, we would be more comfortable.'

'It's too much work,' mumbled Milenze, the old spider.

'It will keep us busy,' said the dung-beetle.

'Why do we need to be busy?' inquired the crab-spider.

'We must have something to do,' said Lwembu firmly, and she started to scrape with her strong forelegs. 'If we line the hole with thread, it will keep us warm.' And she remembered her eggs lying coldly in the hunting spider's web. She pushed the thought away and set to work. The dungbeetle dug beside her and Milenze complained at being showered with sand. But even the crab-spider condescended to help at last and forgot how important she was.

'Ah, how warm we'll be,' cried Milenze surveying the finished chamber. 'And this shall be my corner,' he announced, settling down where the crab-spider had woven a thick lining for herself.

'It's comfortable! In fact it's very nice,' he exclaimed, almost brightly.

'Yes,' said Lwembu bleakly. 'I suppose it is.'

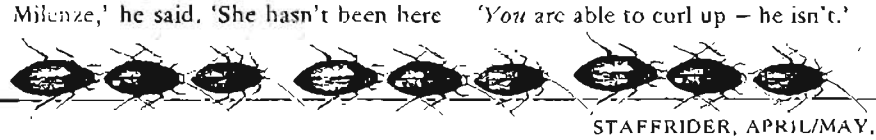
But it was cramped and hot at night and sometimes Lwembu crept out, gliding carefully up the walls of the drain. She found a shadow to hide in, just below the ledge where the Maphela watched the entrance.

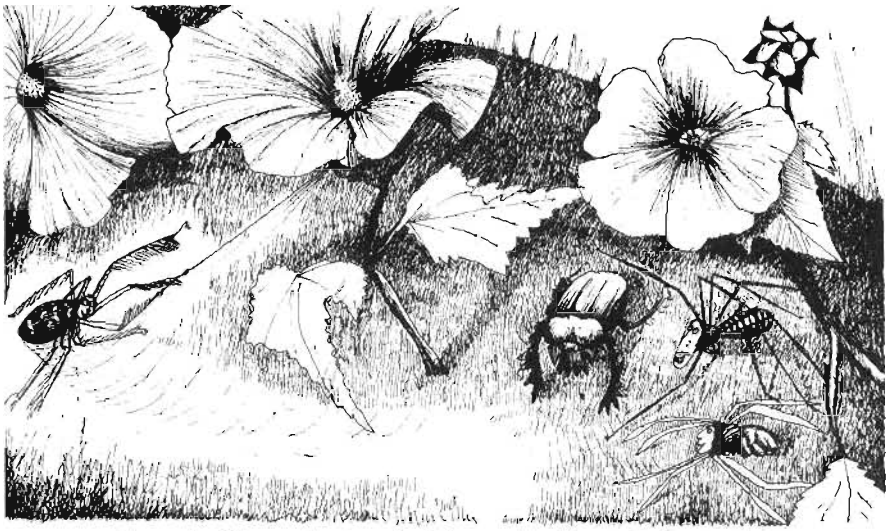
Sometimes a flurry of cool night air sank momentarily around her and she raised her legs, trying to hold it. Once there was moonlight and wind, when a shimmer of winged seeds was blown across the small circle of sky, framed by the drain. And she heard a night-bird call: the clear, sad note she had once known so well – up on a hillside where a windflower grew.

The Maphela had just returned from a night's patrol of the rubble-heap. Lwembu and the dungbeetle could see a ragged group of moths and flies huddled together waiting to be herded into the drain. The crab-spider pushed her way onto the ledge beside them.

'That complaining creepy-crawly takes up all the space in our house with his long legs,' she remarked, glancing at Milenze who slept in an untidy heap.

'Never mind,' said the dungbeetle. '*You* are able to curl up – he isn't.'





'A windflower! A windflower!' she cried to the others; 'I have found a windflower. Come and see!'

'Well, I think he should go somewhere else.'

'That's unfair,' said Lwembu, keeping an eye on the Maphela who had started down the walls with the new arrivals.

'Why is it unfair?' cried the crab-spider, turning towards them. 'He can find another place to live. Who would want to eat him anyway? He's so thin and miserable and . . . '

'Watch out!' cried Lwembu jumping backwards as the leading cockroach marched past their ledge. His searching feelers toppled the crab-spider over the edge, down into the drain.

'She forgot to anchor her safety thread,' cried the dungbeetle.

'I must go and find her,' whispered Lwembu. 'We can't leave her to the Zindlavini.'

'We'll have to! If you go, they will catch you as well.'

Lwembu shook her head. 'I must try.' She anchored a strong safety thread and swung carefully down into the gloom. She descended slowly, for she did not want the watchers to hear her sliding past. She dangled motionlessly as an indlavini spider strode by.

Eyes watched and something shuffled in a cranny nearby. She called softly for the crab-spider but there was no reply. She saw a quick flash in the shadow as another of the Zindlavini turned to face her.

She leapt downwards, letting the thread sing out behind her – too fast for the bigger spider to catch her as she passed.

Her line shuddered and bounced as the indlavini tried to hook it and pull her up. Lwembu sprang for the opposite wall, dragging the thread out of reach.

Down she spun again, right to the depths of the drain and there she stopped in dismay, bobbing just above a dark, slimey pool which filled the bottom of the shaft. The crab spider must have fallen into the water. Lwembu would have to go back alone. And if her thread broke . . . She shuddered.

'Lwembu! Lwembu!' a small frightened voice echoed in the darkness.

'Where are you?' whispered Lwembu urgently.

'Here – at the water's edge.'

'I'm coming. Be ready to leap. Hold onto me.'

'Yes, yes, hurry!' wailed the crab-spider.

Lwembu swung in a low arc, back and forth between the walls. She recoiled in alarm as she brushed bodies and feelers. Then swiftly, she dipped down. The crab-spider stood poised to spring and Lwembu tensed herself to clamber up the thread so that the weight of both did not drag them into the water.

The crab-spider jumped, grasping frantically for Lwembu's back legs. Down they plunged – but Lwembu struggled along the thread, dragging the crab-spider up behind her.

They climbed slowly and a faint fleck of light high above showed where the drain opened to the sky. They heard the rasp of feet as the Maphela marched down the shaft. Lwembu pulled the crab-spider along as fast as she dared. The Maphela were hurrying towards them, for they could see the two small spiders struggling on the anchor line.

The dungbeetle and Milenze who were looking anxiously down at them from the ledge cried, 'Hurry, hurry!'

'Pull up the thread,' panted Lwembu.

The old spider dragged at it with his long legs. It snapped. Lwembu leapt for the wall with the crab-spider still clinging to her.

'Run!' shrieked the dungbeetle, trying to divert the Maphela.

Lwembu jumped as she never had before – right over the leading cockroach onto the ledge. She pulled the crab-spider after her. They dived for the entrance of their cell. Lwembu crouched in a corner panting. The crab-spider looked at her earnestly. 'Thank you Lwembu,' she whispered.

Milenze sat up in alarm. 'Something strange is happening,' he said. 'Do you hear how the Maphela are running?'

They all listened. Many feet rustled on the walls – sounding like drought-brittle leaves. The dungbeetle peeped through the entrance and drew back spluttering.

'I can't breathe,' he gasped. 'The drain is full of smoke.'

Lwembu looked out cautiously. Through the smoke she could see the Maphela pushing each other in their haste to get deeper into the shaft. She wiped her eyes and peered upwards. A ripple of flame broke through the streaming smoke. She could hear the rush of wind and fire racing across the opening of the drain.

'Help me block the door,' she said to the crab-spider. They wove a screen across the entrance.

'We must sit quietly,' said Lwembu. 'There's very little air in here – at least we can keep out the smoke.'

The four small creatures waited. The chamber became hotter and hotter. The old spider sat hunched in his corner, moaning to himself. The dungbeetle lay as near the wall as he could – for his carapace was hard and he did not feel the heat as much as the others. The crab-spider crouched next to Lwembu, afraid.

The hours crept by. Milenze's body sagged between his legs and the dungbeetle shifted uncomfortably.

'Listen,' whispered the crab-spider. 'What's that sound?'

They heard a steady rhythmic beat – distant yet distinct.

'Could it be . . . ?' the old spider whimpered.

'It's rain!' cried Lwembu.

'Shall we go and see?' said the crab-spider eagerly.

'The walls will still be hot,' warned Milenze.

'Perhaps we will be able to escape,' began Lwembu excitedly. 'The Maphela all went to the bottom of the drain.'

'Let me look,' said the dungbeetle, tearing down the thread screen and peering out. Smoke flooded the chamber but he crept onto the ledge. The walls of the shaft burnt his feet and he scuttled back to the others.

'The shaft is very hot but we must go now – the Maphela won't stay down there long. Climb on my back,' he said to Milenze. 'I will carry you.'

'I'll fall off,' protested the spider.

'You will burn your feet,' cried the dungbeetle. 'Hurry.'

Lwembu and the crab-spider pushed Milenze onto the dungbeetle's back,

tucking in his legs. They struggled up the walls towards the light.

Lwembu stared after them. 'They must make it,' she whispered. 'Milenze hasn't seen the daylight for a lifetime. He can't remember the sun.'

'Shhh,' whispered her companion. 'Something's coming.'

Far below they heard scuffles and groans as the Maphela ventured upwards. Lwembu tested the wall and recoiled at the heat.

She saw the dungbeetle struggle over the lip of the drain. He reappeared and started back towards them. Already, Lwembu could hear the Maphela coming through the gloom, pushing those they met into the darkness.

'Go back,' cried Lwembu to the dungbeetle. 'We will make it alone.'

'How can we,' wailed the crab-spider. 'We'll shrivel our legs.'

'I can jump. Hold onto me. No one will catch us this time.'

The crab-spider glanced fearfully down the shaft. 'The Maphela!' she cried, almost toppling from her perch.

The Maphela rushed forward onto the ledge as Lwembu jumped. She landed unsteadily, then sprang again, just as the Maphela closed in.

The crab-spider clung on, urging her forward. They reached the ledge where the Maphela usually stood guard. It was cooler there, for rain had dripped down through the bars.

'Quickly!' cried the dungbeetle who was waiting for them. The crab-spider climbed off Lwembu's back and the three scrambled to freedom.

It was a strange procession that trailed through the burnt-out wastes. The rubble-heap lay around them — a wet, black wilderness. Above, curved a great, grey eternity of sky. No one spoke. They followed Lwembu who led them purposefully. Milenze hobbled behind her and the dungbeetle glanced around, looking for danger. But nothing stirred, except the ashes shifting restlessly.

'Where are you going?' cried the crab-spider trying to keep up.

'We must make for the open hillside,' said Lwembu.

They trudged on towards the blackened grass above the rubble-heap. Suddenly Lwembu stopped and eagerly examined the ground.

'Follow me!' she cried, leaping down an alley.

'But surely this isn't the way . . .' began the dungbeetle.

'Come!' commanded Lwembu, not heeding his protests.

The wind crept round a corner, blustering in their faces, but Lwembu darted on, searching for the place where the big hunting spider had spun her web. She went more slowly. Would the

nest still be there, dangling between the rocks, filled with small busy creatures going up and down, up and down? She hesitated, hardly daring to look.

The rain fell again, sleeting sideways, driven by the rising wind. Lwembu stopped, tense and still, and gazed at the heap of stones. The boulders were licked clean by the flames. Small threads of smoke, as grey and frail as the threads of the great spider's web wisped up and dissolved in the rain. She turned away.

'Come,' she said to the others, who had watched, bewildered. They followed silently as she went ahead.

They struggled up the hillside into the charred grass. The wind shrieked across the rubble-heap. Harder and harder it blew, snapping small dry branches from the bushes.

'Quickly, come this way,' called Lwembu, springing at the singed leaves of a broken twig. 'Hold on tightly.'

The crab-spider wrapped her forelegs round the stem. The dungbeetle wedged himself under a piece of bark and held Milenze steady. Lwembu flattened herself against the underside of a leaf. They waited for the next gust.

The hillside spun around them as they cart-wheeled across the slope in an explosion of wind and rain and lashing grass. They were tossed down, only to be lifted again and blown on — over gullies and dongas where nothing grew.

Lwembu clung to the old spider's legs and tensed herself for the next somersaulting journey away from the rubble-heap. They flew through the air and the sky turned over, above and below them. The line of hills dipped and leapt and sprang to meet them. They were flung to the ground and the twig was caught by the overhanging grass which bounced raindrops in a clean cold shower onto the small, exhausted travellers. They lay stunned, as the wind raced by, raking the slope, searching for them, unable to snatch them from their shelter. They crept into a clump of grass and slept, protected from the rain.

Lwembu stretched and looked about her in surprise. She was amazed by the light. It was not the cold grey glimmer of the drain, nor the harsh, dusty glare of the rubble-heap. It was a light she had once known well — so long, long ago: a clear green light that breathed warmly on the underside of leaves. It meant a morning full of sunshine and bird-song.

The slope below her was thick with new growth and bush lined the creases of the hills. She ran forward and then stopped — poised, stretching up on eager legs. A sprawling cluster of flowers grew at intervals in the grass. Could they be . . . were they . . . ?

She sprang towards them, faster and faster, and clambered into the nearest. She gazed up the furry stem at the ruffled pink-tipped petals of the flowerhead, splashed against the morning sky.

She plunged in among the leaves. They rustled over her with a smooth, familiar coolness. Round and round she explored, then slid, swinging joyfully to the ground.

'A windflower! A windflower!' she cried to the others, who stretched sleepily. 'I have found a windflower. Come and see.'

They hurried after her. The dungbeetle dragged Milenze through the grass and the crab-spider skipped behind them, glancing at the sun every now and then, afraid it might disappear.

'Come this way,' called Lwembu, leaping in all directions in exuberance. She sprang at the lower leaves of the flower and scuttled upwards. She swung out on her anchor thread and whirled round the heads of the others.

Even Milenze smiled as he looked in wonder at the ruff of petals. The dungbeetle stayed below, searching in the earth. The soil was soft and rich. He could drag his dung ball here and keep it safe, close to his friends.

'I think I'll stay among the leaves,' said Milenze, exploring busily. 'Heights bother me after all that time in the drain.'

'And I shall live here,' interrupted the crab-spider scampering up her safety thread. She disappeared among the petals. 'Look at my legs!' she exclaimed, peeping out excitedly. 'They aren't grey anymore — they're turning pink. Oh look at my legs!'

'And I shall visit all of you every day,' cried Lwembu, climbing up to the flowerhead where the firm yellow stamens curled round its heart.

She looked about slowly, seeing her own dark reflection in the white sheen of the petals. And between the petals, briefly, each time the wind dipped the stem, she glimpsed the sweep of hills, the stretch of summer grass, the shadows of the far ravine. And all around she heard the faint familiar murmur of contented voices: the quiet conversation which is heard in wild places — the chant and rhythm of the Bush.

SOME POINTS TO PONDER . . .
Thoughts on the disbanding of P.E.N.

by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

Other Staffriders are invited to contribute their views on this issue to our next edition.

As Mafika Gwala put it, I suspect that something more than what was expressed at the meeting at the Market Theatre lay hidden behind the decision to disband the international writers' organisation, PEN.

Firstly, I believe that one of the main aims of PEN in South Africa was to enhance South African literature to an international level and that only as a non-racial organisation could South Africa be accepted on the international scene. Secondly, it was to unite the literary world in South Africa at the common level of non-racialism.

If that was so, why is it that only two years after its formation it was decided to disband it? My personal view is that those who took part in the debate that led to the decision, perhaps for courteous reasons, avoided stating openly that the real reason for the decision was the colour question.

No one can deny that the colour problem hangs like an albatross around the necks of all South Africans, having been imposed on us by the powers that be. We have been striving to find a solution to this, with little success. Our failure to make headway, I think, is due to the fact that we have all along been working from opposite sides of the fence in an effort to achieve no more than neighbourliness among the races, which has left us caught up in the South African racial mire. What we should have done was to work for the dismantling of the fence that divides us, and then move on to establish a constructive form of communication. Only then would it be possible to unite as South Africans, irrespective of colour or creed.

This differentiation on the basis of colour has led to the exaggeration of any differences that we might have between ourselves. Unfortunately this, in turn, led to what I would refer to as confrontation or divisions within our ranks as people ostensibly committed to the struggle against racialism in our society. And, a word of warning, once we allow divisions on our front, our unity will be undermined, and this means that we shall operate as splinter groups. Although such groups can remain united within themselves, unity being strength, the unity of a few against many is foolhardiness.

Despite this, we must also consider the practicalities of the situation. For instance, blacks and whites live and operate from different sides of the imposed racial iron curtain. Because of this we cannot share one another's experiences. Firstly, as far as readings and workshops are concerned, the permit system curtails the movement of white people to black townships, making it difficult for them to attend such meetings. The same applies to blacks: Because of their financial background, it is often difficult for us to attend events of common interest in areas designated for white people.

There have been allegations that blacks have been sceptical about the membership of black writers in PEN, a non-racial organisation. Personally I have met with very little or no criticism of this nature in all my close association with PEN members or PEN activities. This is not because I personally am not a member of PEN. I believe that people know they have no right to interfere with an individual's freedom of association, as the powers-that-be think they have. Any criticism that might have been levelled came from a few insignificant quarters and again, as Mafika says, 'something is being hidden'.

I also want to say that one cannot use fire to extinguish fire. In other words, our credibility suffers as soon as we start fighting racialism with racialistic utterances, like 'we come from different communities and our prior loyalties lie with the communities from which we come.' True as this may sound, I, Mtutuzeli, would rather put it in my own way: We are all human – black, white, 'coloured' or Indian – and more than anything else, we are all South Africans. The reason behind the confrontation with which we are faced is that we try, as the Nats wish us to for their purposes of divide and rule, to reduce ourselves to mere colours. We demote ourselves from the human status to the racial status, to which we have been forced at gun-point, by we-know-who.

Mtutuzeli (centre) with Neil Williams (left) and Ingoapele Madingoane (right). Photo, Biddy Crewe.

In addition to the views which I have already stated about the disbanding of PEN, particularly problems concerning the smooth operation of the organisation within our divided society, I would like to state that even if the majority of PEN members decided to disband (incidentally a black majority since most members were black) this should not spell an end to the sharing of ideas among writers of different skin pigmentations on the 'neutral' level of the literary arts but that communication channels should be kept open and liaison be maintained at all times to avoid alienation which may possibly lead to antagonism or destructive criticism should one group cross the other's path.

Regarding the formation of a new writers' association, there are several terms which, in my opinion, still need to be clearly defined. For instance, the meaning of the term 'South Africans' remains ambiguous because up until now I suppose that 'South African' has meant all people whose natural domicile has been anywhere south of the Limpopo, irrespective of race, sex or creed. However, since PEN has disbanded over the question of its non-racial character, it should be openly stated whether 'South African' here means 'blacks', and if so, what 'blacks' incorporates, i.e. whether it refers to 'blacks' of aboriginal extraction and not, for example, 'Indians' or 'coloureds'.

'Writers only'. If the association was formed because of pressures from the black community, why then is it that it is open only to writers and not to the community as a whole so that anyone who happens to be interested in the literary arts can participate? And by 'writers' I understand established writers who have at least had some measure of exposure. What about aspirant writers?

'Ideology'. I am openly opposed to any form of ideological strait-jacketing. Writers have a right to think freely.

'Upgrading'. This suggests to me some sort of establishment of standards by which a writer's worth can be determined. What are they?

'Agents'. Why overseas? Are we not overseas ourselves? Do we underestimate our ability to protect our own rights? Why not look to Africa instead?

Seated man being served by standing companion, drawing

A Black Annunciation, drawing

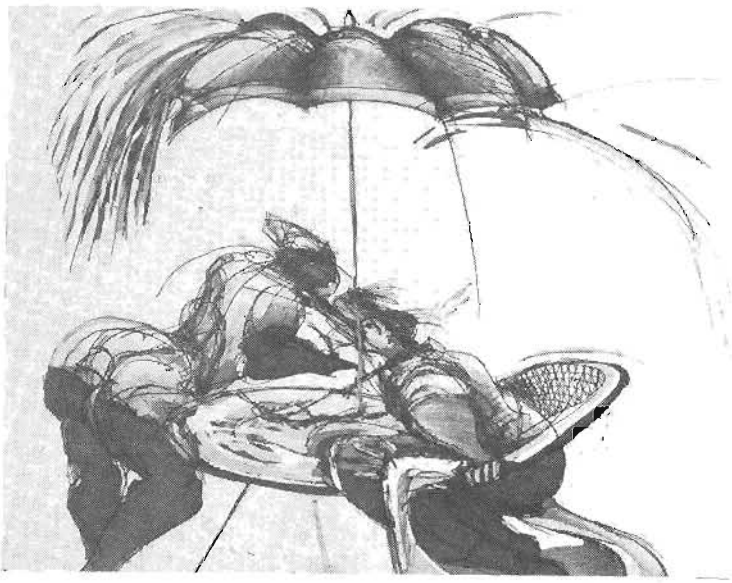
'. . . The art of the clenched fist rings a bit hollow.'

Domestic Scenes

A selection from an exhibition of etchings and monoprints by William Kentridge held recently at the Market Gallery.

Below we publish an excerpt from a conversation between the artist and Joyce Ozynski.

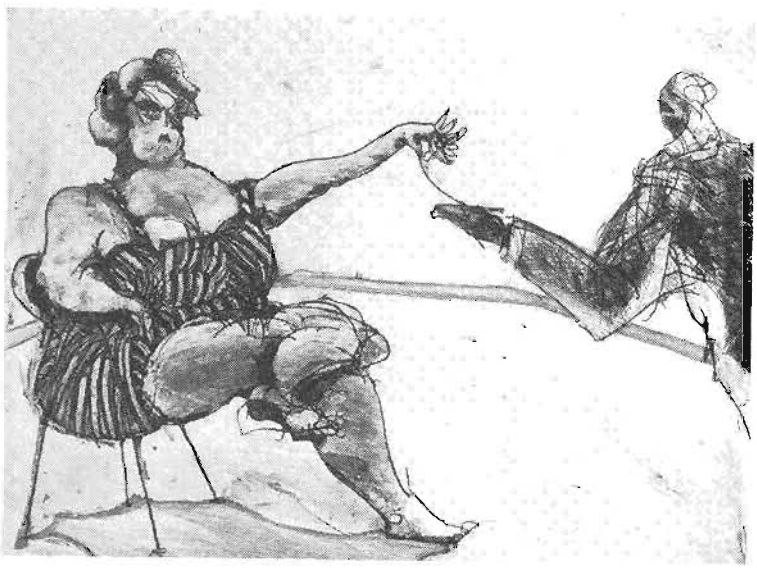
The problems confronting artists here are, I suppose, the same as those facing artists anywhere; how to keep the work rooted in a personal and intimate reality without letting it become inaccessible to other people, and how to celebrate the medium you use without being seduced by it.



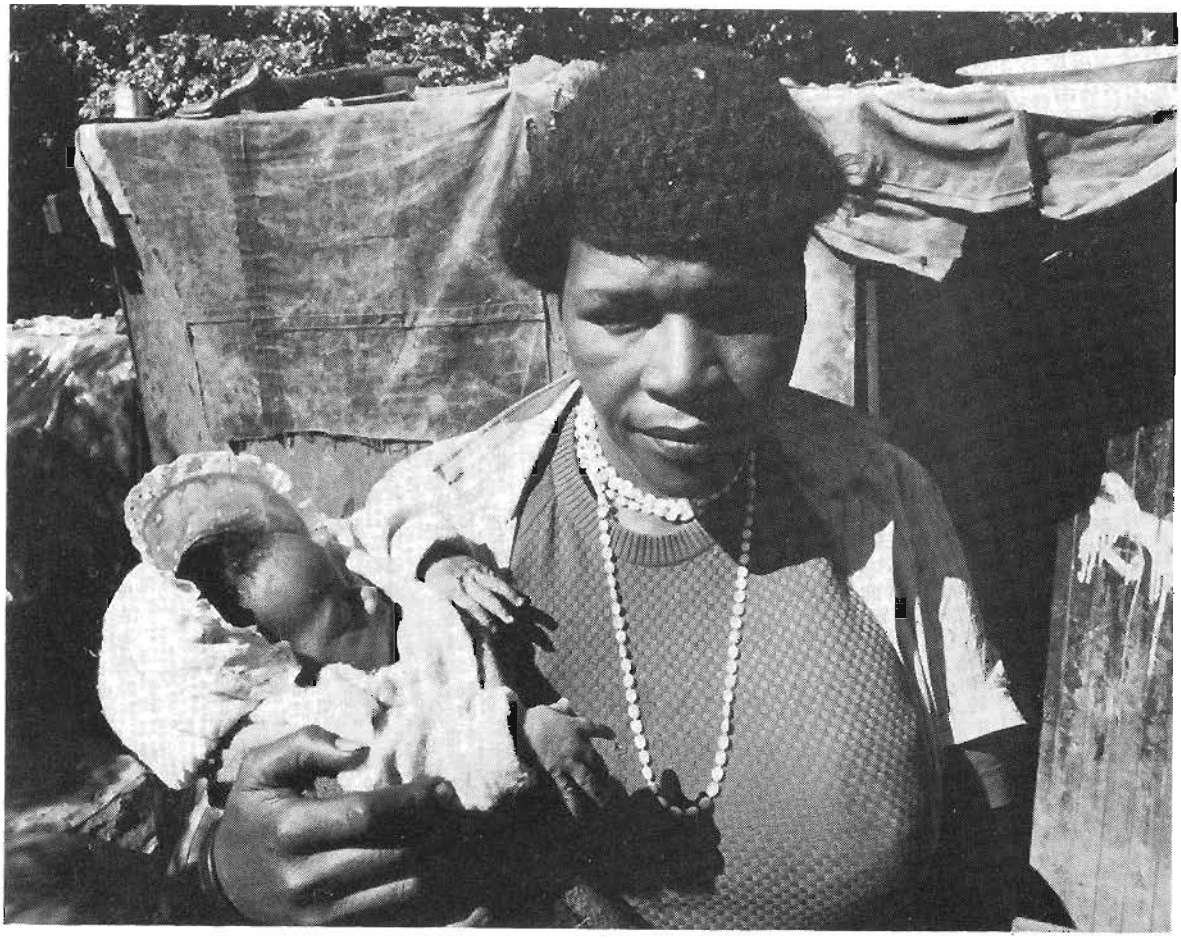
Those painters who, in the quest for 'Good Painting' can see only European and American contemporary work – whose gods are the most recondite painters of forty years ago, who glorify the obscurity of their work, whose only concession to living here is an occasional bit of local colour, who (always under the banner of avoiding the narrative, the illustrational) shy away from a look at their private, public and historical lives – seldom if ever even reach their goal of good painting. However wild, gestural, thick and stormy the paint is, there is at root an avoidance of themselves, a fear of taking responsibility for who they are. Which shows up in the works, even when well lit.

On the other hand, the art of the clenched fist rings a bit hollow. The painters, who for fear of reducing the political import of their work, reduce their images to systematised diagrams of discontent (either torn trousers and hunched shoulders or fists – sentiment or bombast), create only scarecrows. We are fooled for a minute but after that we can ignore the work quite safely.

Now someone like Dumile when he worked here, did drawings which at first sight looked like down and out scarecrows. But when you came within a few feet of them they would give you a good kick in the guts.



Maxie Garb



Omar Badsha

Poetry by Keith Gottshalk, Zakes Mokoena, Daniel P. Kunene, Angolan Poets, Essop Patel, Yousuf Minty, Sipho Sepamla, Macbanai B. Zimunya, Peter C. Chipeya, Nthambeleni Phalanndwa, James Twala, Omarruddin, Masilo Rabothata