



WHAT DOES A SUSTAINABLE BRAND LOOK LIKE TO YOU?



We believe sustainability has both an environmental and social agenda.



JOIN BRUCE JACK WINES ON OUR JOURNEY TO SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT

Not For Persons Under The Age Of 18



SOUTH AFRICAN LITERARY JOURNAL

200, Volume 50, Summer 2022

GUEST EDITOR

Sihle Ntuli

EDITORIAL STAFF

Business Manager Mark Crisp

Website Design Jennifer Pape

Production Design Megan Ross

LITERARY PATRONS

We thank the following Patrons for their continuing support of the South African Literary Journal:

Alistair Mackay, Irene Bekker, J.M. Coetzee, Geoff Haresnape, Zakes Mda, Zoë Wicomb
and Keith Gottschalk

and others who wish to remain anonymous.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The cover artwork is thanks to

Balekane Legoabe:

“Arrange-re”, Digital print on archival paper, 2019

New Contrast is published by the South African Literary Journal NPC

ISSN – 8: 1017-5415

ISSN – 13: 977-1017-54100-8

Printed and bound by Castle Graphics South (Pty) Ltd.

CONTENTS

Summer Notes

6

ENGLISH ALIVE

A story to be told, Robyn Evans ¹² // *Ask*, Tristan King ¹³ // *I am*, Letago Makhafola ¹⁴ // *Xhosa*, Milani Vakala ¹⁵ // *Mourning the living*, Inge van der Westhuizen ¹⁷ // *The man on the island*, Timothy Sparks ¹⁸ // *Mindlessness*, Lutfiya Dadabhay ²⁰

POETRY

Horns for Mankunku Ngozi, Kabelo Mofokeng ²⁷ // *Wall of denials*, Abu Bakr Solomons ²⁹ // *Self-portrait underneath a curtain of sorrow*, Faswillah Nattabi ³⁰ // *Collected Amnesia*, Faswillah Nattabi ³¹ // *The final mutilation*, Faswillah Nattabi ³² // *Hooks in the water*, Basil du Toit ³³ // *Thinking in a marrow-bone*, Basil du Toit ³⁵ // *Green Market Square, Cape Town 1989*, Christine Coates ³⁷ // *Toy-toying for Tutu*, Christine Coates, ³⁸ // *In defence of over-sentimentality*, Loic Ekinga ³⁹ // *Slow Puncture*, Loic Ekinga ⁴⁰ // *This is not a cry for help*, Loic Ekinga ⁴¹ // *Untitled 1*, Katleho Khaola ⁴² // *Untitled 2*, Katleho Khaola ⁴³ // *Crossings*, Marí Peté ⁴⁵ // *The first time I saw a ghost*, Nicol Gowar ⁴⁷ // *beatitude I*, Jeremy Teddy Karn ⁴⁸ // *beatitude II*, Jeremy Teddy Karn ⁵⁰ // *The Visitor*, Leanne Francis ⁵¹ // *The Shampoo*, Leanne Francis ⁵² // *Roots*, Leanne Francis ⁵³ // *gold leafing*, Iyra Maharaj ⁵⁴ // *the witch in glass wind cycles*, Iyra Maharaj ⁵⁵ // *Phantom Child*, Pakama Mlokoti ⁵⁶ // *Vocation*, P.R. Anderson ⁵⁷ // *The Letters*, P.R. Anderson ⁵⁸ // *Walking*, Jeannie McKeown ⁵⁹ // *Berries*, Robyn Porteous ⁶¹ // *Salani Kahle*,

Kirby Manià ⁶² // *Ibhubesi eliselincane*, LLM Mbatha ⁶³ // *Incwadi yothando yesiZulu*, LLM Mbatha ⁶⁴ // *Umuzi onjani lona*, LLM Mbatha ⁶⁵ // *The Stick Has No Kraal*, Lucas Zulu ⁶⁶ // *The Wild-plum*, Lucas Zulu ⁶⁷ // *Ephemeral Eternities*, Meshalini Govender ⁶⁸ // *Uganda*, Sarah Mudeebe ⁶⁹ // *Hosta guacamol*, James Dewey ⁷¹ // *Hail*, Robyn Bloch ⁷³ // *bruised male flowers*, Tshegofatjo Makhafola ⁷⁵ // *the funeral*, Tshegofatjo Makhafola ⁷⁷

PROSE

D44, Carla Chait ⁸¹ // *The Cost of Flights*, Robyn Perros ⁹⁰ // *Old Man Salmon*, Sadie Scotch ⁹² // *The Bird and the Beggar*, Ramtin Mesgari ¹⁰⁰ // *The Rape of Galatea*, Toney Dimos ¹⁰⁴ // *The Results*, Joseph A. Schiller ¹¹⁴ // *Don't Cause Trouble*, James Roth ¹¹⁷

OTHER

Wamuwi Mbao in Conversation with Vasti Calitz	10
Artist Fact Sheets	131
Contributors	133
Subscriptions & Submissions	138

SUMMER NOTES

This issue of *New Contrast* marks the historic 200th edition of the literary journal, which is in itself a major milestone in the context of the very many literary magazines that have been founded and folded. It is a great honour to be invited to guest-edit this historic edition. It has certainly been a striking contrast to perform duties on the other side of a literary submission, and I must give credit to the



amazing team of Karina Szczurek, Christine Coates and Megan Ross. It has been heartwarming to spread joy to the diverse South African writers who have kept their faith in the journal over the years.

I'm proud that quite a number of poets and prose writers in this edition will be appearing in print for the very first time. So many will have a great story to tell about the feeling of having their work published in one of the oldest literary journals in South Africa.

The announcement of the winner of the National Poetry Prize is also imminent, so these are indeed very exciting times to look forward to for poetry lovers. At the same time however, we should take a moment to celebrate and acknowledge the longevity of *New Contrast* in being preserved and also in persevering in this faithful endeavor to introduce new poets and prose writers in the South African literary space. This has been done alongside showcasing new works from established and emerging artists from various upcoming individual collections.

In our poetry, we open with Soweto poet Kabelo Mofokeng whose piece pays homage to the legendary Cape Townian tenor saxophonist, Winston Monwabisi "Mankunku" Ngozi. In his poem Kabelo reminds us of the differing meanings of the phrase 'Yakhal'inkomo' from the likes of Mankunku Ngozi to South African poet laureate Mongane Wally Serote. The poem is taken from his upcoming Botsotso press debut *Hungry on Arrival* to be launched in April, and

this poem marks Kabelo's first appearance in *New Contrast*.

Also in this edition, we have poems by Durban poet Iyra Maharaj, whose debut collection *earth-circuit* is due for release in 2023 with Dryad Press. As with Kabelo, this will be the very first time that Iyra will be appearing in *New Contrast*.

In the prose section, we are joined by Robyn Perros, who has recently been announced as part of the longlist for the 2023 Island Prize for the manuscript '*Choosing an Outfit for the End of the World*'. The piece touches on the aspirational idea of holiday destinations and, more broadly speaking, the distance between the dream and the fulfillment of it.

While beginning the daunting task of writing this editorial, I consulted the editorial of the 100th edition written by Michael King back in December of 1997; it spoke about the rich history of *New Contrast* and the essential individuals that paved the way for the literary journal to become a cornerstone publication in South African literature.

Michael King was the editor when I first heard about the literary journal in 2012. He was also editor-in-chief when I was published for the very first time shortly afterwards. Stylistically my approach to the craft aspect of writing was a lot more unhinged and unorthodox. I believe the refining of my work comes from my exposure to the differences in the styles that I found in literary journals. I am in that school of thought that believes that a writer should be fundamentally a reader at their very core. While the editorial for *New Contrast* 100 certainly did justice to those who came before, I would still like to take this moment to acknowledge the presence of Mtiutuzeli Matshoba for having a black African presence in the history of the literary journal.

To do things a little differently from Michael King for this historic 200th edition, I'd like to touch on the prospects of *New Contrast's* present and a bit about its future. In the midst of the hard times that the journal is experiencing, one should still be able to acknowledge those who are currently steering the ship under some difficult circumstances. In the gradual process of transformation that has taken shape at *New Contrast*, the editorial direction of South African novelist Masande Ntshanga needs to be acknowledged. To watch Masande at work has been both thrilling and exhilarating, writers and subscribers alike have been witnesses to an unfolding miracle of the journal's reinvention and adaptation to become relevant in the present. One truly hopes that the work of Masande will be spoken about when the time comes for us to speak about the present as history.

When I think about the future of *New Contrast*, I am reminded of one particular film by British director Steve McQueen called 'Mangrove'. The film is based on a restaurant by the same name in the Notting Hill area of West London during

the '70 period. At the centre of the film is the 1971 trial of the Mangrove Nine. However, the directorial brilliance of McQueen comes from establishing the Mangrove as a space that fostered community among those who had migrated from the Caribbean to seek an honest living in London.

The legacy of *New Contrast* is being able to bring together diverse artists and writers. The journal is a multicultural home to local and international writing and so it must be defended and preserved in order to remain present for future generations of writers. My hope for the future of *New Contrast* is to inspire agency from those who identify with it as a literary home to defend and preserve by all means necessary so that the journal may outlive us.

Sihle Ntuli
Guest Editor

Conversations

INTERVIEW

with **Vasti Calitz** | podcast host

In a world where less and less print space is available for literary discussion, podcasts have become a hospitable format for nuanced discussions of contemporary literature. Among these, *A Readers' Community*, now in its fourth season, is a distinctive literary broadcast that presents insightful and nuanced discussions with writers and poets from South Africa. Host Vasti Calitz steers each episode. We interviewed her for *New Contrast*.

NC: *A Reader's Community* is doing really important work in the public life of literature. Would you walk us through where the podcast started, and what your idea was with it?

VC: I started *A Readers' Community* with the Book Lounge in 2020, when I was working as the Open Book Festival coordinator. It was a few months into the pandemic and we were missing so many of the good things that come from going to a brilliant bookstore – the live events, the recommendations you get from staff, exposure to books you wouldn't know about otherwise, and also connecting with other readers. We wanted to see how much of that experience we could create remotely, and to that end, in each episode we featured an interview with an author, and book recommendations for new book releases from the staff (who are all serious readers who give excellent recommendations).

Though the podcast was started for the Book Lounge, the last two seasons were funded by the National Arts Council. So though we still



“I really like to feature debut authors, since they are often at a disadvantage because they are usually unknown, so I like to give people a reason to pick up those books – and those are some of the books I’ve been most excited about in the last couple of years...”

get support from the Book Lounge in the form of advice and promotion, it’s become an independent project and now our book recommenders come from our community. The goal is to provide a high-quality platform for South African authors to discuss their work, but also to generate conversations around South African literature. I think so much of the literary culture that South African readers consume and participate in is focused outside the country, on books from the global North, and I want to help nudge that focus back to South African literature.

NC: Some of our readers might never have thought of listening to a literary podcast before. What would you say is the appeal of a literary podcast in terms of being a resource for readers?

VC: Books needn’t provide only a solitary experience. They can be sites of provocation and of connection, and I think conversations that we have about those books are valuable and enrich our experience of reading – of course, publications like *New Contrast* are a big part of that. Podcasts are too.

A Readers’ Community features books published in the last 6-12 months, so I think it gives a curated glimpse of what’s new and interesting in the book world (not comprehensively, of course) and allows listeners to keep abreast of new releases. And then I think that these podcasts are important archives of the voices of South African writers. The Cheeky Natives have done really important work in this regard, and I’d say they’re the OG literary podcasters in South Africa.

And then another reason to listen to literary podcasts is most certainly for the recommendations. My favourite international podcast is Literary Friction, partly because the hosts have a similar taste in books to me, which means I get endless recommendations that are almost



guaranteed to be bang-on.

NC: What goes into making a podcast like *A Readers' Community*?

VC: I scope out what's been released in the last few months, and what's coming out in the next few months, and then read as many of the books as I can. This season I was lucky enough to have

help with the reading from our assistant producer, Kelly-Eve Koopman. When I select books, I choose books that I can heartily recommend, but also that will ensure a variety of conversations within a season (and of course I can never include all the books I loved).

Each episode consists of a conversation with an author, and then book recommendations around a theme inspired by the featured book from myself and a member of the community – often bookstagrammers, sometimes writers, or friends from the book world. I meet up with the recommender beforehand and we brainstorm books for the theme. I record the interviews in person whenever possible, and then the editing is done by Andri Burnett, who also gives a lot of creative input. We do quite a lot of editing, aiming for a polished end product.

NC: Diversity is a tremendous and ongoing problem in the literary world. Is there a sense that podcasts like *A Reader's Community* might direct readers to literature by authors they might otherwise not see?

VC: I really hope so! I really like to feature debut authors, since they are often at a disadvantage because they are usually unknown, so I like to give people a reason to pick up those books – and those are some of the books I've been most excited about in the last couple of years (Mia Arderne, Tsidiso Moletsane, Remy Ngamije, Robert Hamblin, Jarred Thompson). It's also important to me that the podcast features young writers, queer authors, and writers of colour, because those are often stories and perspectives that are missing from people's book-

“Maybe I could describe the shift like this: we know we ought to diversify our reading, but now I do it because of the undeniable fruitfulness of doing so, for self-interested reasons. It’s changed my reading taste in that way.”

that reason, but I’ve tried to bring more of my own voice and opinions into this season. This is the first time I’m recommending books myself, for example, because giving a summary and opinion of a book is strangely exposing. On the other hand, the interview component feels primarily like an interaction between me and the author, rather than providing an analysis for an audience, and the comfort in that is that authors can set you straight if your reading is really off.

And of course, that the medium is just audio also helps – to be literally invisible counteracts the sense of exposure!

NC: Is there an interview or a podcast you’ve done that really stands out for you?

VC: I did an episode with Nondwe Mpuma recently, a wonderful poet, with some poetry recommendations from Maneo Mohale. I don’t often read poetry, and I was so grateful for the incentive to slow down and spend time with poetry, for its enforced patience. It was a balm and a bit of a revelation for me. And what a privilege to be able to discuss poetry as a total novice with brilliant poets.

shelves and their reading, and those are the authors I’m most interested in speaking to.

NC: There’s a certain amount of risk involved in, not just putting your voice out into the world, but also performing a very public kind of reading, that I don’t think many people would be prepared to take on. How do you navigate the sense of exposure that comes with doing that?

VC: It’s a challenge to be more personal for exactly

NC: Has talking to so many authors/literary types changed anything about how you read, and what you pay attention to?

VC: I'd say that how I read in the past is how many of us read – I'd pick something up that is kind of similar to something I'd read and liked (in my case, often novels with a cynical female protagonist, or a queer romp), or otherwise something with international acclaim. Now, I more often look to read things that are unlike books I've read before, or stories that reveal something to me that I don't already know. Maybe I could describe the shift like this: we know we ought to diversify our reading, but now I do it because of the undeniable fruitfulness of doing so, for self-interested reasons. It's changed my reading taste in that way.

NC: What are you currently reading? Is there anything / anyone literary you're currently excited by, or anything you're eagerly looking forward to?

VC: I'm really late to this party, but I'm reading *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong, which is obviously beautiful, and for non-fiction I'm reading *They Call it Love: The Politics of Emotional Life* by Alva Gotby, which is a philosophical work on emotional labour.

I was excited to see that SJ Naude has a novel coming out later this year, since I was blown away by his last book, a collection of short stories called *Mad Honey*, and that Lethokuhle Msimang's novella, *The Frightened*, is coming out in April – I saw her speak at Open Book 2022 and have been desperate to read it ever since.

A Readers' Community is available on all streaming platforms.



the original South African literary journal
www.newcontrast.net

ADVERTISING WITH NEW CONTRAST

RATES

TYPE	RATE
Inside Front/ Back Cover (Full Page)	R1000
Full Page	R800
1/2 Page (Vertical)	R400
1/4 Page (Vertical)	R200

DEADLINES

New Contrast is published quarterly. In order to accommodate our design and printing timeline, we require all advertising materials six weeks prior to our set distribution dates. Please see the table below for more information:

DISTRIBUTION DATE	FINAL SUBMISSION DATE
15 March 2023	1 February 2023
14 June 2023	3 May 2023
13 September 2023	2 August 2023
13 December 2023	1 November 2023

For any queries regarding our rates, please contact our business manager: business@newcontrast.net.

English Alive

These pieces first appeared in the 2022 edition of *English Alive*, an annual anthology of high-school writing, published by the South African Council for English Education (SACEE) Western Cape branch.

© *English Alive*

Enquiries to editor@englishalive.org.za

A story to be told

There is a story to be told
The coloured liquid runs down the dripping canvas
Trying to create a semblance of form
Moulded by the thick streaks of different hues.
There is a story being made.

A single story,
Lying deep within the mess of drying colours,
Colours that will last for eternity,
Showing itself to all those who take the time to
Stop and look.
There is a story to be told.

Robyn Evans, St Dominic's Catholic School for Girls, Boksburg

Ask

I asked for stars
And I was given your eyes.
I asked for flowing rivers
And I was given your hair.

I asked for sea scents
And I was given your aroma.
I asked for a birdsong
And I was given your voice.

I asked for happiness, peace and love, too,
And I thank God
He gave me you.

Tristan King, Victoria Park High School

I am

I am from rolling hills
and little mud rondavels
From dusty planes
and water heated over a fire
From brides-to-be adorned in blankets
and cows setting up camp in the backyard
From men sitting in circles forging brotherhood on a plate
A plate filled with steaming pap, 'morogo' and the offal of the day.

I am the product of diversity
and rich history
From colourful houses that line the streets above the Cape;
embodiments of culture in and of themselves
From a mesa that dominates the skyline
and an island that has freed so many but imprisons endless struggles
From potjiekos and braais that give us more commonality
than the languages we speak

I am from inequality
From some staring at plates full of hearty meals
While others are scrounging around to make ends meet
From freedom and justice that is systemically selective
Discrimination that is subtle but potent
Where being educated is a miracle –
a distant dream

I am from predators
Not lurking in the shadows of alleyways
But walking our streets at noon
And residing in our homes at night
From an inferno of violence
that spreads across the cities
Ignited by the flickering flames of our women
as they continue to be slain.
Their bodies a vessel for our crimes.

Letago Makhafola, Greenside High School

Xhosa

Oh Xhosa, how I love your home.
You welcome me into your rondavel,
With umngqusho waiting for me near iziko.
You brew your traditional beer,
Umnqobothi,
For many to drink.
They drink to get drunk.
Oh, they don't know that it is medicine.
To cure them from the trauma they inherited
That is now part of them.

Sing to them, Xhosa,
In your flow that runs like the river.
The soft, calming river.
Komkhulu.
Remind them where they come from
Through your songs, through your music.
Remind them where they come from,
They have forgotten.
Play umrhube, awaken their inner callings.

You have the power to break them down
And build them up again.
Anew, stronger, wiser.
You are always with them, Xhosa
Showing them the way.
Why do they turn their backs on you?
Why do they choose to ignore you?
You do not care what flaws they have
What mistakes they've done.
Or how they choose to live their lives on earth.

You're guidance.
You're freedom.
You're home.
You're unity.
You're love.

You're Ubuntu.
You welcome them into your rondavel.
You welcome them because they are a part of you,
And vice versa
You welcome them because they are your children.

Carry on, Xhosa.
Carry on.

Milani Vakala, Springfield Convent School

Mourning the living

'Stop all the clocks,' as Auden said
Pause all life and mourn the dead
Yet fret, my friend, if like me you are
Mourning the living and living afar
For all must die if my books aren't mistaken
All seems dull, and I feel forsaken
Yet such, I prefer above foolish connection.
Skip being soft and keep love from detection,
Love, like fire, dances madly and churns
Yet in its wake it recklessly burns.
Care must be taken, and caution must grow
For of true love, there is little I know
All whom I'll love are one day to die
And I lack the strength to cope with 'goodbye'
So, 'hello' and 'love you' and 'death do us part'
Are neglected in order to shelter my heart
A lonely life, yes, perhaps dull too
But a life, nonetheless, that saves me from losing you

Inge van der Westhuizen, La Rochelle Girls' High School

The man on the island

As the sky slowly started to fade, I looked out to sea and saw the familiar, dark shape of the island. Suddenly, a faint light appeared, and a figure emerged from the trees. I knew it was him. Sometimes at dusk we would see him come out from the hidden interior of his island. For years we had no idea who he was or what he did until my brother and I decided to find out.

We lived on the coast, and the mysterious man's island was not far from the mainland. No one in the area dared to set foot on the island because of the ghost stories. I wondered if we were doing the right thing, as we packed for the trip. My brother brought out the old canoe, and I prepared the supplies.

We started paddling while the brilliant sun was still high in the sky, suspended above a sea that looked like a creased blanket. In the distance, I could see gulls circling around the jagged cliffs of the island, as if warning us away. The steady rhythm of paddling and the calm lapping of water against the canoe made me feel at peace. My brother steered us towards the far side of the island.

It was cooler when our canoe finally rested on the pearly sand of the island. We both knew that we would not have to wait long until he emerged. I tied the canoe to a flexible sapling, and we were on our way towards the front of the island. A few flies buzzed lazily in the dimming light as we trod carefully through the undergrowth. We stole through the dense trees like hunters stalking their prey. I could not help but wonder if we were the prey.

As the sun slipped behind the horizon, we saw him. A lantern flickered on him to reveal an old man resembling a shrivelled flower. He immediately started limping away into the trees. We followed him cautiously and eventually reached the sea again. The man had disappeared. Just when I was beginning to give up hope, I felt a cold, gnarly hand on my shoulder. I jumped in fright and turned to see him.

He asked us what we were doing, and we shakingly responded. The old man brought us to the water's edge and pointed into the shallows. I saw a silvery seal splashing and twisting in the water. The moonlight lit up the seal's eyes to create a magical atmosphere. I realised that the man just came to watch the seal and that he was harmless. Then I heard the click of a gun.

Timothy Sparks, Cannons Creek Independent School

Mindlessness

*Mind
less
ness*

Why does a single minute feel like a million hours? One perfect line of gold shines through the tiny crack between the curtains. Dust flows, golden specks glittering like an intricate labyrinth of mirrors. I hear the screaming inside. The clumsy mix of sounds stirs me. It's getting louder.

Night is the one place I feel I belong. Everything is opposite. Day is night. Sun is Moon. And I no longer insane. I like that nothing is too bright. The Sun is harsh and cruel. The Moon is my dearest friend. The velvet darkness is the warmest blanket. It's six in the morning.

I can't decipher the words swimming and thrashing in my head. I can't recognise the voices.

Staring at the plain ceiling that seems to be getting closer, I stand up. I want something to eat. *Exit the room with your right foot. One, two, three, four, five, six stairs.* I ended on the left foot. *You must start again.*

Rufus, my old, hairy dog, watches me with careful eyes.

My shirt hugs me too tightly. Sigh. I clutch my pockets and insert a hand into each one. Two oblong white pills rest in the fabric, the blue cotton pants. I watch as the water fills my cup. I wonder why I'm not like that. I wonder why I can't fit into the shape or size I'm supposed to. The doctor said it's an effervescent, but I can't stand the fizz. Can't stand the tiny explosion that feels like summer drizzle on my face. The water makes them easier to tolerate. 'These will control your serotonin levels.'

The doctor lied. I know they did nothing.

No one was in the house – not even a bark from Rufus. But it had never been louder. The wall cracked as I punched it. My hand hurt. Rufus kept his watchful eyes on me. His leathery tongue licked at the water resting by his paws. I remembered breakfast.

The kettle boiled angrily as I picked out the seventh slice of bread from the loaf. I placed it into the right slit of the toaster. It would take two minutes, I set the dial at two. Steam hissed as I went to fetch the white mug. *One teaspoon of sugar. Not heaped.* The milk clouded the auburn water. I went to fetch the strawberry jam for my toast.

The toast jumped out hastily. It was ready.

I smelled smoke.

No.

No. No. No. No. No. You burnt it.

The faces of the bread a charcoal black. The crust a deep chestnut brown. Toast from the cafes of Hell. I couldn't do anything right, *stupid, stupid, the dial was set to four!* I was so sure it said two. It said two ... didn't it? I couldn't hear anything. My thoughts stung my tongue, they tasted like burnt honey.

The toast was ruined.

I looked in the mirror. I didn't recognise her tangled locks and torn lips. Where had that little girl gone? Who was this monster? I was scared of her. I touched the mirror. Once. Twice. I touched myself. Once. Twice. My reflection stared at me with eyes that held a million truths. I was petrified.

Existence has always been exhausting. Particularly for those who aren't good at living. I missed Dad. I missed Mom. I wondered why I left. Then I looked back in the mirror. Dad's eyes. Mom's nose. Dad's generosity. Mom's kindness. *Dad's recklessness, Mom's anxiety, Dad's rage, Mom's fear.*

I sighed again. And again.

Rufus wrestled with my slipper. Marinating it in sweat and saliva. He looked at me and smiled a goofy, lopsided smile.

Everything was finally quiet.

Lutfiya Dadabhay, SAHETI School

Poe
etry

Horns for Mankunku Ngozi*

Kabelo Mofokeng

Yakhal'inkomo* groans inside a belly of night
yakhala faraway in Tran(s)ky
Yakhal'inkomo across a seabed of neon stars
Yakhala melancholia inside a river of dreams

There is peace here
Rhini-moon unleashes colours of night sounds
gentle breeze creaks through blades of dry winter grass
a drag of Mpondo herb slowly raises smoke to fills my eyes

I am a type-write-artist lost in the music of nature's orchestra
the punkster slash hip-hopper downstairs keeps snoring
earlier his electronic beatz gashed through my ear-drums
a dungeon dark number mocking nature's purity

Yakhal'inkomo unveils Mankunku
saxophonizing behind the iron curtain
inside a world historic night
Yakhal'inkomo steaming lungs of fire breath
skinning beatz from night sounds of a cowhide
A choir of songbirds chirps their chops and changes.

**Notes*

Winston 'Mankunku' Ngozi (1943 – 2009) was a very influential musician and saxophonist. In the words of Rashid Lombard, the photographer, "He inspired countless audiences and artists with beautiful phrases from his horn. I don't think a voice as unique as Winston's can ever really be forgotten (2010)."

'Yakhal'inkomo – (isiNguni) "The cry of cattle at the slaughterhouse", as noted by Wally Mongane Serote (1972).

'Yakhal'inkomo (1968) – A hallmark recording by Mankunku Ngozi. Many artists recorded their own versions of the song, including Sibongile Khumalo (1998), Thembi Mtshali (2016), Maselo Matana (2010) and Nomfundo

(2012).

*'Yakhal'inkomo unveils Mankunku /saxophonizing behind the iron curtain –
"Playing behind a screen at the Cape Town City Hall while a white musician
mimed his notes, reedman Winston Mankunku Ngozi was billed as Winston
Mann (Ansell 2004:03)*

Wall of denials

Abu Bakr Solomons

It's easy to terrorize maps
build a wall of denials to de-populate,
wipe a country

into a blank space, admit that Palestinians
exist but not Palestine, claim that God
and imperial Balfour gave you fellahin land *
to compensate for Nazi evils.

This wall perpetuates a cycle of atrocities
inflicted on thousands of the dispossessed,
legitimizes incongruent Western pacts
with their clients, Arab oil barons.

This barrier between interminable slaughter
and the realization of justice,
possesses another name.

**fellahin* peasants, a derogatory reference used by Zionists to describe
Indigenous Palestinians to justify their occupation of Palestine

Self-portrait underneath a curtain of sorrow

Faswillah Nattabi

the skin that i am in
black and brimming
melancholic
invincible still
corrugated with a curtain of sorrow

joy tiptoes beneath my edges
on collarbones and cheekbones
spinal cord and sinews
masked in the milk of my eye
glistening in the yellow of my smile
gap-teeth gaping
flailing fleeting flame-igniting joy

curtain caressing combustion
smoke pooling in a trance
still i crouch unflinching
blood veins bursting
a black body blackening
crackling cartilage chanting
eve-gene epeporating
enchanted enbers etching
embellishing my frying flesh

self-induced suffering
suffocating in the smell of skin and sweat
self-immolation
(seeking the sorrow at its source)

ardent arsonist
invincible still
i am
at the pinnacle of pain tolerance

Collected Amnesia

Faswillah Nattabi

When I was two years old, my parents packed our bags,
booked a bus from Kampala and brought us here.
The earliest memory I have is of my brother and I sharing a shower
with our neighbour's children in a flat in Johannesburg.

The earliest memory I have is of my Mother's childhood friend,
Auntie Khadija, bathing me in a basin on the balcony of a flat in
Mayfair, a community crowded with migrants like myself.

My parents speak of my toddler self; smart, outspoken,
loud, carefree, bold and bubbly black girl.
I do not remember but I imagine my chubby and
melanated younger self talking, playing, laughing
and jumping up and down a moving bus.

My parents remind me of how effortlessly my first language
would flow fluently from my tongue.
I do not remember but I imagine my cheeks swelling up to make space
for a beautiful black language, untainted by the tongues of the white.

Even though I fail to remember, I continuously imagine these scenarios

When we left, we filled our cases with memories of home,
hoping they would remain with us to be cherished
but they too got dispersed along the way.
While we collect amnesia from unwelcoming winters.
While we collect anxiety from slurs and xenophobia.

The final mutilation

Faswillah Nattabi

hands swell like skin slumbering in a swamp
fingers spiral in search of direction
who is to blame for this mutilation?
for the wasting away of intellect

Hooks in the water

Basil Du Toit

for Lorine Niedecker

The punt glides over the pongy
river – the punting pole churns
grey lungs of mud-clay up from
the bottom, guddles of cloudy
sludge suspended in mid-water;

the prow rushes unhurriedly over
stuffy water which hasn't breathed
clean air for months; its intakes
have all been exhausted and lost
to the surface, one blip at a time;

oxygen-needing animals poke
their snouts above the water-line,
breaking the gloopy skin of the
lagoon, to sniff sparingly a few
test-tube quantities of farty air;

the poet-naturalist sucks all this
experience under the ravenous
epidermis of her expeditionary
body floating into the realms of
mosquito, salt fish and alligator;

the chattering music of marriages
and harpsichords is carried along
inside her, as background noise,
while her spirit leans on locality
and memories of a fishing father;

inheritor of swampland, swale
and pickerelweed, the trade she
is practicing here is the one she

gathered from her grandfather –
sifting, condensing, sitting tight.

Thinking in a marrow-bone

Basil Du Toit

*He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone.*

Yeats, "A Prayer for Old Age"

Stiff, old gelatine that has lost
its wobble is ideal for thought;
steel inhibits, slush cannot bind
acts of steady contemplation;

the human body has built soft
and plausible cushions to enable
the domestication of awareness,
bringing life to the old dog yet;

consciousness creeps through
yielding channels of breast,
bone and gristle, until it finds
a home substance to settle in;

software logic ponders in silicon
and iron, deliberates in copper,
but our thoughts need comfy
sponges to reach conclusions in,

brainy brawn in which to make
their feelings known; thoughts
running in a marrow-bone have
a congenial place to show some

spunk or fiercely ratiocinate;
finding something to think in
means avoiding the Cartesian
loneliness of the ghostly mind –

thought snuggles into the clever
legs of an octopus to grapple
the world to itself or to confer
with lilacs, anemones and stars.

Green Market Square, Cape Town 1989

Christine Coates

Do you remember the heady days
of Greenmarket Square,
how it was the place to be, me in my
polite dress and sandals.

We'd sit under the plane trees and
draw people to the sounds of
Graceland. I didn't realize
how my mind was opening.

You noticed the shape of a man
in the rock of the Methodist Church
painted purple in the protests,
one eye completely closed.

I had no idea what was happening
but I put the pieces together, the city
a tangle of roads and intersections,
a place of grace, for grace, where
we could see ourselves at last.

Toy-toying for Tutu

Christine Coates

—Goodwood Stadium, 7 September 1986

You never know at the time that
you're being awakened, can only see it
in hindsight.
When I think back to that Sunday,
how we drove to Goodwood, the cooling
towers of the Power Station,
pink watsonias in swampy fields
between sewerage works and golf club,
someone's lost shoe.
thin trains of clouds in an otherwise
blue sky.

Held in suspension as a steel band
played Ladysmith Black Mambazo, people
milled about the stadium,
youths toy-toying, singing
as they waved their fists.
I took a sip from your water bottle without
shaking. Let's not talk, I said.
A woman, praise-singing, arms held high.
began a slow shuffle dance as
the Eucharist service ensued and
people lined up in rows.

The day turned from gold to red.
The Archbishop of Canterbury was saying
... just ask for pardon.
Youths lifted their knees, toy-toying again
around and around the stadium.
I wondered how the next years would be,
but for now I could feel the layers peeling
away, scales falling like leaves.
We didn't know the time but we stayed on,
watching until the busses arrived
to take everyone home.

In defence of over-sentimentality

Loic Ekinga

On the internet, sleeping otters hold hands
And a dwarf planet refuses to stop spinning
In my room, I think about the millions of molecules
that have not killed me,
my curtain pregnant with the wind— the sun,
a warm cheek against my face
I sit on the knowledge that my chair won't break
Under me. I'm alive.
I think of Johannesburg:
tense city of buildings that stand up like hair
And yet there's laughter in it,
A stranger greets me with *I see you...*
When I say God I mean home,
I mean soft, I mean there is no better reason
for me to want to return anywhere
A grove of sequoias
A dog barking in the distance
The many birds that give to my body before they're born
And after they're dead

Slow puncture

Loic Ekinga

I remember the bullet that made a hole
In Rita's breast; the whistling of an injured animal
How the body is the sum of air and dirge
I watched her blood blacken under the summer sun
Every colour turns black eventually.
Her name breaks in her mother's mouth and you hold
my hand.

Somebody get the bullet out of Rita! anybody!

I got so close to you in the days that followed
In a dream, I could hear dancing feet behind
your bedroom door and I saw your colours leaking from under it. This
is how I felt when I thought of you. You held my hand the day Rita
leaked out of her body. And I developed a new form of hunger

But your hand was all I could get on your curfew of a body

I'm a man now and desire is a foolish luxury...
the slow puncture of loving you stops tonight!

This is not a cry for help

Loic Ekinga

In my prayers, I recite a line from an Ocean Vuong poem
I say to my Lord *oh no, the sadness is intensifying*

The truth is, I don't want to be in this poem
But I was raised on many tragedies.

My sorrows are indifferent to laughter in a city
that doubles as a joke, on most days.

I knew women; I loved a woman once
Until she became a bubble under this thorn I call body

it is said that when Mary Magdalene's saviour left
Her clothes fell off her breast in grief until her saviour
Clad her with hair. I wish to be able to clad a woman

Why can't I? Why can't I think of my life without the fear of an end?

The first person I heard say the word *trauma* was my mother.
This was around the time she left home, around the time
I first held your hand. Tell me that I can be a possibility

Because as much as I tried, the things I neglected did not
wait for me to come back.

Because my mother went out to search for beauty and
found it, she did.

But I lost mine.

Untitled 1

Katleho Khaola

Somewhere between the steam and the crease,
Everything is beyond the fold
Where a single tuck,
Cannot ensure that it is all hidden [away]

Absent father in the place of absent father,
And all he surrendered to
Was the selfish need to split himself into two,
Like the same word articulated
by different tongues

As a result,
You and I have become two sides
of the exact same coin
paying the price for another's deeds,
plagued by the notion that to acquire
a taste for the silence,
one must surrender the clamour

Contrary to the manner in which,
I was last seen walking a fine line
Between revenge and forgiveness,
The same way I soak the bread with tea
Careful not to swallow down its choke

But where I am from,
no one talks about how
Each callous is a traded off tenderness
Mentioning something about hardening
The texture of hands

And as a consequence of,
Is the insistent need
to be held,
the way a stain holds onto fabric

Untitled 2

Katleho Khaola

we mouth clarity and monologues break,
the same way mirrors have learnt
to hold reflections
in the place of each disguise

and yet, time and time again
our reflections stain mirrors
compelling sight beyond her ability
to see

how we,

those black like me
travel towards the fracture
just to hear our very own injuries scream,

walking on our knees
with the burdens of others carried
on our backs

Yet we are still
declared weak
By the things hand crafter to
weigh us down

it is no secret that
to see blood vividly
and recognize death
without the compulsion to kill

depicts a torture,
born of the same evil
as the absence of one's truth,

but our freedom speaks to how
racism implodes when
those who are black like me
find their voice,

for it can only be an imposed
madness which has always sanctioned us
to walk steadily past ourselves

this discomfort is a detached safety harness
cleaving our hopes into shards

and how quickly we become the things
done in the dark
with no intention of coming out into
whatever light the subtitles communicate to us
as being our own,

while white noise has done a meagre job
of convincing us that

those who are black like me

should have begun
where their apartheid ended

but still, no one knows
where I
(or those black like me)

begin

Crossings

Mari Peté

I

After her prisoner-of-war father
crossed back to Africa, over the sea from India
and her mother (freed from concentration camp)
strode home over scorched earth, my grandmother
(their ninth child) was conceived:
Susanna Adriana Van der Merwe's place of birth:
Woestalleen farm, Transvaal Boer Colony,
District, Middelburg.

II

When Ouma was small
she wished to be *just* like her teacher,
cycling to school with two weapons—
for defence against the likes of leopards,
a revolver; and a fountain pen, above all.

III

Ouma loathed logarithms, so,
at sixteen she asked her brother
to take her by donkey cart to a neighbour:
she probed Mister Heyman for a loan –
to change her fate, she traversed the Union by train.
In the Cape, she could swap log tables
for sheet music. She matriculated
thousands of miles from home.
Then, she became a teacher.

IV

When her eyes began to fade, she recalled her crossings.
Unlike her ten siblings, she married at thirty.
Her wedding dress and shoes

were not preserved, but danced
to shreds – a flapper doing *Balke toe*...
Then the Great Depression, never wasting food.

Especially, three memories etched in my heart.

First, Ouma's stern-playful counsel:

"Never read if you can *watch*",

"Moet nooit lees as jy kan *kyk* nie";

second, her favourite hymn,

Aan U, O God, my dankgesange –

To Thee, O God, my gratitude psalms;

last, that she never spoke of the photo
taken long before she met our Oupa –

her in a stripy swimsuit,

draped in a fetching Englishman's arms.

Ouma: Grandmother (Afrikaans)

Balke toe: "To the beams" (Afrikaans) – a practice at barnyard dances.
When the dust became too thick, someone shouted "Balke toe!", then
the dancers jumped and hung from the beams, so that the dung floors
could be sprayed with water.

Oupa: Grandfather (Afrikaans)

The first time I saw a ghost

Nicol Gowar

As a little girl scared
of the peeling plaster
on the wall in the passage;
the Alsatian, Baloo,
barking into the darkness
and then rushing off for
a good hour before we
would whistle and
search the orchard,

it was a wonder I was brave
enough to search
between the cassette tapes
when I was eight years old.

As I pawed mindlessly
through the puddle
of black disks
a photo fell from the tapes
and sauntered
down to rest in my lap.

John – 1972

The name seemed familiar,
as though someone was knocking
on a door inside my mind.
It had opened before, but not recently.
The cobwebs clouded my memory
as I turned the waxy card.

I dropped it as soon as I saw
the ghost captured in the frame.
I ran to my mother,

hoping for an explanation

that would make
me want to look again.

She snatched the photo,
scolded me for poking my
nose where it should not be
meddling and continued to
prune the canary creeper.

From then on,
I sat with Baloo looking
into the darkness
trying to remember the image
of the ghost my mother was
keeping from me.

It was only much later
when I realised the ghost was
haunting my mother,
not me.

All I can remember is how the eyes
bled into the face
and the smile
was strangled into a scream that
broke the borders of the frame.

beatitude I

Jeremy Teddy Karn

only a god is enough to be likened to my mother.
everything about living
when my father left was a miracle.

my mother never got used to it,
memories of a husband
strong enough to spew voices
from the stones in our throats.

blessed was the day i stopped believing
that my father would return home.

*blessed is my mother who knows how to wait—
wait on a husband,
& how to bury memories the way
she buried dead friends.*

beatitude II

Jeremy Teddy Karn

i don't imagine you running
or turning the backyard garden into a cemetery again.

once you planted bodies into the ground instead
of corn seeds. *blessed are those bodies*
that grew out of the ground into a harvested grief.

i don't imagine you holding my small hands
to show me where to bury you
if i ever found your mutilated body
among the other women's bodies on a sidewalk.

the memories of war have unnerved you
this is what war does to a woman,
turning everything about her into grief,
and even her small garden into a large grassy cemetery.

The Visitor

Leanne Francis

The tomato plant sat in the conservatory
like a stiffened burlap sack.
We over-watered it,
went away for two weeks,
and when we returned,
it had taken over the entire room,
growing, like triffids,
out of its pot,
scratching the back of the sofa (or
us if we got too close).

Our home became a greenhouse
and we lived in it, until we grew sick of tomatoes.
I often wondered why it had to be tomatoes
and not another fruit:
why it looked black at night,
tentacled,
faceless.

The plant has gone but, to this day,
when the outside heat filters
through the conservatory glass,
I can still smell its leaves.

The Shampoo

Leanne Francis

I can't stand Tresemmé,
or the shower head in my flat.
Each time, the shampoo
injects itself into my eyes like
syringes of Satan's piss and the sulphates
kill my curls, but Aunt Jackie's is just too dear.
So now I am stingy and stinging
and red eyed and
late for a lecture because I feel like both *Nobody*
and poor, blinded Polyphemus.
Maybe I should just shave my head.

Roots

Leanne Francis

Revolution can be planted anywhere:

even in the hair of young black girls.

gold leafing

Iyra Maharaj

can i crawl under a Klimt and
sprain my neck towards you?
perhaps this is why god put me here,
to stand beneath a maple sky
curling my feet on wood, marching
nowhere, to the gold-leaf sun, with
rolling kohl, high-waist jeans,
palmed tangled hair,
and ten peppermint-tea tongues sliding in and out —
this love is the bite mark on your poison-apple
world, it is *Flavor Aid* lodged in my throat,
and here, on the bed between us is what unwrapping
a piece of cocoa sounds like

the witch in glass wind cycles

Iyra Maharaj

in the south, seven mothers before me,
lay birds and bricks and myrrh,
under storm lights and cold water

like some unwatched wick, i
broke and bore, like a midnight
doorbell, a snake in a letterbox
the maddening answer to
prayer

the witch in glass wind cycles
shuttled me awake
in a warbling pitch
no one could remember

and i was birthed, pawing
from webs and mud,
blushed, swollen
and cradled in blotting clay

Phantom Child

Pakama Mlokoti

twilight skin,
dusty pink lips
eyes painted with a particular elegance
and small kinky hair
that would take eons to nurse.
what would we name her?
no doubt she would not be immediately
beautiful
i wasn't too until i turned a certain age
and you said the women in your
family die hopeless
we made her real
i traced my finger through your forehead
to show where her furrows
would grow,
much like your own furrows
and you said, eat or you will
starve her out.
some times i think i held her
against my breast
the child we invented when we
were high on each other's bodies
drunk on orgasms
her canines are sharp like yours
around my nipple
some times i can hear her cry

Vocation

P.R. Anderson

On being driven back to boarding school,

Of the hare for which you never swerve, told
some precocious night, brought up to vision
where the road disclosed itself in headlights
as a living thing. This was how politics begin.

Returned to diligence of dormitories, which mean
doss-houses of the dead. The train went by
to seethe at Alicedale, de-couple there and take
its place in polity. Thought then of your return

down tunnels of your predicted dust, the road
that brought the here. And now, lights out
and congregating dreams, some few who fret
for mathematics or lost things, as I have lost

abruption of that journey back to where
stars wash the sea, stars wash the sea and hare.

The Letters

P.R. Anderson

You chose the letters over any music knowing two things, *viz.* (a) I could not compose and (b) only in letters. Later (the same night, *viz.* the one shared lifetime, more-or-less, the dark that was withstood in wonder) you stipulated Nought rehearsed as lore, nor then and nor before. Instead I wrote of how the ice was singing my same song. And sent it to you, blue. So much was true.

Days put out the buds of weeks, weeks the year. I took you there. I had you see the sorghum come at last and smell of beer. I always took two apricots and told you so, and telling told on me. Augustine's theft was pears. Let's be so honest with each other it arouses us. Implicitly. You said you'd come with me. The letters plied the skies. Everything dies.

Those were the days when sleep was treasure. I dreamed of all of you. The plague was got among us and the world, like weather. Winter resurrected it as fog burnt off the snow; by summer it was pressure in the air, the sweat of lightning. I wrote that for an amulet I wore those apricots. You caught the thing. I wrote to you again. So I compose. Who knows what you suppose.

Walking

Jeannie McKeown

I arrange to meet a friend,
with our dogs,
where the lilies appeared
when the rains came;
bursting into existence overnight -
dramatically scarlet, fuschia, magenta
against the grey-green vlei,
then a wide shallow circle of water,
today a cracked, dry water bed.
The lilies are ghosts now,
but their presence lingers
in our language.

We walk;
the dogs hunt voles and vlei rats.
My eye is caught, and I bend down
to pick up a perfect Palaeolithic flint.
It's an unexpected find, geometric backing
pointing back to the lily vlei.
The small blade fits snugly
between my thumb and forefinger
as if crafted for me,
to my precise measurements.
Its jagged, scalloped edges
suggest industrious use.

Some Stone Age hunter or gatherer
lost this from a leather pouch
while walking.
We pass each other,
60 000 years apart,
on the pathway -
as I bend to retrieve,
my fellow ghost moves past me,
unaware as yet of the slight

loss of weight at the waist.
Their presence, though, lingers,
in the grip of my hand.

Berries

Robyn Porteous

Maybe my limbs
Were made for decoration,
Like the berries on a Syringa tree,
That you shouldn't really eat.
Or,
If you knew,
You wouldn't want to.
Your hand – full –
A crowd of ochre,
Before you squish them
With your teeth.
Tonguing fate.
A revolting taste
Lingers,
Like spoken promises.
And guilt.

We broke a branch,
And the berries,
free from their tether.
They fell,
Where they may,
Where they lay.
Inedible fruit,
Naked and needy.

Hope lead to headaches,
Confusion and regret.
Darling, can you hear me?
There's a pounding,
A racing,
Convulsing,
Respiratory Arrest.

Darling, can you hear me?
It's time I love you less.

Salani Kahle

Kirby Manià

Blue sky
as far as the eye
can see.
Mossies and loeries
at home with the skeletal
sliver of moon —
bone white
above the acacia.

It is unseasonably
warm for June.
Squinting into the sun
while traffic warbles
and the car guard
passes the time of day
with the caretaker and his
dog.

I am full and
empty
to the marrow.
Wanting to distil this
afternoon
into a scent or a taste
to comfort me
in days to come.

But as much as
this fullness of present
being
suffuses me
now, now, now,
I know I must
release
tree and bird and sky
to say
goodbye.

Ibhubesi eliselincane

LLM Mbatha

Babethi, 'akayukubusa, akayukuba nkosi'
Kodwa ibhubesi eliselincane liqhwakele
Esihlalweni salo sobukhosi, liya bhonga
Ezintabeni zase Hlalankosi, kuleyo ndawo
Yengoma, kwaNongoma; balizwile
Ngaphesheya kwe Limpopo ne Zambezi
Balizwa ezinkalweni zonke zeAfrika
Ikhona inkosi kwela kithi, kwaZulu
Bobabili oZwangendaba no Mzilikazi
Babuyile ukuzo-sina nenkosi entsha
Bephula imincele encolile yaseBerlin
Emva kwamakhulu amabili eminyaka
Bezidingisile bona, abantwana bomuntu
Abafowethu kanye no dadewethu
Kusetshenzelwa ubukhosi obubumbeneyo
Liphumile ilanga ilisha, luqalile usuku
Olusha, asikhumbuleni ulimi lwakudala
Nalelo phupho lokhokho elisa philayo:
Owodwa umhlaba, isizwe, ne nkosi
Kule mpilo yesi shagalolunye, yeLembe

Incwadi yothando yesiZulu

LLM Mbatha

Ngifisa sengathi ungangibhalela incwadi
Incwadi yothando yesiZulu
Esho ngemibalabala na ngamabalabala
Axoxa indaba ejulile yemizwa nemicabango
Idayimane, ngelo thando lweqiniso
Omhlophe, ngowenhliziyi engenasici
Indilinga, ngoba olwethu kalunasiphetho
Oluhlaza-sasibhakabhaka, ngoba wena ucabanga ngami
Unxantathu, ngoba amazulu aphezulu
Kanjalo nomhlaba nolwandle ngaphansi bayazi
Onsundu, ngoba kuyitshe kunothele futhi okwemvelo
Njengomhlabathi ongaphansi kwezinyawo zami
Noma ungawu shiya umbala ophuzi
Kungani kumele ungethanda ngenhliziyi enesikhwele! ?
Ngifisa sengathi ungangibhalela incwadi
Engiyoyigaxa emqaleni
Ukuze zonke izimbali zase maqaleni
Ziyohawuka lapho zingibheka
Ngenxa yayo yonke lemibala egqamile
Incwadi yothando yesiZulu
Esho ngobuhlalu bothingo-lwenkosazana
Obuvela emazweni aqhelileyo
Okhokho, bethu abangayi qondisisa
Minake sengiyoba nentokozo emangalisayo
Lapho ngiphendu-phendula ulimi lwakho
Kancane-kancane, futhi ngesikhulu isineke
Ukuze ugcine usukwazi kahle hle
Ukubingelela abazali bami
Ngendlela eyiyona-yona, ngolimi lwesiZulu

Umuzi onjani lona

LLM Mbatha

NgoMsombuluko, kukhala impama eqhumisa amehlo
NgoLwesibili, ukhahlela ngathi ubhekene no nozinti
NgoLwesithathu, vika ipuleti lindiza emoyeni
NgoLwesine, nanti itiyе elibilayo ebusweni
NgoLwesihlanu, ngikhonjiswa isibhamu
NgoMqgibelo, umese wasekhishini udla enyameni
Cishe wangena emqaleni kwaphela izinkinga
Phela nomakhelwane abasakwazi ukulala
Umsindo ongapheli imini nobusuku
NgeSonto, ngicela ungixolele sithandwa sami
Okwenzekile ngeke kuphinde kwenzakale futhi

NgoMsombuluko olandelayo, isibhaxu na mankomane...

Sithandwa lendlela esihamba ngayo
Oyedwa uzophelela ebhokisini
Omunye aphelele etilongweni
Izingane, imintshingo ibethwa ng'bani
Buyisa lapha inhliziyo yami
Ngizoyifihla ebhantshini lami
Ngizihambe ngezinyawo zami
Ngibuyele ekhaya kubazali bami

The Stick Has No Kraal

Lucas Zulu

Habe! Habe! A bull began to rattle-off oral poetry,
praising her pumpkin, pampering her with sweet paprika metaphors
declaiming, the only squash from the green valleys of uKhahlamba, the sweetest
one that make his supper unforgettable.

Thirsty as a camel the only one that replenish him with Tugela Falls.
Before he began to gravely slapped her Queen Nandi face,
halfway into an early grave, sharp iris that have seen this skirt

gently woke up from a coma, vomiting broken teeth
the bull, one that bore resemblances to the eggs of the lark.
Sadly, left her laying on the floor beaten like a crushed can
still breathing and bleeding. Her son orbs glistened with dew
when he saw her mother visage red with beetroot juice
praying for his father's horns to come to a full stop. Since that day
they had cast a pall over their tattered bond, while the pumpkin

shooting for doves. Even though, she held out for change, can a zebra
wipe away its stripes? When elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers.
Her toothpick skinny son could pick up a pained moo, coming
from her mum troubled by the bull that continues to make
unrepairable dents in her mother's body. And give her bruises
an affectionate pat, after roughly grabbed her arm and battered her.
As every herdsman knows that the stick has no kraal.

The Wild-plum

Lucas Zulu

There is a wild-plum tree
in the hinterland of her heart, not
to touch on its thrilling voice, tickled
by a gentle breeze. I've never seen his hubby
so completely transported by a cliff hanger
eying her plum, a ripened one that has brought
a herd of long horns in her father's cattle pen. One
that keeps his goatee man strutting like a peacock
every fortnight heading home. A wild plum of ...
A ravishing one, brought up alone like an egg.
Under her coat of dense leaves they call home.
a rare bird who eats last after her hatchlings
graze on cicadas and her kin
give the impression
of
being
fallen
by
a
purple
patch.

Ephemeral Eternities

Meshalini Govender

the night thick with unspoken words that
hung ripe and weary from the heavens
the ground littered with human dots their
bodies incandescent from the sweat and liquor
a thousand silkworms glowing under the tint of the moon
pulsating and preening along the shimmer and spectre of spasmodic
neon lights that swam like airborne mermaids across the crowd
my best friends grip each of my hands they are dressed in the colours
of freedom and fortune and I in wildness and infinity
and then. gazes met furiously stubbornly defiance and despair and
deference and distance and devotion all at once
but her at your side and him at mine

days later on a hungover morning over watered down tea stale
tomatoes and hashbrowns in the local breakfast spot I'll think that I
imagined it that
it was never you
just a shape that morphed into whatever the lights and ecstasy
commanded that it was desire cloaked in the deceit of delusion and
drink

years later in some foreign corner with food I pay for in dollars and
with a luminous man whose name I can't pronounce who I drank later
like condensed milk I'll think that
it was always you
then before always

that night a memory muted by time yet still my mouth is heavy with
your name that anchors in my throat I try to wash it down with
Ethiopian tea in Nairobi something radiating red and syrupy in
Istanbul boiling water in Guangxi privilege in Paris
till finally I feel some of the syllables in my belly, swollen with the secrets
I swallowed to keep you with me

Uganda

Sarah Mudeebe

The Pearl of Africa,
Black for our heritage and fertile soil,
Yellow for our glorious sunny days,
Red that draws a common bond of blood through our veins,
A blessing to have a voice but a curse to be knowledgeable,
A *ghetto* musician who dedicated his songs towards educating the youth,
Nearly died through each breath revealing the truth about his society.

The Pearl of Africa,
Black for our heritage and fertile soil,
Yellow for our glorious sunny days,
Red that draws a common bond of blood through our veins,
A community seeking change,
Dozens were eliminated for thinking the same way,
Leaving with only a prayer to their title.

The Pearl of Africa,
Black for our heritage and fertile soil,
Yellow for our glorious sunny days,
Red that draws a common bond of blood through our veins,
Sending his rebellious gang to handle his business,
God has enabled you to live long,
Misruling the land for thirty-seven years.

He attempted to turn off our microphones,
Hoping that the rest of the world would be blinded,
Inflicting pain to his citizens in these chambers,
He locked them away making the sanctuary a priority,
The blood on his hands will always remain his fault,
Our people were not even given the opportunity to say goodbye.

The Pearl of Africa,
His power still remains,
Ignoring our cry for mercy,
His illusion of a God-complex,

He cheated the system,
Upon our weakness he plays,
And somehow our people accepted that that was the game.

Hosta guacamole

James Dewey

1.
this variety of plantain lily behind our home
in Alexandria, Virginia, is called Guacamole

and by May
we see why:

its fanlike leaves are a dull, dark green
like Hass armadillo skin

and the variegation is grasshopper green
with yellow notes like the fruit's guts

(in winter, this rich display hides
in a hairy bulb less than one foot down)

2.
isn't it true an army of avocado trees
seethes inside each avocado pit

(round like a lacrosse ball
covered in dog spit)?

once, in Maputo, I stood
on a friend's back porch

admiring a colossus
with branches burdened in black

What are those? I asked
he replied: Abacate

3.
in the Santa Teresa market, we bought three
aguacates and six loaves like flat moons
and each morning you slept under banana leaves

and I performed surgery:

the pit half in my left hand
a dull kitchen knife in my right

I struck the pit to yank it free
scraped the fruit into a bowl

mashed it with lime and salt
and spread it on bread

and this was our honeymoon breakfast
those first three days

4.

I have never been to Japan, but I have read that
those rounded tops protecting Shinto temples

are called giboshi, yet another name for hosta
because their flowers look like those tops, and

they say giboshi grant wishes, but my question is
which giboshi and which wishes and how often?

but that is not important
and now I know what is:

the miracle of winter dirt
erupting into leaves again

a seed that becomes a tree
a tree that becomes a seed

the pleasure of recalling the pleasure of
calling you to a breakfast of guac on bread

and the protection these memories provide
on my temple of promises to you

Hail

Robyn Bloch

Hail
Mary
Full of the only prayer I know.
Found like a smooth stone
in my childhood
and shot through with the
amber of that chapel.
Pious on my knees,
fingers pointing,
up to God, at 12,
I look behind
at the nuns
wafting in.

Hail
Mary
Full of the curtains closed.
Fore finger into hot wax
to peel back a print.
Shut out my mother
who moans at the music
and call to the mother
for menarche,
at 16, and the girls at the bus stop
tell me periods are a nuisance
(but I see how their legs
hold down the ground).

Hail
Mary
Full of grace.
Is the lord
with me,
at 37, when I pull a bead from
the komboloi

instead of a rosary?
Ten to go around,
and then round again,
passing in the lamplight
the fruit
and then the womb
and then the fruit again.
Fruit, womb, fruit
round
and round
praying
to be among women
and praying not to bleed.

bruised male flowers

Tshegofatjo Makhafola

the beer slithers out of your fathers hands.
it floods your home.
it soaks the walls.
it collapses everything.

what kind of flower
grows out of caved walls of a dying home?
you learn to make rain out of your fathers
leftover bottles.
water yourself while shedding your petals in fear of
the bottle reflecting you as him.
if you watched your mother cut thorns
off her stem so your father can hold her.
and then watched him mishandle her instead.
force her to grow the thorns back in defence.
water her with a remorse made of hangover
and recycled regrets.
what kind of flower would you be?
how many bottles will it take to water you,
to grow into nothing like him?

you are an heir to a draught on your fathers oesophagus.
using the bottle so your dry throat does not start a fire with the friction of
your unanswered prayers.
there is no pity for men with suicide notes as flammable as prayers so tired -
surrendering to combustion.
men who search for salvation in bottles.
seal the lips of their wounds together with bitter sips.
ask your father.
he comes from generations
that pass down dreams deferred for too long that they turn sour.
society presses its nostrils when he opens his mouth to weep.
he carries everyones failed dreams with his in a sac
of failure.
have the rot of his children's dreams infect his own.

have the weight of everyones dreams bend his spinal cord.
he learns to crawl with bottles in his hands.
he counts the cuts as tries.
his dignity leaks through his palms.

your father walks around with
clenched fists hiding scars.
a jesus persevering slow crucifixion in the sun
trusting the harness to do the work of god.
he sweats from the cross made of a rusting ladder at a construction
site to save your stomach.
he is afraid.
his death will not save his children.
there are no black men rising out of graves for second chances.
there are no return flights for men with broken wings.
your father has contemplated flying out of this life.

boy,
what kind of flower survives?
without bottles?
how do you keep your roots from drying?
how do you take in everyone's expectations dry?
how do you not become a stats to another black boy
choking from biting too many expectations from home
than he can chew?
without bottles?

the funeral

Tshegofatjo Makhafola

on the eve of the funeral.
mother does not weep.
her breath undresses itself off her flesh.
permeates the ceiling.
exits the room without notice.
leaves behind her body on the mattress.

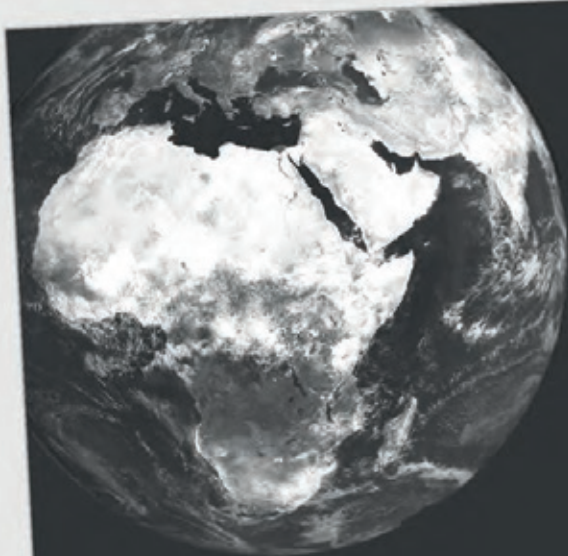
we have learned,
your child's funeral requires two graves.
and when only one is dug, for the child,
it will be as though earth has rejected your body.
you will watch your soul escape through
your skin pores in search for a home.
you will not call the soul back.
grief will steal your voice.
your tongue will rot glued to the roof of your mouth.
you will stink of pain.
you will not open your mouth to receive condolences.
or to say how far down the shaft pain has sunk in you runs.
you will watch the world disintegrate down the hole.
pain will swallow everything without digestion.
it will force you to do the same. without suggestion.
numb.

on the day of the funeral.
she does not let grief escape her nostrils as heavy air.
does not perform a dramatic confrontation prayer
to god in her black clothes when the coffin slides down.
does not cause a tornado out of the graveyard dust.
her grief sits somewhere on her throat.
dissolves into her lungs.
eating everything inside like worms.
what is grief to those left behind
if not maggots that will stop at nothing but the bones.
and still the greed of grief will somehow find a way

to drill your feet bones for the marrow.
and paralyses you.

we watch our mother limping in faith.
watch her replace her prayers with mincing her tongue
with her own teeth.
watch her season the memories of our lost sister with the salt of her
own bleeding.
watch her swallow everything.
even our sister's name.
watch her forbid the name.
watch her carry all the water her eyes refuse to release.
drown herself than to let her tears flood our home.
what have you made out of my mother death?
you have made an ocean out of my mother death.

after the funeral,
we watched our mother's body failing to hold itself together against
the anger of the currents hidden inside her.
we have watched pain paying visits in waves
breaking the shores of mothers skin.
there are cracks everywhere on my mothers skin.
we fear,
she will one day leak all the life she has left.



Cosmonauts do it in Heaven

Keith Gottschalk

"Keith Gottschalk's poems speak a beautifully crafted, compressed, sophisticated language, with an oceanic width of reference. Even where the references weren't necessarily known to this reader, the lyrical clarity rang out:

On the western shore
renaissance of flying dragons:
you, midwife, let fly a new moon
you, bamboo too often battered
by madness of typhoons."

– Ken Barris, award winning author

Available from all good bookshops and online at African Books Collective (ABC) or Amazon.

Prose

D44

Carla Chait

As the community-service dietician, I'm given the psychiatric ward, D44, because no one else wants it, which everyone thinks is very funny, although I don't. Jacquie, the Head of Department, says that the ward was closed off with a security gate (and guard) at its entrance a few years ago after a psychotic patient escaped and was found dead on a level between the lifts. The other dieticians tell me not to worry because the ward hardly ever phones to request a dietician: the anorexic and bulimic patients are usually sent directly to the Eating Disorder Unit at Tara Hospital, and otherwise, the psychiatric interns aren't much interested in nutrition.

One group of interns does refer a patient to me though, an anorexic woman. The patient files in D44 aren't kept at the end of the patient's bed as they are in the other wards. The psychiatrists keep the files and I'm given access only by request.

The intern who phones to refer the woman says I should come directly to him in the doctor's room, which I do. I knock on the room's door, which is opened after a moment by a mousy girl who tells me that the doctor is busy at present and that I should wait for him outside. After a minute or two, the same girl reopens the door to permit my entry.

I sit down in front of a young man, as mousy as the girl, only with a body longer in length, and spectacles on his nose. The girl, who I suspect will leave, doesn't, but sits off to the side as if to observe us. The doctor begins rummaging around fretfully on the table, grabs an opened yellow file, tears off one of the patient's hospital stickers, and hands it to me.

I look down at the sticker. I hear the tinkling of keys, and my eye is drawn to the doctor's tapping foot. The girl to my left is unmoving. I look up at the doctor, who begins tapping his pen then, and says hurriedly, "So that's her."

"That's her," the mousy girl echoes, but I don't turn my head in her direction and neither does the doctor.

The keys and pen start going again and only then do I realise that he must be as nervous as I am. Because of the patient – we're as helpless as one another.

"All right," I say gently to him. "Where's she?"

The girl jumps up immediately and tells me to follow her. "I'll show you," and I regret leaving the doctor behind.

She makes a point of walking one step ahead of me down the passage, and doesn't say a word, and I don't care enough to be polite to her.

At the entrance to one of the general female cubicles, the girl gives me an awkward smile and then departs. The cubicle seems larger than any I've ever seen, but it's only because, instead of hospital beds, there are mattresses scattered all over the floor. There is only one patient in the cubicle, a woman sitting on the only hospital bed there, next to the window. He's looking out. She doesn't turn her head as I approach. She continues looking out of the window until I insert myself into her line of vision, and then she frowns at me.

She has fair skin, dark hair, and long limbs.

I apologise for disturbing her, "But can we talk?"

She doesn't seem pleased to see me, but she says, "All right."

This is the last thing that I want to do then, but I introduce myself as the dietician.

Her expression doesn't change.

"What are you doing in the hospital?" I ask her.

"My husband brought me here," she says. Her tone is severe and inscrutable.

"You're married?" I sit down on a chair against the wall and under the window, and her face hardens. "And you have children?" I indicate the picture frame next to her bed with a photograph of two young boys with sandy brown hair and matching hazel eyes. I don't know whether to be buoyant or to commiserate.

"I won't let my boys see me here," she says without emotion.

Why does she tell me this – does she want me to console her, to encourage her to let them come? "Why not?"

She doesn't answer. Draws me in and then excludes me. Maybe she's ashamed.

I ask her another question: "Do you work?"

"I teach dancing."

A stereotype – I block this thought. "That's nice."

Another patient bursts into the cubicle, rolls around on a mattress, and then runs off again. I try to engage her in the humour, but she's not interested. I'm intrigued by her. Maybe it's her illness.

"What can I do for you?" I ask.

She surprises me by asking, "Could you bring me a supplement?" She reaches out toward the handle of the grey, metal bedside table to open the drawer, but it jams, and I go to assist her. She's disproportionately frustrated with the jamming drawer, and won't let me help her, until finally stuck, she gives up, petulant and defeated, and I do it.

Then she waves me back to the chair. When I'm sitting, she begins to unpack the drawer full of Milo Ready to Drink. She's been drinking these here at the hospital, she tells me, and flips the carton in her hand on its side to look at the nutritional information.

Maybe she's just been looking at the nutritional information the whole time and not actually imbibing the liquid. I admonish myself – this is something that the mousy girl would have thought.

"How long have you been here for," I ask her, "in the hospital?"

"Since the weekend. I'm waiting to be transferred to Tara Hospital." Was the doctor ever going to tell me this?

"Do you want to go there?"

She says yes without hesitating.

"Okay, good. What supplement can I bring you meanwhile?"

"Ensure."

"Oh, you know about Ensure. How come?"

"What's its nutritional content?" She's keeping the conversation limited.

"Uh, I know the energy and protein content offhand," I tell her.

Immediately she looks at the Milo. I expect she's comparing energy and protein contents.

"We only have vanilla sip feeds in the office." I anticipate she's going to be unhappy with this.

But she isn't. She's only concerned that I go get them urgently.

So that she can scrutinise the carbohydrate content? What am I supposed to say to this woman? She's more interested in me as a dietician than she is in me as someone who is trying to talk to her.

"Okay, I'm coming."

"Hi again," I say to the security guard on returning to the ward. "How are you now?"

The woman isn't in the cubicle. Maybe she's gone to the ward's games room, where the pool table and couches are, and where the patients smoke.

I decide to report back to the doctors.

He opens the door of the doctor's room this time in response to my knock. He even smiles at me before ushering me in. I am relieved to find that the mousy girl isn't there.

He looks at the cartons in my hand as he sits down behind the desk.

"I'm going to give her Ensure to drink," I tell him with false confidence, also sitting down.

He begins rummaging around for the yellow file.

"When is she going to Tara Hospital?" This is all I'm worried about. I can't manage her.

"I'm sorry, I don't know." He speaks more mildly in the absence of the other doctor. Maybe they feel obliged to keep up appearances in front of each other. "She's on the waiting list."

"Do you want me to write the nutritional information in the file?" I offer, not knowing what else I can offer this doctor.

"Will you dictate?" he asks.

So he follows the rules. I can't write in the file.

The mousy girl returns then and makes a big show of not disturbing us, and then settles down in her side chair and begins writing furiously in the pages of a patient file.

Why must I always antagonise the doctors? Okay, I'm ready to dictate.

"How many of those a day?" He indicates the Ensure. "Those three that you're holding?"

"If she ultimately drinks three a day, that would be great. But if she hasn't been eating anything, we'll have to start with a small volume. What's been happening?"

The mousy girl didn't see that woman drink once the whole weekend.

I ignore her and suggest we get the nurses to monitor the woman's intake, "starting with a small volume three times a day."

He doesn't know if the nurses will do it.

"Why not?"

"They aren't used to doing that sort of thing," he says. "Someone will have to show them."

Someone will have to speak to the woman too. I'm going to have to choose a side. I decline their assistance.

She's back on her bed again. She looks happy to see that I'm bringing her the Ensure. I tell her that I'd like her to please drink one of these today. She can divide the intake in half if she likes. If she wants more than one carton today, she can have it with pleasure. I will come see her tomorrow and bring more. If she wants to have one in the morning before I come, she can have it with pleasure.

"Is this better to drink than the Milo?" she asks me.

I'm not sure what she's implying, but I say yes.

She seems aggravated with me then, and asks if I will put the two extra cartons of Ensure in the ward refrigerator with her hospital sticker on.

"Okay. Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

"No."

I'm not fooling her in pretending to know what I'm doing, but at least, if I bypass the nurses, I'm doing something to maintain her dignity. I'm trusting her.

At lunchtime, the psychiatric intern, the young man, phones down to the office to say that the woman is asking for me, and please will I come see her.

She's in the same position on her bed as before: legs stretched out in denim, feet in black socks, slightly extended. There are two other patients sitting together on one of the mattresses towards the door, chatting, but the woman seems oblivious to them. Then they leave.

She wants to know about Maltodextrin. "It's listed under the ingredients of Ensure."

"It's the form of carbohydrate in the Ensure," I tell her.

"But what is it?"

"A carbohydrate..."

"But from what?"

"Probably corn."

She looks past me, out of the window.

I'm starting to like her less. It's hard to like someone who doesn't like you. Who doesn't like anyone. Obviously I'm taking it personally – characteristically inappropriate and unprofessional. I'm becoming resentful on the part of her husband: what a selfish woman to leave her children behind so that she can sit alone the whole day thinking about Maltodextrin.

"Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

She asks me to sit down.

"Okay."

"What's the Eating Disorder Unit like at Tara?" she asks. "What do they do to you there?"

Maybe she really does want to get better.

"I'm not exactly sure," I admit, "but I assume you have psychotherapy and nutritional counselling, and other things."

"Are there a lot of people there?"

"I don't know how many patients they take on course each time, but I'm sure you'll have some of your own space there."

She shakes her head then and looks away.

I look at her two sons behind the glass. Other than the photograph, her bedside table is empty.

"How old are you?" she asks me.

"Twenty-four."

"How long have you been working in the hospital?"

"A few months."

She nods several times, and I look to the floor. Am I being tested for something?

"I'm not going to drink the Ensure," she says then.

I look at her, but have nothing to say.

"Thanks for it, but you can take it back to wherever you come from."

I actually feel like laughing.

"I'm just waiting to go to Tara Hospital. I hate it here and I hope that it's not going to be as bad there."

Is she throwing a tantrum? I want to tell her that she might be here for a very long time and that she better start cooperating.

"Thanks again. You can go. Here's the Ensure."

I creep out of the cubicle, squeezing the carton, and go to the tea room to get the other two from the refrigerator, but then decide that I will leave them there deliberately. No, in fact, I will take them deliberately.

Partway down the stairs, I remember that I haven't spoken to the doctor.

Again he opens the door to the doctor's room.

I have returned completely unprepared for this encounter and don't know what to say.

"Is everything all right?" He looks concerned. "Did you see her?"

"She's not going to drink the Ensure." I deflate.

"Do you want to come inside?" He's on my side, even if I'm not on his.

But I don't want to risk having to see the mousy girl now. "No thanks; it's fine." I show him the damaged carton.

"It's not your fault," he reassures me. "These people are very difficult."

I'll take what consolation I can get, but, "Can't you speed up her transfer to Tara?"

It's not in his hands, but he'll phone again later.

Is he going to let me off this easily? Is he going to let her off this easily?

"Will you let me know if there's any change?" I ask him.

"Yes. We are going to start her on antidepressants this afternoon."

"All right." Am I switching sides?

The next morning he phones to say that the woman is asking for me again. No news about Tara.

I tramp up the stairs.

Her presence seems to clear the cubicle of people from morning to night. Again she is alone on her bed, looking out of the window.

"Hello," I greet her.

She asks me to sit down.

I consider saying no, but then sit down.

"What time do they bring lunch here?" she asks.

Was it necessary to call in the dietician to answer this question?

"Twelve-thirty."

She's thinking of eating today.

"All right."

"What do you think?"

What is she asking me? "I think you should start with the Ensure first."

"One today and I can divide it in half if I like?"

"Right." Is she mocking me?

"Will you get me one?"

"Okay, I'll come back now." Hooked again. I can't bear another failure.

I rush down to the office, grab a carton of Ensure, and return with it to

D44.

The woman is walking up the ward passage. She's less intimidating on two legs, whose inner thighs don't touch, but she's tall, and her eyes are of a crazed and stabbing intensity at this moment. She wants to speak to a doctor.

"Here's the Ensure." I hold it out to her, realising that this is not the right thing to do now.

"I don't care. I want a doctor."

"Has something happened?"

She swears then.

"Can I help you with something?" Is this about the Ensure? Or the antidepressants? Or what?

"I hate it here."

"Are you all right?"

She walks past me and disappears into the games room like a flicker.

I don't report to the doctor; don't tell the nurses; leave the ward with the Ensure.

The next morning I expect to hear from D44, but don't. By lunchtime I can no longer contain myself and phone the ward.

"There are no women here," the nurse tells me, "in the ward."

"What? What do you mean? Where did she go?"

"Who?"

"Are the same interns there? I'm coming."

The mousy girl is in the doctor's room. She tells me that the woman was discharged yesterday.

"Did she go to Tara?"

"No, she went home."

"But why?"

"She wasn't cooperating."

Ah, that familiarly patronising term: cooperate.

"Did she choose to go home?" I wonder if she took her Milo.

"You'll have to ask the other doctor."

Maybe I should have told her to drink the Milo rather than the Ensure. "Are there any other patients for me to see in the ward?" I ask the intern, trying to redeem myself.

"Not at the moment," she says, "but we'll let you know if there's anyone else you can bring those drinks to."

I am non-responsive when I come back down to the office: referrals are given without much acknowledgement; the office conversation wafts past me. I feel crushed, like I somehow disappointed her. Nothing I said or could say would have satisfied her or have been right. Her hunger for nutritional information was insatiable because, of course, her hunger had nothing at all to do with nutritional information. But what else might I have provided?

“What happened with that woman in D44?” my colleague Anneke wonders.

“She didn’t care about the Ensure,” I grumble. “She wouldn’t listen.”

“What happened?”

“She went home.”

“Well, that’s good,” Anneke says encouragingly. When she sees I’m not convinced, she tells me not to worry. “You’ll help the next referral from D44.”

“Will I?”

The Cost of Flights

Robyn Perros

My mother loved watching the South African magazine show *Top Billing* on SABC3 TV. One particular episode she watched had a segment titled “The Marvels of Morocco”. Depicted in this episode was a white woman riding a camel on a beach as layers of fabric and hair trailed in the wind behind her. Vacationing beyond caravan parks on the Kwa-Zulu-Natal south coast was not an idea that people like us realistically entertained. But ever since that Moroccan *Top Billing* episode, my mother developed an obsession with the place.

At the end of every month, she started buying magazines that had anything to do with Morocco in them, from music to interior design to quad-biking in the desert. After her shifts at Mr Price Home, it soon became a ritual of hers to take the shopping mall escalator down to the Moroccan carpet shop, “just to browse”, she always said. Her cell phone screensaver began alternating stock images she’d downloaded on her lunch breaks. A gallery of Moroccan sand dunes, palaces, mosques, and mosaics she didn’t know the names of. Soon enough, our refrigerator door was a collage of cut-out recipes for chicken tagine that neither of us made.

When my mother returned home from work in the evenings, the first thing she would do was dock her pumps at the door and uncoil the day from each of her ankles. The sound of frozen fish-fingers thumping like rocks onto a tray followed. I’d done nothing but watch TV all day in my pyjamas again, but my mother never complained. Instead, she’d sniff the steam off the boiling rice with her eyes closed and talk about the “pretty blue buildings” she was going to visit in Morocco. With her MRP cashier’s nametag still pinned to her breast, my mother went on and on about all the jewellery she was going to buy and all the Facebook photos she was going to post – imagining that rich European woman riding a camel she could be when she got there.

My mother’s strategy for saving up for this holiday was to buy one extra Lotto ticket per week. On Sunday nights she watched the National Lottery draw, her eyes fixed on the TV presenter as if he were a pastor about to perform a miracle. For weeks, months, years I watched my mother scratch those numbers on her tickets, the blue light from the TV another exotic mirage on her face.

My mother never suspected that her first holiday to Morocco would be experienced from the inside of an urn. Her urn, as it turned out, was a Made-in-China Moroccan vase she had bought from Mr Price Home on her employee discount. A few months before her death, she had placed the vase on her bedside table to “catch all her Moroccan dreams”, she had joked.

Surely, I could have found the money to buy my mother a flight ticket to Marrakesh. But instead, I packed her body into a fake souvenir one might buy at Duty Free. The Morocco my mother entered was dark, dusty, and smelt of factory plastic – nothing like all those pretty blue buildings she had imagined.

A year later, I poured my mother’s ashes out of Morocco into a river on the opposite end of the continent. As pieces of her bones sunk to the bottom, I watched from the edge, a tourist tossing coins into a wish fountain.

Old Man Salmon

Sadie Scotch

No one walking through Midtown Manhattan made eye contact with me that day. That was odd, because if ever there was a place to eyeball perfect strangers, this would be it. The sun was setting behind me and the temperatures were dropping, which forced the disoriented tourists to turn their eyes away from the direct beams of sun and my glances. I aimed my gaze up toward the sunlit skyscrapers as I paced myself to arrive on time. These beautiful monuments of architecture and civilization will outlive me by hundreds of years. I was meeting Ken for the first time, to see if we could add our blended progeny to history.

I count bad biological odds and societal pressures as factors that push me to want to have a baby. I count on them since, if they were to go away, I'd just be single, my fertility test results wouldn't be all that promising, but who would care, and, of course, I'd be another 39-year-old woman. Basically, I'd be one more nameless, mediocre person on the streets. But what's wrong with wanting more and better? Ken wants more and better. Is he a transaction or an ally, waving at me from the other side of my fertility window? Should I pull him through?

A few weeks earlier, I was in Dr. Cho's office, fixating on his nose. His mask only covered his mouth, which itself is no longer remarkable in the COVID-fatigued era, not even in a medical environment. But I just like this body part, it's so removed from our reproductive systems. He held the transvaginal probe in one hand, its business end covered with lube and a condom inside me, and pointed at the ultrasound images on a screen with the other.

Why have I avoided male doctors for so long? He didn't even look at my vagina! I understand that this lack of professional duty could be considered problematic, but I liked how my private parts were treated as just an entry point, or perhaps an exit.

He seemed a little nervous by the direct confrontation of my genitalia, and that gave me a sense of control. Legs spread, head tilted towards the images on the ultrasound machine, I watched as he swiveled the probe to reveal tiny follicles in my left ovary that could have produced mature eggs that cycle. The theme music of *Game of Thrones* played on repeat in my head.

It was the woman in the texts who referred me to Dr. Cho's fertility

practice. I've often attempted to figure out how we got to texting, in terms of things like, how did she get my number, who does she work for, what are her interests? I can see where the texts begin, sure, but I haven't figured out the rest. Once in a while, she texts me things like, 10% off discount code on fertility testing, proving she does have a commercial side, but mostly she's just been kind and helpful. I know she's a she because we spoke on the phone once or twice, but I don't remember her name.

The woman in the texts led me to Dr. Cho who, like a good doctor, leveled with me about my prospects.

"They call it insanity when someone does the same thing over and over again and expects different outcomes," he said, staring blankly into my eyes. He was trying to explain why frozen donor sperm, which I had used unsuccessfully four times, shouldn't be considered a viable option again.

After a pause, "Live sperm lives longer in the cervix."

"Oh yes, of course, I know." Then after another pause, more forcefully, "I agree."

"Oh, OK, you've done all your research, then, you know this already."

I remain silent.

"Do you know anyone who could act as your donor?"

"No!" "Would I be in this situation if that were the case?"

"There are websites where you can find men who would be your donors. And for free."

In so many words, he told me to identify one of these men, bring him in, and, if we want to get the job done without needless paperwork, we must say in unison that we are in an "intimate relationship". Here, Dr. Cho stressed he would deny ever telling me this, he even plugged his fingers in his ears and mimed, la la la, shutting his eyes to emphasize that he neither endorses nor opposes this option. All the contracts, testing, financial agreements, etc., would be up to the donor and me to navigate. This might be my last shot at having a baby, and I should act quick, he added solemnly.

He also mentioned that his daughter's period was so regular. Like clockwork. Good for her.

I shook Dr. Cho's hand and stepped out of his ground-floor office, the entrance tucked in an alleyway, and back into the throngs of tourists. A man was rooted into the pavement, head back, glaring up at the

giant electrified billboards at dusk. I maneuvered around him, looking down, and stepped over a rat before making my way into the Subway.

This wasn't my first toe-dip into the pool of fertility options; I knew about live donors, but I always guffawed at the idea of using a known man who would choose to not be in the known child's life. The anonymity of a sperm bank donor seemed more transactional, in a good way. Like I'm making a purchase on a genetic marketplace. The line I would toe with my future child would go something like, mommy wanted you so bad and someone helped her to have you. You are mommy's gift.

But a known donor would have to look me in the eyes and shake my hand as he passed a cup of jizz through a bathroom door. "My job here is done, ma'am," I can hear him say, as he pulls his jacket taught at the waist before walking out of my apartment and life forever.

Would the offspring of this kind of union develop abandonment issues? The kid would know perfectly well that her daddy is aware that she is alive out there in the world, and doesn't want anything more to do with her.

Back at home in my bedroom, I slipped the piece of paper with the URL scribbled on it out of my bag and logged into the Live Donor Forum's website. I don't have to add credit card details to get past a pay-wall, huzzah, open-source semen! After adding a few filters, I found 18 potential donors in my area. Not bad. I was mostly concerned about whether they wanted to have sex with me or not. If they do want sex, what do they look like? How many children have they sired, what number would this make me?

From the woman in the texts to Dr. Cho, the divergent path of this shadier side of my fertility journey led me to Ken.

I spotted "Wants to Help", Ken's avatar, right away. I clicked on his little, circular picture which enlarged to reveal a dashing older gentleman. But what is his age, I thought, as I leaned closer to the screen and squinted my eyes. His about me section revealed an articulate, thoughtful man, new to the platform as well, who hasn't had any children of his own, nor has he helped any other women, yet. I wrote him a message, trying to imply that this is normal, I'm not begging, I'm not shy.

And he wrote back. He was down. We decided to kick it all off with a phone call.

The next morning, I walked to a farmer's market to buy fruit and vegetables for the week and to ponder a future with Ken's child in my

life.

What would it be like with Ken coexisting in my child's world? I fixated on a zucchini. It was a busy Saturday morning, chillier than it should have been, and there were too many produce options. I did what any good person in therapy would do, and interrogated my thoughts and emotions. I'm overly occupied with what Ken will think of me. A stand of tiny succulents caught my eye, as living objects that would last longer, not perishable, than the week's food, but I did not buy any. I walked home empty-handed.

He'd be calling soon. I went back to the therapy thoughts.

Do I feel judged? Powerful? Do I want this older man to fall in love with me? And, seriously, what questions should I ask him? What questions would make me sound...smart? Why do I want to sound smart? What is wrong with me?

And how can I turn this into a personal essay that The New York Times' Modern Love column would want to publish? Start in the middle, with the walk to the farmer's market...

At noon, the phone rang. I launched into it – though he tried to amicably chit-chat and break the ice first. I told him my story, extolling my virtues. But when there was a lull in the conversation, I blurted out the nut graf of my desires. What's your eye color? How tall are you? Scratching my head, do you have schizophrenia in your family? Good at math, or art? I didn't ask him who his favorite *Thrones* character was.

He told me his story. About how he and his ex-wife wanted children, but they waited too long. They tried fertility treatments to no avail. They missed their window, too.

And finally, he revealed, in a roundabout way, that he was 60 years old. I garbled my thoughts into words, regurgitating things about him dying soon, increased risks of autism in babies born to fathers of his age, and needing to do more research. He took this in stride, though we both knew that the egg-producing partner's risks weigh just a little bit more heavily in this equation.

On his profile, he selected that he wanted a form of limited relationship, or fun uncle, with the child. What this means is the ultimate question. Everything else, the eye color and height, would be outside our control. I needed him to tell me what he wanted with the child, so I could decide what I wanted with him. Maybe the actual filter didn't say "fun uncle", but that's how I remember it.

Ken wanted to meet me in person. I wanted to meet him, too. Who

asked who first? I can't remember anymore.

Wrapping up the call, he offered to pay for my IVF treatment and for the kid's college! Ken, you're my number one sperm donor!

But what's a fun uncle? A funcle? My friend called this term creepy and that in turn makes him creepy. Isn't that too obvious, though, that this whole process is inherently creepy? Let's go back to the transaction of sperm. Dr. Cho even used the word "cells" to describe the male product I was seeking. I liked how removed this word was from the person producing it. I could be a true solo mom, creating a child out of my own body with just a sprinkle of another's DNA. It reduces the male component to something involuntary that he has no control over. Like drawing blood. Your cells, my body, a child.

Moving all of two feet from my desk to my bed, I put the next episode of *Thrones* reruns back on. What's with this urgency to get the most out of life? Death is everywhere, always. At least in the TV show they openly acknowledge the importance of legacy. They also tortured and raped each other, usually if someone got in the way of their family's desires.

I've seen Instagram reels of cats sitting on top of pregnant women's bellies, then the videos skip forward to show the cats lounging beside the newborn babe. My sweet, little OJ, writhing his way out from underneath me as I smush him into my comforter, is charming in his innocent desire to be set free. But the long-since deceased cats of my childhood would try to trick me into letting them loose by faking their purrs so that I might think they were enjoying our game. Maybe it's not so much the instinct of all cats that's changed but my expectations. I can't see OJ coddling a baby, I can only picture him stealing his breath.

I reached for my phone to contact the woman in the texts...Sarah, let's just call her. I asked her about the quality of old man semen, but I was using dictation and the word came out spelled "salmon". I quickly added, haha, to the text stream. I just feel like, lol, it is a bit too informal.

I want to impress Ken. I think about how in Jane Austin's world of *Pride and Prejudice*, women mastered the pianoforte and read novels endlessly, but modern characters are traded in creative skills, travel and experiences. I could mention that I've spent years overseas, that I like to draw, write and bike ride (more and better than most people, I need to indicate). How to say that I am not an old spinster without saying that I am not an old spinster?

He must be asking himself similar, insecurity-laced questions. A rich

old man should see it as a blessing that I would want to procreate with him. Take his semen and run. That is the ultimate goal in biological life, to reproduce, isn't it? He should be begging me to do this for him, not the other way around. I am offering a womb and motherhood and my life as a martyr for this child. As it was meant to be?

I tweeted at an editor at *The New York Times'* Modern Love desk, asking him out for coffee, before finding in the details of an interview with him that he is married, even "happily". I slumped over my computer desk, sighed, then opened another window to search for a female author who I could ask to be my mentor.

Sarah, my most trusted confidant, has given up on me. She used to always text me right back, but I don't think I'm a lead to her anymore. She has referred me to a cryobank after texting that she couldn't help with determining if "60-year-old man salmon" is worth anything.

He said he wanted to be a funicle. Can he please go fuck himself?

Another night in my bedroom, I put back on *Game of Thrones*, and wondered what he was watching. I thought about how Samwell Tarly reacted when he learned Daenerys Targaryen burnt his father and brother alive, and how he was meant to bend the knee to this dragon woman because that's the way it should be. The last season was trash anyways.

But Sarah, my unembodied texting friend, I haven't forgotten you. I'll name my firstborn child after you if you can only help me. I want you to use your ethereal powers to scan his inbox, his outbound messages, what is he saying? Am I too good to be true?

I once read that Julian Assange is a pro-natalist, a serial "donor". He, like Elon Musk, believes strongly in progeneration. The thesis is that we should be adding more children to the earth instead of treating population growth as something to be curtailed. Musk says that "fear of climate change" is one of the biggest factors in declining fertility rates, amongst educated people, he adds. Alas, it's not my old eggs but rather my advanced brain that got me here. My cleverness found Sarah, Dr. Cho and Ken and my tenacity will sift through the rubble and make something out of nothing, a baby from what is left over.

How much more informal could this get, to make a human being? Is it just another social construction that a man and a woman should fall in love and make another person, born of the bonds of that love? Does that deep, devoted compatibility manifest in the genetic embodiment of their souls? Clearly. My child my child my child. It's not my child.

It's half my child. It makes me feel less. The woman is burdened with offspring and the man has enriched his life.

As I slowed my pace, I saw Ken. At first, I noticed the flowers. I flushed. He was there before me, too, and I always arrive first. He fumbled getting up and a tiny espresso wobbled obtrusively on the table where he was seated, outside in the open air. We locked eyes. I lifted my arm to wave, just the part below the elbow, smiling and keeping my bodily extremities by my core. But once I was close enough, we hugged. I think he reached out first to take me in. He was tall and broad, I felt swaddled in his manhood.

He was the image of a dapper older man through and through. Maybe he had a facelift, or veneers? Full head of hair for sure. The checklist checked itself. I did sense a mild tension, like an awkwardness meter ticking up, when I talked about semen and insemination, almost like we were in the Victorian Era. As if our creation would be done via stork dropping a baby down the chimney. It was like talking to a sexy but well-mannered grandpa.

He was actually most interested in chatting about...climate change. After retiring from something in finance, maybe he said asset management, he set his attention on climate change awareness. I did wonder if he was forced to retire from banking due to his age, like a cog in a bottleneck, only the top dogs moving up to the C-Suite, but maybe I don't really know anything. Now he passes his time financing documentary films and traveling the world to stop climate change in its tracks, or something like that, it wasn't clear. I was overly focused on conveying that this topic was of interest to me, trying not to dart my eyes around as panic took hold in my chest. He was just oozing money. He had a Ferrari hat perched on the third seat at our table.

There's mostly trash on the Live Donor Forum website, but he and I are perfect together! We both have great educations, families, genes. I think either of us could've met a real piece of junk, but instead, we met each other. We are meant to be.

Hours passed, it grew dark. I pictured myself floating above the table and looking down at Ken and me. Two strangers laughing and drinking coffee in the fall. I caught myself rehashing an old story about myself that might have been a bit too detailed and maybe I was being a bit too coy telling it, tilting my head down and smiling. He listened, allowing me to finish all my thoughts before commenting or asking another question.

Though the details are a bit of a blur, I did not bring up the word *fun-
cle* once. We decided that logistics should be secondary to things like
genetic testing, background checks and, of course, more coffee dates to
come for us to figure it all out.

But they wouldn't, and we didn't. I'd never see Ken again. I was
lying in bed when he sent the breakup text about a week later. I first
heard the vibration coming from my phone as it lay in bed beside me,
and somehow I knew. He broke up with our child and a future scenario
that had panned out 100 different ways in my head.

He said he put a lot of thought into it and decided to put things on
hold for now. He thinks I'm a great person and will make a great mom
one day when I'm ready.

It wasn't my uterus, it was him, he could have just as easily said. This
was a death. He sent the message at night. I was in the final throes of
the last season of *Thrones*. I put my phone down after reading the text
twice. It ended with, I hope you find what you're looking for.

I asked him to meet me first, anyway. He said he wanted a child,
but he didn't say it had to be mine. Maybe I appeared too desperate,
that it was clear that my true intentions weren't to transact in bodily
fluids passed through a syringe in a doctor's office, they were for what
I shouldn't have desired. I tried to turn him from a fun uncle into a
willing participant in parenting. I made it too real, that was my error. I
wanted to be less alone.

Now I'm left with half a baby—or a Ken-shaped hole in my child's
heart. I wanted cells and someone to take care of me. I feel like a me-
dieval character in my own series right before the executioner is set to
chop off my head. Nevermind, I'll find another donor and add this to
the list of rejections to discuss in therapy.

No more college for you, kid.

I turned off the TV, shaking my head. Ned Stark wasn't your father,
Jon, he was your *fun-
cle*. Good luck with that.

The Bird and the Beggar

Ramtin Mesgari

For the past year I've been working the weekday shifts at my father's shop. I sit there idly, for the most part, hoping someone will walk in, and fearing at the same time having to talk to them, to sell them something I know nothing about: a Kashan, a Kilim, a Qom, carpets with city names, Iranian cities, mosaics, coloured carpets, silk rugs, some woven by hand, others by machine. At the end of the day, they're just carpets, as ordinary to me as brittle leaves are to the winter. I grew up with them, slept on them, sat on them, rolled them up, dined on them, washed them and dried them and scrubbed them too, but never have I been able to sell them.

It's not so much about the carpets themselves, as it is about the work. When it comes to work, I'm lazy; and if sales were speech, then I'd have a speech impediment. But even though this sort of work is itself a lazy sort of work, there is still some commitment that's required to do it right. A commitment I lack. I'm happy to lunge about, to move from here to there, tidy the store, even crook my already-crooked back in trying to wash these things, but when it comes to selling them, I'm better off not being in the store at all. Surely the customer is capable of deciding what he wants on his own, what he likes for his home; it is after all he who wants the carpet, he who's looking for something to buy. But it doesn't work that way. You have to tell him, you have to show him what he wants... or rather, what he must have! And yet, even when you do, even when you turn the shop inside out, upside down, showing the customer all that he desires, all the varieties of blue and red – because that's how they decide, not by material or origin or quality, but by colour – he still ends up walking out with a soft grunt and a false promise of return: that is, after he's consulted his wife. So yes, I'm better off standing outside the store.

By noon I've already melted away into the midst of obscurity. And at around half past, when the heat strokes hit the hardest, I get up and walk to avoid drifting off into daydreams. By quarter past one, I ask Phillip to watch over the shop yet again. "I have an errand to run," I tell him. Errand: that is, guiltily parading around the mall, praying desperately that no customers show up while I'm gone – yet hoping at the same time that there will be a sale in my absence; this is how we

make a living after all.

My bearing begins and ends with the tobacco store opposite my father's shop. It's one that's piled so high with an endless array of candles, candies, and frivolous fragrances that even passing by it causes the colour on my face to fade. Rushing past, I go straight to Seattle Coffee and leave with a cortado in hand.

On my way back, I stop at the pet shop, a place I've been visiting every other day since I started working here. For the past week in particular, I've been coming daily to see the creature behind the shop window: the Blue Crone Reinette. It's a Parisian bird, the shopkeeper tells me, yet found only in the southern hemisphere. Every time I come to see the bird, determined to buy it, I walk in, see the price on the cage, then walk out, recalling my continued hesitation in taking the poor thing home. But having now worked here for the past eight months, I've managed to save up a considerable amount. What is work anyhow, if not a means for buying the things that appeal to us, for purchasing little Parisian birds? What counts today isn't money, but what you do with it. And I work only for money –

also as a favour to my father, but mostly for money. If it weren't for him, I'd be working elsewhere. But the problem with elsewhere is that my obstinance would have long been crushed and I would have lost my sense of leisure by now.

I step into the shop, determined to take the bird home at last, to admire it in the mornings and the evenings, and on the weekends when I'm home alone. But having foreseen my return, my routine – that is, me stepping into the shop, admiring the bird, then walking out again – the shopkeeper merely nods his head and returns to his papers. Although I am now determined to take the bird home with me, he refuses to help me. The man, who's built with a face that's craved more by vultures than by women, does not give me his attention.

"Hello," I say. But someone else has already walked in, and it's this newcomer who's now being attended to. This newcomer, a boy, a student perhaps, who's dressed as though he'd fallen out of bed – with a crinkled shirt, patches for a beard, and short brown shorts – now hogs the shopkeeper's attention.

I decide to come back later; and later, I see the same boy walking by my shop, and again, eyeing his outfit, I wonder how the Afrikaners here never flinch or cringe at the clothes or lack of clothes they wear. In Centurion, if you wear underwear, you're overdressed. The boys here

only ever wear short shorts with sleeveless shirts; the girls, in their own way, are almost always short-less and wear only short-sleeved shirts.

Just before closing time, I give Philip the keys and ask him to lock up. And back at the pet shop again, I head straight for the bird, ignoring the shopkeeper who's turned his back on me. The Crone is the most beautiful bird I've ever seen. Why it's called a crone is beyond me, for its beauty outshines that of all the other birds in the shop. It wears on its back a scarlet jacket, has a black torso, and looks as though its wings were made of blue velvet. Its beak, which is long and thin and round, reminds me of a sorcerer's hat; and its tail, too, makes me think of a sorcerer, because it's long, almost as long as its body. It's the tail of a phoenix, red on top but with a blue underside.

When the shopkeeper announces he's closing the shop, I don't respond. Instead, I stare into the eyes of the bird, into its face which now expresses a profound concentration as it looks back into mine. Charming eyes, a majestic bird.

"How much?" I ask again, though the price is right there. It's two weeks of wages for the bird. "But it's a Parisian bird," he tells me, though they're only found in the southern hemisphere.

It's only two weeks' wages, I reason with myself. And I know what happens to these creatures if no one comes for them. Yes, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and knowing this, I decide to take it. In total, with the cage, its decorations, and the food, I nearly deplete my month's earnings. But when I walk out, I walk out happy. I walk with the strut of a benefactor, happy to have rescued the bird from the grey and dreary walls of the shopping mall. And on my way out, I walk again pass my father's shop, one more time to make sure it's closed, then head for the parking lot. Outside, the sun has already set. It's quiet. It's a Tuesday evening; naturally it's quiet.

In the gap of silence, in the calm that perseveres, I contemplate my purchase. Looking down, I see the bird perched on a branch in a cage hardly twice its size. The bird is silent, and in its silence – quite unlike other birds – its majesty shines all the more. I look at it again, thinking, contemplating, and in a moment of revelation, I decide to free the bird. Looking into the Crone's eyes, I see eyes that yearn for the night sky, black eyes wishing again to be a streak of gold and blue. And compelled thereupon, by its sorrows and grievances, I open the cage. I let the bird loose. You're free, I think, but suddenly, almost as though out of thin air, before it can even spread its wings, a man appears behind

me, and leaping for the bird, he snatches it from my hand, snaps its neck, and runs off.

All I can do is stare into the distance, frozen, at fault, ashamed. And in a state of muddled sullenness, I pack the cage and food into the back of my car and drive home alone.

The Rape of Galatea

Toney Dimos

Andreas and Jorge sat at a cafe near the port in Piraeus sipping coffees when Andreas saw a woman named Galatea dressed in black with two young children, her son Selim and daughter Electra, aged 11 and 9, trailing behind her. Galatea had departed a British warship from Smyrna that had arrived carrying a vessel full of Greek refugees in the autumn of 1922. With the inferno in Asia Minor, droves of refugees poured into the area from across the Aegean seeking solace. Andreas could see the anguish and fear in the woman's eyes and got up from the cafe table to approach her. "*Kyria*," he said, "Ms."

The woman ignored his overtures at first, calling to her children to move quickly, even though she had no place to go. Her Turkish husband Ahmet, a decorated military officer in the Greco-Turkish War, had been assassinated by a Greek sniper at the Battle of Dumlupinar. The marriage had proved divisive for both of their families, even following the birth of Selim, named after Ahmet's father, and Electra, named after the mother of Galatea from Crete. Nevertheless, with the continued conflict between Greece and Turkey, her existence in Smyrna had become untenable. Her Greek family had excommunicated her years earlier after her decision to marry Ahmet and convert to Islam, given that her grandfather had been skinned alive by the Turkish authorities in Crete for attempting to incite a revolt against their rule, while his family blamed Galatea and her people for the death of their son, casting out her and the children as well.

"*Kyria, parakaló*," said Andreas, standing in front of her to preclude her from advancing. "*Parakaló, Kyria*, I have a job for you and a place for your children to live." The woman stopped and glared at him and said, "I'm not some loose woman if that's what you seek."

"No, madame, I simply want to help a woman and her children in need."

Galatea paused, glaring at Andreas eye-to-eye. He maintained her gaze for several seconds until she said, "*endáxi, páme*." Andreas took one of her suitcases to lessen her burden, as she instructed her children to follow her lead. Andreas shouted to Jorge that he would see him later at the shop.

Within a week of arriving in Piraeus, Galatea began to work as a clerk in the commodities trading office Andreas and Jorge ran. Selim and Electra, fluent in Turkish, would study Greek lessons from school to improve their language skills in their new home, while their mother would manage administrative tasks, clean, and do whatever else was needed. Jorge kept his distance from her, wary of what Andreas's real intentions were. Galatea, however, had taken notice of Jorge and could sense his power and the attention women paid him. She found it both amusing and arousing how matriarchs throughout Piraeus and Athens would bring their daughters to him for consideration of marriage. She admired Jorge's tact and facility in gently declining the steady stream of overtures.

In time, though, Andreas became less subtle with his intentions for Galatea. He would ask her to accompany him on walks after the workday had concluded, to which she would tell him to go home to his wife and children. She always was quite careful in how she rebuffed him, afraid that he may seek some form of retribution by firing her, leaving her with limited prospects for herself and her children.

A little more than a year after Galatea had arrived from Smyrna, Andreas had asked Jorge to meet him for a drink at the elegant Select Cafe adjacent to the port at ten in the evening. He told him to be on-time, because it was in regard to an important business opportunity involving a prominent businessman from Alexandria named Sophocles Kavafy with interests in cotton and wheat. Andreas had been instrumental in helping some of Sophocles's distant relations find jobs after they had been forced to flee Asia Minor. As a gesture of gratitude, Sophocles had made an appointment to meet Andreas during his visit to Athens before embarking on a business matter in Beirut.

The father of Sophocles, Ptolemy, had established commodity interests in Egypt facilitated through his marriage to a local coptic Christian woman named Demiana whose family had maintained land rights on the Nile delta for centuries. Sophocles, the eldest son, had begun to take greater ownership of the business in the last couple of years, as his father's health had begun to deteriorate.

Jorge arrived a few minutes early and found Andreas at his usual table inside the grand cafe featuring a Belle Epoque interior. After removing his coat, he stepped into the bathroom to wash his hands. Upon returning, he found Andreas and Sophocles seated, whereby both men stood, as Jorge arrived at the table. They shook hands and exchanged greetings before sitting to discuss the venture.

Sophocles shared how his family wanted to expand their enterprises more efficiently and deeper into Europe. Jorge instantly became intrigued as it was the type of venture he had wanted to pursue based on ideas he had outlined in his notebooks. Andreas and Sophocles proposed to Jorge that he would go to Alexandria and establish the operations there. They presented the terms for a generous salary in addition to an apartment and expense account to help develop social connections. Jorge pushed for an equity stake as well. Though Sophocles admired his moxie and courage to ask, he deflected the request out of hand. Nevertheless, Jorge agreed to the proposition and would be set to sail to Egypt within a month.

The night before Jorge was scheduled to leave Piraeus to begin his journey to Alexandria, Galatea prepared a meal to celebrate his birthday. Andreas had provided her generously with a three-bedroom flat that he had used previously with his wife and three children before moving to a mansion above the city. Jorge arrived at the flat around eight in the evening feeling confident and enthusiastic about the new stage in his life. Andreas opened the door to the apartment giving him a warm hug. Selim and Electra ran to the door wishing him happy birthday. Electra hugged one of his legs, refusing to let him walk.

Galatea was in the kitchen preparing the meal still. Jorge and Andreas made their way there, while the children returned to the living room to play with their toys. Upon entering the kitchen, Jorge presented her with a bottle of Mastica from Chios and a medley of sweets he had purchased for the occasion. She thanked him, giving him a hug that lasted longer than usual. Andreas observed Jorge's awkwardness as he tried to pull away in spite of Galatea's unwillingness to let go.

Jorge excused himself from the kitchen to go play with the children in the living room, leaving Andreas and Galatea to finish the meal preparations. Andreas entered the space with two glasses of whiskey

a few minutes later. "Yia mas!" he said, toasting Jorge. "Are you ready for tomorrow?"

"Of course," said Jorge. "I don't think I will sleep tonight."

"You deserve this opportunity, cousin. You've worked hard for it. I know you won't let us down."

Jorge nodded his head in assurance believing he was ready, while continuing to play with the children as if they were his own, teasing, admonishing, and hugging them. Galatea observed this from a distance for a few minutes realising the type of father he would be. Soon after Galatea told everyone dinner was ready in the dining room. As Jorge walked by her, Galatea gazed at him intently in plain view of Andreas.

In the dining room, Andreas sat at the head of the table with Jorge to his left and Galatea to his right. The children sat next to each other to Jorge's left. He helped them cut and eat their food while Galatea watched in admiration. The three adults made small talk through the meal of lamb, potatoes, and salad. Jorge and Andreas refrained from mentioning anything related to his work upcoming in Egypt. *The St. Matthew* opera by Bach played in the background. Galatea always played classical music over meals believing it would enhance the education of her children.

Throughout the dessert course of baklava, Andreas noticed how Galatea could not keep from gazing at Jorge longingly. Jorge felt this as well but didn't acknowledge or reciprocate it. Around 9:30 in the evening, Galatea put the children to bed. Jorge kissed them goodnight, knowing that this, perhaps, was the last time he would ever see them. Andreas and Jorge retired to the salon where they drank more Mastica.

The men smoked a couple of Cuban cigars Sophocles had given them as a gift. They made small talk about Jorge's preparation for departure in the morning to Alexandria. As the men spoke, though, Andreas's thoughts were more on Galatea than Jorge. "What is taking her so long?" said Andreas.

"Let it be. She's putting the children to sleep." said Jorge.

"I'm going to go see what's taking her so long."

Jorge made nothing of it, as Andreas walked down the hall to the children's bedroom. Upon approaching the room, Galatea exited the bathroom in the hallway. "What took you so long?" said Andreas. "We were waiting for you."

"The children were fooling around too much and didn't want to go to sleep," said Galatea.

"Ah, okay. You look very beautiful tonight. Did I tell you that?"

"Thank you," she said, trying to avoid his gaze.

"I *said* you look very beautiful this evening."

"And, I said 'thank you'. Jorge is waiting for us," she said, looking at him sternly.

Andreas then tried to kiss her, but she rebuked him with a look of disgust, saying, "Think of your wife and children." Galatea pushed him away and made her way down the hall calling Jorge's name. Jorge could see she was flustered and asked if everything was all right. She responded that the children were just being ornery. Andreas then entered the salon asking Jorge for another glass of Mastica.

The three of them made small talk for a while before Jorge checked his pocket watch and realised he had to leave to prepare for his journey. He took one last gulp of Mastica and got up from his chair as the Bach opera finished.

Galatea went to her bedroom to collect his coat. Upon entering her room, she went to the top drawer of her dresser and took out a note she had written to Jorge, which she slipped into his inside coat pocket. She returned to the foyer of the apartment where Jorge and Andreas were standing at the door chatting. Galatea handed Jorge his coat and watched him closely as he put it on. Jorge thanked her again for the meal and her hospitality. They kissed on the cheek and hugged.

When Jorge tried to naturally let go of the embrace, she held on tightly for a few seconds. Upon releasing him, Jorge smiled at her to conceal any awkwardness and said goodnight. He shook hands with Andreas and said he would see him in the morning at the port. Andreas closed the door to the flat, as Jorge made his way down the winding staircase. When he heard the latch lock to Galatea's apartment turn, Jorge thought it strange, as Andreas was preparing to leave as well. He stopped and looked up at the door, but then dismissed it and continued to the street.

Inside Galatea's apartment, Andreas fastened the chain lock after turning the key. Bewildered, Galatea asked him what he was doing. Andreas turned to her, his eyes enraged with jealousy and scorn and said, "You, *poutana*," he said to her. "After all I've done for you and your children, you love *him*."

"What are you talking about?!" said Galatea.

"Don't play stupid with me!"

"You're being ridiculous!"

"Oh, am I?" he said, slapping her across the face.

"Andreas, parakalo, my children are here."

"You're children? Your Turkish bastards, you mean," he said moving closer to her, taking off his suit coat.

He grabbed her hair and pulled her into the living room, throwing her on the sofa face down. Andreas unfastened his belt and unzipped his pants. Tears fell from Galatea's eyes, as she struggled to overcome the weight of Andreas's body. He pulled up her dress and tore her underwear off. Galatea let out a scream and began to weep. Andreas told her to shut-up. Just as Andreas thrust back to begin to violate her, Galatea heard the voice of her son Selim. "Mama, mama, what's wrong?"

"*Agápi mou!*" said Galatea.

Startled, Andreas got off of Galatea and quickly pulled up his pants. Galatea covered herself, wiped her tears and went to her son. "Why are you crying?" Selim said.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "I wasn't feeling well. I heard about something sad, that's all."

"What is Kyrios Andreas doing to you?"

"We were just playing a game," she said, hugging her son firmly. "Kyrios Andreas was just leaving."

She glared at Andreas with disdain, as a deep feeling of wretchedness overcame him. "Help me walk Kyrios Andreas to the door, *agápi mou.*"

At the door, Andreas and Galatea looked at each other with utter antipathy. "Tell Kyrios Andreas, goodnight," said Galatea.

"*Kaliníxta*, Kyrios Andreas, see you tomorrow," said her son.

"*Kaliníxta*," said Andreas.

Andreas glared then at Galatea and said, "You know he's leaving tomorrow for Egypt. You'll never see him again."

Galatea looked at him, as the tears returned and began to trickle down her cheeks.

"That's right," said Andreas, "shed more tears for him, you pathetic whore and traitor. You're finished. Don't come to work tomorrow. I want you out of this flat by noon."

She shook her head in acknowledgment and locked the door behind her. She walked Selim back to his and her daughter's bedroom and put him back to sleep. He asked her why she was crying again, and she told

him not to worry. She was just a little sad, she said, trying to comfort him. She lay in bed between her two children, stroking her son's hair until her tears put her to sleep.

On the first night of his journey from Piraeus to Alexandria, Jorge stood alone on the top deck of the *Danae* observing the full moon. He smoked a couple of hand-rolled custom Egyptian cigarettes while listening to the ship cut through the open waters. After making a few more notes in his notebook, Jorge returned to his room for a night cap. Once in his room, he poured himself a brandy and lit a cigarette. He reached inside his coat pocket to take out his wallet when he found the letter Galatea had left him. He took out the folded note curious about its contents. The front side read:

Giorgos

On the inside, the note read:

Giorgos,

I hope you had a beautiful birthday. My children and I have enjoyed getting to know you over the last several months. And, I, myself have grown quite fond of you. Or, should I say, I've fallen in love with you. You may think I'm foolish, but I have to tell you how I feel.

Love,

Galatea

Jorge grinned in delight after finishing the letter. The paper was lightly scented with Galatea's French perfume. He was quite flattered by her confession of love. He, of course, had sensed an attraction, and felt an affinity as well. However, he doubted the feasibility of realising something with her. Nevertheless, part of him now regretted following Andreas's advice of not telling anyone he was leaving for Egypt.

The next evening Jorge tried futilely to write a response to Galatea. Over a few Jameson whiskeys and some dark chocolates, he would stare at the blank stationery paper from the liner in vain. He would write: "Dear Galatea," and then look at the rest of the blank page for a while and then crumble it up and start again. Jorge would get up and

walk around his room taking drags of his cigarette looking for the right words. By four in the morning, he had fallen asleep on his bed, pen and paper in hand with the photo of him and Ayse, his deceased fiancé, in front of the windmills of Mykonos resting on his chest.

In the morning, Jorge sat in the first-class lounge reading a telegram he had received from Andreas wishing him luck. His cousin said that he would be sending him more money upon his arrival in Alexandria. After reading the telegram from Andreas, he began to write a response to Galatea. He told her of the work to be done in Egypt, and that he was looking forward to life in Alexandria; he asked her how her children were and what she was planning for Christmas.

Towards the end of his message, his hand had begun to tremble a bit, as he began to address her confession of love. He told her that he was flattered and surprised by her feelings and that he, too, had found her alluring, but had never considered a romance with her. He said that he would keep her in his thoughts upon establishing himself in Egypt and would see how they felt about each other in time.

The day the *Danae* was scheduled to arrive in Alexandria Jorge stood on deck watching the city come into view. Jorge disembarked the ship onto a bustling port where he heard a symphony of Arabic, French, English, and Greek. Jorge was looking for an associate of Sophocles who Andreas had said would be waiting at the port to take him to his apartment on the Rue Lepsius. Yet, he saw no one. He surveyed the port, declining the overtures of peddlers and beggars. He checked his Swiss pocket watch from Zurich after twenty minutes had passed.

A sinking feeling overcame him, as he made his way to the courier service on the port. He dashed off a quick message to Andreas stating no one had arrived to meet him. When he asked the clerk if any money had arrived for him, the clerk responded that only a telegram for him had just been received. Jorge took the message, which read:

Giorgos,

If you're reading this message, you must have made it to Alexandria. By no doubt now, you're wondering where Sophocles's contact is as well as money.

Alas, my cousin, there has been a change of plans is all I can say. Don't expect to receive anything from me and consider yourself free from any obligation to Sophocles and myself.

Andreas

It was only years later did Jorge learn the truth behind the intrigue. Seething with jealousy for Galatea's affection for Jorge and shame from his own attempt to violate her, Andreas plotted against his cousin. After he watched Jorge leave Piraeus, Andreas contacted Sophocles and told him that he had fired Jorge for stealing from him but that he had another family member who could do a better job in Alexandria. Andreas said he would cover all the costs to send him there and reimburse Sophocles the money and time he had invested in Jorge.

Sophocles sensed something foul, but agreed to the terms not wanting any other delays. From there, Andreas removed Jorge's ability to access any money from his bank accounts, which Andreas had co-signed to open, given Jorge was considered a minor when he first opened them. Finally, he had intercepted the telegram Jorge had sent Galatea. She would thus die thinking Jorge had spurned her.

Overcome with his own shame and disgust for himself, Andreas set out to destroy Galatea next. He cast her out from her home and job and proceeded to smear her reputation in Piraeus, stating she had tried to seduce him and make him leave his wife and children. She, subsequently, moved to Athens and worked a couple of fleeting maid jobs. Desperate, she turned to prostitution; yet, within a short time, she became overwhelmed by the indignities of her life. One night, as her son Selim lay next to her in bed, she said to him, stroking his head, "If I died, Selim, would you miss me?" Selim said nothing, pretending to sleep. Later that evening Galatea took her own life in the kitchen with arsenic.

Selim had found her the morning after on the kitchen floor and understood instinctively what she had done and why. Soon after he returned to Piraeus and plotted to avenge his mother. One hour before he and Electra were to take the *Artemis*, an overnight ferry to Chania in Crete, where they would go to the remote mountains of Sfakia to find their mother's family, Selim stepped inside Andreas's office who had been working late at night. He had told Electra to wait for him outside the shop and that he would be back in 10 minutes. Selim made his way through the shop into the back office where Andreas was overlooking

the status of some accounts.

Recognising Selim, Andreas said, "What are you doing here, you Turkish bastard?"

"I've come here to kill you," said Selim, pointing at Andreas a Cretan dagger his father Ahmet had found on a battlefield in Anatolia, and had given him as a gift back in Smyrna.

"Well, come do it," said Andreas undaunted by Selim.

He stood firmly waiting for Selim to strike. "Well, what are you waiting for?" said Andreas.

Paralysed by fear, Selim raised the knife, but failed to act. Seeing him tremble, Andreas knocked the dagger from his hand. As he attempted to flee the shop, Andreas tackled Selim and pinned him to the ground straddling his chest. He wrapped both of his hands around Selim's neck. Selim struggled at first to free himself from Andreas's grip, but soon his eyes began to close and his capacity to resist waned.

Yet, just as he was squeezing the last breaths of life from Selim, Andreas felt the sharp edge of the Cretan dagger plunge deep inside his back. He shouted in agony and rolled off of Selim onto the ground wailing in pain, futilely attempting to try and pull the blade out of his back. Flailing about disoriented with blood pouring out of his body, Andreas saw Electra standing over him with a cold stare fueled by the resentment she felt toward what she perceived to be the softness of her brother and the cowardice of her mother.

Andreas reached up futilely to try and grab her, but she simply pushed his hand away and pushed him to the ground, whereby he landed on his back – his full body weight, thereby plunging the blade entirely through his midsection with the tip now protruding from his belly. As he took his last breath of life, Electra glared at him and spat in his face, leading her brother to the Artemis.

The Results

Joseph A. Schiller

Ethan stepped up to one of several elevators of a high-rise of medical offices and clinics and promptly indicated he wanted to go up with the corresponding button. He only had to wait a few moments before the elevator made the expected dinging sound that traditionally accompanies its arrival before the door too opened before him, as if welcoming its latest guest with open arms. After stepping in and selecting the button for the fifth floor, the door of the elevator closed and subsequently began to climb quickly upward as directed. The building did not seem to have a soul within, Ethan noted, besides the security officer sitting behind the reception desk on the first floor. As he moved down the empty hallway toward his destination, his footsteps almost created an echo as he walked.

When Ethan finally found the door to the clinic at which he had an appointment, he paused. His hesitation was only momentary but was enough to make Ethan feel embarrassed by the cautionary impulse. *You're being silly.* Almost to overcompensate, he stepped into the clinic waiting room as if his arrival was somehow greatly anticipated, only to find two other guests looking up uninterestedly at him from their seats. Ethan took a few awkward steps up to an electronic interface screen on the other side of the small room.

Approaching the display in the wall triggered a series of electronic noises from the device before a surprisingly life-like female voice sounded. "Welcome. Please place your right wrist face down over the biometric scanner. This process may take several seconds. Do not lift your wrist from the screen until directed to do so. If you have any questions or require assistance, press the 'Help' button."

Ethan pulled the sleeve of his shirt covering his right arm a bit to his forearm and promptly placed his wrist down upon the small glass screen as instructed. A bluish-green light moved quickly back and forth under the glass, flashing as it did, indicating the device was reading the identification chip just under the surface of his skin.

After a couple of seconds, the woman's voice returned. "Welcome, Mr. Malvic. You are now checked in for your appointment. Please take a seat, and your name will be called shortly."

Pulling his sleeve back over his wrist, Ethan turned and took a seat

along the side of the wall a few chairs away from one of the other two patients, exchanging a compulsory smile and nod as he did. He remembered from his initial visit just how thoroughly clean and sterilised the clinic was maintained, with a hint of disinfectant lingering in the air. *Or, perhaps they pump something in through the ventilation system.* Either way, all he knew for sure was this was a level of cleanliness impossible for a person to achieve. *They are clearly using a humanoid service.*

There would only be a few minutes at the most to wait. One of the benefits of the advent of automated medical services over the past century was the addition of increased efficiencies, one of which was that appointments started and ended with remarkable precision with physicians, nurses, and reception staff being replaced by AI. There was also the added anonymity and sensitivity as well. Patients entered through one automatic door and were ushered out another when finished. What Ethan could not reason was, however, with all of the tremendous advancements that had been made, why there was still a lingering necessity to ever physically visit a clinic just to receive the results of a set of lab tests. Ethan's profession, that of a school teacher, he reasoned, had long since migrated online for virtual or asynchronous lessons. In his short six years as a teacher, he never had, and would never meet any of his pupils face-to-face. *If I can collect assignments from home, I can certainly get these lab results sent to me digitally.*

Eventually, finding himself alone after the other two patients were called in for their appointments, Ethan had a quick moment to himself in silence before the automated voice came over a speaker to announce his turn. "Mr. Malvic, please step forward and enter. Room 5 has been prepared for you."

Stepping forward as requested, Ethan walked up to a door that led into a back hallway which then led into a series of small spaces. When he was standing directly under the door, a sensor was triggered and the door slid open, allowing him to enter. Ethan walked about halfway down the hallway until he found the entrance to the room labeled with five, and the door to the cubicle opened immediately revealing a small capsule with a single chair facing a computer interface.

Ethan took one step forward to the chair but stopped, and just stared down, the door closing behind him. He slowly, gingerly, moved toward the chair, reaching out to grab the back of it as if to pull it away and sit, before pausing again. *You wanted this. Remember that you wanted this.*

Finally sitting down, Ethan faced the screen and adjusted himself in

the seat, almost squirming as he did. Electronic beeps sounded from the interface before the AI-generated voice spoke to him. "Mr. Malvic, Please place your right wrist face down over the biometric scanner. This process may take several seconds. Do not lift your wrist from the screen until directed to do so. If you have any questions or require assistance, press the 'Help' button."

Much more reluctant this time, Ethan reached forward to rest his right wrist upon the glass biometric scanning screen. He noticed the anxiety rising within him. After quickly having his identity verified, Ethan waited for the interface to respond. "Mr. Malvic, thank you. The result of the examination you requested is now available. A printout of that result is forthcoming. There are eight minutes and twenty-eight seconds of time remaining for your appointment. Feel free to use the remaining time to review your exam results. We know you have alternative service provider options, so thank you for trusting us with your business. Should you have additional needs in the future we hope that you will consider our services again."

When the AI-generated voice had concluded its message, a brief whirring sound came from within the interface before a small piece of paper was released from a slip in the device. Ethan did not immediately reach for the exam results, but rather, sat back in the chair, leaning and stretching backward, slouching a bit. He turned his face to look up at the tiles of the ceiling and closed his eyes, taking slow, deep breaths. Ethan felt his heart pounding in his chest. Several more long breaths passed in and out before Ethan sat forward again to face the wall monitor. He sighed, then extended his hand to take the slip of paper sticking out of the module. *Just take it.*

Forcing himself to look at what was printed on the paper, Ethan read, *5 years, 3 months, 2 days, 6 hours, and 24 minutes*

Don't Cause Trouble

James Roth

The beginning was on a safari in Hwange National Park in western Zimbabwe, a bucket list item my wife Gretchen and I were checking off. The trip, though, had an unexpected consequence: I decided to divorce her. The decision came to me in a couple of epiphanies while on the safari, and it led me back to Zimbabwe, but not to see elephants.

The first epiphany occurred when we were in the back of a safari truck, caged to protect us from bull elephants, though the wire of the cage seemed a bit flimsy to be any defense against one if it was intent on crushing the truck. The driver had stopped it near a muddy watering hole, where some elephants were using their trunks to suck up the water and spray themselves to cool off and wash. The guide, a very bright university student, was telling us about them, that they were in danger, not from poachers, but from climate change. (The number of watering holes was decreasing; animals were getting stuck in mud and dying.)

I was watching the elephants and listening to our guide teach us something, while Gretchen was taking photos of the elephants with her unlocked Samsung Galaxy and sending the photos back to her friends in the U.S. on WhatsApp, telling them that she was having a wonderful time. Zim was what? “Awesome” – damn I hate that meaningless word. -t then struck me that she wasn't even there with me in Zim, really, learning about the plight of these elephants. She might as well have been in a safari park near Tampa. Epiphany one.

Epiphany two came that evening at sunset, when we were under a white canvas tent, open on all four sides, so we could take in the view of the landscape – arid, rocky, red dirt and scrubby bush, the horizon to the west turning orange and a flaming red before fading to black as night settled on the plain. We were having dinner, the china, crystal, and silverware set out on a white tablecloth (cloth napkins, too). Everything seemed so anachronistic, as if we'd gone back in time to something out of the Victorian explorer period, when the explorers had black porters, an uncomfortable thought, really, or we had entered the world of Hemingway's attempt at a nonfiction novel, *The Green Hills of Africa*.

There on our china was grilled brim, caught locally, served with

roasted potatoes and a salad of avocados, tomatoes, onions, all grown in Zimbabwe. The dressing was vinaigrette. I said to Gretchen, "Zimbabwe isn't the country I'd expected it to be. All a person hears about is the economic mess, the suffering. But the wardens, the guides, the people, they're all so neatly dressed, civil, so generous and kind and polite. Well-educated. And the scenery! Spectacular, isn't it?"

To which Gretchen responded, "There are too many bones in this fish. I prefer salmon."

Salmon, I thought, in the middle of southern Africa? What a thought. At about this time Isaiah – many Zimbabweans have names taken from the Bible, successful colonial proselytisation, to my horror – came up to our table. He was about thirty, had gentle eyes and a dignified way of presenting himself. He was wearing a white tunic, pressed, like a waiter out of a movie, a 007 Bond movie, he was so perfect.

"Madam," he said, "would you care for some more wine?"

Gretchen was picking through her fish with her pink fingernails.

I don't recall what wine it was, only that it was white and from South Africa. I'm a beer drinker: Orange Wheat, brewed in St. Pete, where I/we had a house.

Gretchen finished picking at her bream, cleaned her fingers on the pressed linen napkin, arranged the knife and fork on the plate, put the napkin beside it, and picked up her Galaxy, to take a picture of what, the skeleton of a fish that she had just complained about?

"Madam," Isaiah repeated, "would you care for some more wine?" The question made me think of that scene in *A Clockwork Orange* when Alex has unknowingly returned to the home of the woman he and his droogs had raped earlier in the movie, and her husband is asking him if he'd like some more wine, as they eat a spaghetti dinner.

She said nothing; rather she was positioning the camera to take the photo.

"Wine," I said, "Isaiah is asking if you'd like more wine."

She took the photo, then looked up at him, and said, "Oh! Wine? Yes, please. It's delicious."

Isaiah poured the wine, and, as he was doing so, the second, and more decisive, epiphany struck me: I couldn't recall how I'd ended up married to Gretchen and had sired two daughters who had flown the coop. We were empty nesters. And then, for some reason, I got to thinking of the women I'd seen walking along the sides of highways in Zim, carrying bundles of firewood on their heads, not a building in sight, not

even a round, thatched roof mud hut. Some of the girls couldn't have been more than seven or eight. And there they were, trudging along behind their mothers, a bundle of wood on their heads, tied up with twine. There were no men. They, the ones I saw, the men, were out in front of shops, drunk on cheap African beer that comes in plastic jugs, dancing to reggae music. They were, most of them, Isiah told me, illegal gold miners. The country was thick with illegal mining, because of the economy, no jobs, no money, hopelessness on the faces of many.

I said to Isiah, "Those girls carrying wood along the side of the road, they're so young."

"It's sad," he said. "Their families cannot afford the school fees. We are struggling in Zimbabwe, sir."

That is a refrain I later heard again and again.

I couldn't help but feel sympathy for them, of course, but didn't know what to do. Isiah must have seen this in me and said, "My uncle in Mutare, he has an NGO that sponsors girls, to pay for their school fees, sir."

I asked for his uncle's email address, and he wrote it down on a slip of paper, one too readily available, I know now. Isiah left, and Gretchen said, "What do you have in mind, Lawrence?"

After we'd returned to St. Pete and finalised the divorce, ending a twenty-seven-year marriage, I gave up the house on Sunset Drive. (It's across from a canal, old house dating back to the fifties, but timelessly modern, simple roof design pitched just enough to drain off the rain, lots of glass, three bedrooms, a terrace and yard of sawgrass, an oak tree with Spanish moss hanging from it, offering shade, palmetto plants here and there.) I gave up half of my retirement, too. (I'm a retired Navy and airline pilot, A-6 intruders and 757s). So I moved south to Punta Gorda on Charlotte Harbor, where I'd been keeping my sailboat, a twenty-six-foot Nonsuch catboat, and bought a place there, a townhouse, small, one-bedroom bachelor's pad on a canal, fenced-in patio to keep out the bugs – plenty of them during the summer months – and tied Pole Cat up against the sea wall.

Now and then in the winter months I'd go sailing on Charlotte Harbor, spend a few nights out in a slough among the mangroves, where there were snook and redfish, and if I was lucky enough to catch one, I'd grill it for dinner. Looking up at the star-filled sky while I ate, my mind often wandered. Sometimes I thought about another bucket list item I probably wouldn't check off: navigating around Cape Horn in a

steel hull cutter rig. (What a damn ride that would be! Waves coming over the bow, water slushing down the deck into the cockpit, cold as ice, and pouring out the scuppers.)

It was on one of these nights that I also got to thinking about Zimbabwe and those girls carrying firewood on their heads, walking along the side of the highway. Maybe it was the star-filled sky that got me thinking about them. The Zimbabwe night sky is filled with stars. Occasionally, a shooting star flashes by. The feeling was one of reverence for the beauty and an intense caring for the people. I was privileged and knew it and felt guilty about it as well. I had the luxury to make a sacrifice.

When I returned home I emailed Isiah's uncle. The NGO he ran was called Empowerment of Young Women in Zimbabwe. He answered my email a few days later, sent me photos of the girls; and me, being a sentimental old sucker, I guess, set up an automatic money transfer, just twenty-five dollars a month, for the school fees of three girls, a paltry amount, I thought, for an education, but plenty for a Zimbo, as they call themselves. The monthly salary, if a person even has a job, can be less than fifty, of which a third can go for rent, a couple of dark and dank rooms in a shared house, maybe no electricity, firewood the only fuel source to cook with. "We're struggling, sir." Hell, yes, they are.

The girls in the photos were all smiling, very cheerful, one with owl-ish glasses, all looking eager to embrace their futures. They all sent me letters that Isiah's uncle, David Mapfumo, scanned and attached to his emails. The girls were all fifteen, doing their "A" levels. (British system there, still a mystery to me why they, the British, can't just do things in a way that's easy to understand, first grade, second grade, and so on, not "O" and "A" levels and "form" this or that. Leave it to the British to complicate something that's as simple as one, two, three.)

About a year went by. It was early May, turning hot and humid. Bugs thumped up against the screen of the porch every night. My younger daughter, Kimberly, was calling me almost daily and telling me about "mother", saying that she had fallen into a depression and was on Xanax and Clonazepam, staying inside all day because she was "medicated," that she wasn't taking care of herself--trimming her toenails, shampooing her hair. A home helper, if that's what they're called, had to come by every few days to do those things for her.

"You, it's you, you're selfishness," Kimberly said once to me.

Well, I just let it pass, because I thought I was entitled to lead the

life that I wanted, and that life was not with Gretchen, and if Gretchen had fallen into a depression, considering she had gotten the house and half of my retirement, had never worked since our marriage, well, her mental collapse didn't fall on my shoulders. Moreover, Kimberly, a couple of years out of Florida State, had landed a good job at an advertising agency in Jacksonville as a video incubator, whatever the hell that was, and I (and I mean I because it was I) had paid every penny of Kimberly's education. No, I didn't say a thing about that. She'd come to understand it, I thought, in time, when and if she got married to the guy she'd been living with for I don't know how many years. Me paying rent on her apartment when she was a student and her boyfriend coming over to screw her whenever he wanted, rent-free. No. I didn't say anything about that. My other daughter, Francine, was more understanding. She had two kids she was raising and she was also dealing with a drunken husband, a Vikings fan, a lawyer in a big firm, living up north in Minneapolis. His firm had a box at the stadium and passed out season tickets to attorneys, which only encouraged his drunken kiss-ass behavior, because, well, that's what he thought was necessary to become a partner.

So one day when I was out on the porch grilling a burger, hearing the bugs thump up against the screen, I thought: It's winter in Zimbabwe. Why not get the hell out of here, go there, where the winters are pleasant, the evenings cool, and see the girls I've been sponsoring? As a retired airline pilot, all I had to do was hop a flight there, no cost to me, flying stand-by. So that's what I did.

Mutare, the town where the NGO was, was in the eastern highlands, which were very different from the arid western part of the country, and this became manifestly clear to me when the driver I'd hired had driven up and over Christmas Pass, just to the west of Mutare; from there I could see a range of mountains on the Mozambican border, under a canopy of brilliant white clouds, the faces of some of the mountains very dramatic, a curtain of stone. I knew from my research that there was a hotel resort up there in those mountains called Leopard Rock. It boasted that the Queen had stayed there way back when the country was Southern Rhodesia, named after Cecil Rhodes, the founder of the De Beers diamond company, who had, along with cornering the diamond market, promoted a policy to enslave the two main tribes, the Shona and Ndebele. They were driven off their lands, put onto malaria-infested reservations, a Trail of Tears Andrew Jackson way of

treating the natives.

Mutare is spread out in a valley, small houses with yards, has a grid system for streets – First Street, Second Street, Upper Fourth Avenue, like that. Only a couple of buildings were eight or so stories, hotels, mostly, one a Holiday Inn, of all things. The first time I went into town I saw people, many, lining the streets, waiting for buses or hitching rides, and women, always women, carrying bundles of wood on their heads, often with a baby strapped to their backs, pretty much what I'd seen in the western part of the country, women and babies. A lot of fucking and little birth control in evidence.

I stayed at Nigel's Bed and Breakfast on Upper Ninth Avenue, around the corner from a mosque thrown up with corrugated green roofing sheet metal. Nigel's was also across the street from an elementary school. Behind the school was the Hillside Sports Club. I knew all this even before arriving, thanks to Google Earth. Nigel's was surrounded by a concrete wall, protection from burglars. A garden filled with a kaleidoscope of flowers, none of which I knew the name of, welcomed visitors. The building was gray, trimmed in white, had a veranda, and the rooms were here and there, scattered around the house, hallways and paths leading through the garden to them from the veranda. My room was the kind you'd expect, with pictures of elephants and rhinos on the walls, a double-bed, a Victoria-era chair, and a nice, clean shower. In the two windows were pristine white curtains.

The next morning I was having a raisin scone, black coffee (Zimbabwean, mild, a bit fruity, from a plantation up in the mountains near Leopard Rock), and granola and yogurt. After drinking some of the coffee, I set my cup down and looked up, and there on the wall was a black-faced vervet monkey staring me down as I reached for the scone. Then Sarah, the waitress, long orange braids down her back, fake, came up to my table and, looking at the monkey, said, "Be sure to close your room window when you leave."

"Can they get their hands – or tail – on a duplicate key?" I said.

Sarah said, "My Lord Jesus, if they get in a house with eggs!"

Eggs? I thought. I'd thought they would have gone after something like, well, a banana.

The economic hardship of the people, which had continued on after Robert Mugabe's death in a Singapore hospital room after he had been deposed by his former minister of national security, Emmerson Mnangagwa, in 2017, was immediately in evidence just before I left Nigel's

that morning, on my way to the NGO to see David and meet the girls I'd been sponsoring, when the power failed, but only for a second. Nigel's backup solar power unit, which charged a battery pack, kicked in.

The NGO was only a few blocks away, across the street from the Lighthouse Church. I'd never been to a place where there were so many churches, the traditional ones, of course, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and also Seventh Day Adventist, if that could be called traditional, and then there were these other denominations run by charlatans, obviously, to scam money from people, Ebenezer Salvation Church of the Holy Ghost, and The Church of Holy Salvation and Prosperity Prophets Ministry. (I don't think Jesus was too concerned with prosperity.) Often there was a late model Mercedes or two parked out front, no doubt owned by a Shona Kenneth Copeland who promised miracles in exchange for a small contribution. And there were the Apostolics, too, whose women dressed all in white and held services under a tree. There was something admirable in that, to my way of thinking, the ascetic aspect of their religion, even if you can put me into the "strongly agnostic" category.

I had to hand it to President Mngagagwa, though, for taking advantage of this fervent religiousness of the place, because coming into town from Christmas Pass, there was a billboard for his party, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front). On the billboard there was a picture of him to one side of it grinning malevolently, all teeth in his squarish head, and one of the party's slogans, "The voice of God is the voice of the people." Hell, George Orwell couldn't have come up with a better one.

The road that led to the NGO was rutted out from rain, had patches of macadam here and there, and along it were some colonial homes that had gone to hell, windows busted out, stuffed with plastic, tiles missing, carriage houses in the back from long ago, where houseboys had lived, now rented out to families of how many? Six? There was the smoke from cooking fires coming from them, the wood pillaged from the golf course, I heard, and always children, happy, made happy by rolling a worn-out car tire along the street, seeing it bump along through the potholes and ruts, or playing soccer barefoot in the dirt with a ball made of rags. This brought them joy. They laughed and were always smiling. But what I saw wasn't always evidence of an economic meltdown. Hidden behind concrete walls, all topped with razor wire, were gardens that had palms and mahogany trees (planted by the

white colonisers), flowers, purple and red and yellow, and red, gray, or green tile roofs, on which there were solar panels, and in a corner of these gardens there was always a water tank on a tower, gravity-fed water pressure. These were islands of the good life surrounded by a sea of desperation; that's what they were.

David's NGO was in a building for the Manicaland Scout Association Headquarters, around the corner from the male circumcision clinic, truly. Manicaland was the province. The building, cream-colored stucco, was spattered with mud, probably hadn't been painted in fifty years, and had a broken-up sidewalk leading to the entrance, two wooden doors, rotten at the corners and held closed by a rusty latch. I opened one of the doors and went inside, only to see, at first, a vast classroom, desks and chairs piled up in one corner, a cracked chalkboard on a wall before me, a bare concrete floor, and, streaming into the room through mud-dobbed glass panes (in the windows that did have glass), a yellow light. I thought, here, in this place, an NGO? And then I turned and saw a door, and on it a newly printed sheet of A4 paper taped to it. On the paper, it read "Empowerment of Young Women in Zimbabwe." Not a good sign, that sign, I knew. But I had come too far to turn and leave and, out of curiosity – because I knew then that I'd been a sucker – I knocked on the door, which rattled on its hinges.

David answered, "Sir, come in."

I did. There he was, David Mapfumo, behind a desk on which sat a new HP laptop computer. The desk, though, was decrepit, chipped at the corners, cracked on the top, the legs uneven, so that it wobbled.

From behind the desk, David stood. The chair on which he'd been sitting wobbled to one side. David was a small man, head shaved, and wore bookish black-framed glasses. He was wearing a white shirt and a scarlet tie. My impression right off was, he was like one of these blood-sucking preachers in town. But I didn't say that, of course. We shook hands.

"So happy to meet you, Mister Osterling," he said. "You're a God-send, an answer to the prayers of these fine young women."

There were no young women in the room. The office, if that was what it was – and it wasn't – was tiny, hardly room enough for the two of us and the desk, so I had to wonder, Where are the young women?

David said, "How was your trip?"

"Fine," I said.

"Are you not tired?"

"No. I'm used to flying," I said.

"Was it a long flight?" he asked.

I told him.

"How is Nigel's?"

"Very nice," I said. "Thanks for the recommendation."

"The Hillside Sports Club is not far away. There's tennis, lawn bowling, and golf."

"I know," I said.

"You must go there. But, well, the maintenance, you understand. It's not like it was. We are struggling, sir. Maybe one day the Lord will deliver us from our suffering."

I wasn't too sure about that one. But I did know that he was stalling. I said, "I think you should put more faith in good governance."

"What can we do, sir?" he asked. "If we demonstrate, we might disappear."

This was true enough. Mnangagwa, to stay in power, deployed the military, young thugs stoned on marijuana, to keep people in line. And it worked, too. Well, it would until another despot came along to depose him. "It's Africa." I'd heard that refrain, too. "It's Africa." As if that was how things were and always would be.

I looked at the solitary window, grimy glass, spackling – probably the original – cracked off in places, glass chipped at one of the corners. It's Africa, I told myself.

I turned back to him and said what was on my mind, "Where are the girls?" Maybe it was the cracked spackling that set me off. I like things, well, shipshape, no cracks in the hull.

Shaking his head after taking off his glasses and setting them down on the decrepit desk, he said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Lawrence, but they've returned to their rural areas."

I'd heard that one before, people returning to their "rural areas", ancestral homes, to visit relatives, but I knew that he was just feeding me a line, because I saw no photos of other girls on the walls, no indication that his NGO helped anyone but himself, but I said nothing, for to cause a problem, I knew, might result in me landing in jail. (I had no idea who he knew. Hell, he could have had a brother-in-law who was a police officer.) So, thinking this, I said, "And when will they return from their rural areas?"

He picked up his glasses, slid them on, put his hands together, locking his fingers, and said, "Let's hope soon."

Soon, I knew, meant never, but once again I kept my composure and said, "Contact me when they do return, please?"

"Sure," he said. Shona say "sure" a lot. It could mean anything.

I walked out of there more than a little angry at myself for being such a fool, for falling for such a scam, and thinking of Isiah, too, with his pressed white tunic, so trusting in appearance, but what the hell, it hadn't been much money. Maybe five hundred, a fraction of what Gretchen had gotten in the settlement. Five hundred, that wouldn't be enough to cover her co-pays for the drugs she was on, I was guessing. And so, as I was walking, I just laughed to myself and headed into town, up a hill, to Herbert Chipeto Street, the main drag, which ran along the spine of a hill and intersected with Robert Mugabe Avenue. Along Herbert Chipeto Street there were quite a few people, men in fine trousers, pressed shirts, women in colorful red, yellow, and red dresses and headscarves, other women, too, pregnant, or with a baby strapped to their backs, a wicker basket on their heads full of bananas, usually. Or they, other women, were carrying on their heads sacks of maize meal, or boxes of cooking oil, even suitcases, roller boards, the kind used when walking to a ticket counter in an airport.

It soon became a joy to walk along Herbert Chipeto Street. It had four lanes, and people were crossing it wherever they liked. There were two traffic lights. One was out, so they, the people, and they, the people in the cars, had to feel their way around to avoid running over someone or crashing into another car.

I continued on down the street, in the direction of the township, Sakubva, where blacks had been forced to live during colonial times – just out of curiosity, because I felt no fear at all, none, that someone would put the blade of a knife or the barrel of a gun in my back and ask for my wallet. Hell, I felt safer there than in Ibor City, sure.

Along the way, I passed a Methodist church with a steeple. The church looked like it hadn't been painted in a hundred years, which was probably the truth, and the steeple looked as if it might topple over. Then, not far past it, I came to an old custom house, definitely dating back to colonial times, the hands on a clock tower having fallen off, the shutters weather-beaten, the front door chained closed, with a padlock, which made me wonder, what the hell was inside, skeletons of those whites who got caught at their desks doing paperwork, levying duties, when Mugabe came to power?

I passed under a railroad trestle, the literal demarcation line between

the formerly white area of the city where blacks had not been allowed to enter during colonial times, unless they had the papers to prove that they had a reason for being there, and Sakubva. No sign was necessary to indicate that I had entered Sakubva. I knew it. Most of the streets were sand. Only a few had patches of macadam. The homes there were brick, mostly, made long ago, and had corrugated metal roofs, tarnished gray, and were maybe two or three rooms, at most; a toilet is out back. These Rhodesian-era township homes looked as if they'd been stamped out in a factory, the same design, each one. And after so many years of neglect, the bricks were crumbling at the corners of the homes. The doors were rotting away. Some of the windows were patched with plastic or cardboard or scraps of corrugated plastic salvaged from who knew where.

In many of these doorways were desperate young men smoking weed and desperate young women, futureless, eyes that looked hollow, empty, those of someone who might have seen combat. They, these eyes, were focused on me, a privileged white man. It was reasonable for them to think this because I had been born into a good middle-class family, grew up in a home with a yard, had my first car when I was a teenager. My father was an officer in the Navy. I'd graduated from a good university, had never known financial distress, not even after the divorce. I knew nothing, absolutely nothing, of the lives of these people, but I wanted to know.

What intrigued me the most were the hives of children, everywhere children, in the doorways, sitting on the floor beside a desperate sister or brother; one I distinctly remember was chewing on the corner of a rubber flip-flop. Some of the girls, seven or eight, had a little brother or sister, a few months old, on their backs, their childhood erased by what? The desires of a man to get laid? Tragic. But the kids didn't know this. The kids were kids, playing with model cars made of wires and bottle caps, or kicking soccer balls made of rags. Under a tree I saw a man who made toys. One was the space shuttle, cobbled together from a mailbox and plastic bottles, painted black and white, and that, sentimental me, made me proud, proud to be an American, the sight of this American icon. A chill went up my spine. I never would've thought that could happen, and of all the places for it to happen.

Many of the women had set up rickety stands made of wood in front of their homes, on which they had on display tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, bags of peanuts – and bananas, of course, always bananas. I

stopped at one of these stands, and, as a token gesture, because I really didn't need any of what she was selling, bought some tomatoes. She had set them up in the shape of a pyramid. I think I paid, what, thirty bond for the lot, less than thirty cents, for about five ruby red ones, freshly picked, maybe from her garden, not ones grown in agro-industrial complex farms down in the Everglades, picked green and as hard as a baseball.

Within a few minutes of buying the tomatoes, children, and their mothers, had clustered around me. The children, maybe up to the age of twelve, did not, yet, have the hopeless expressions of the teenagers in doorways. They were all smiling, looking up at me as if I were this benign alien which they weren't sure about, and so I simply said, "Hello!"

They all laughed.

"How are you?" I continued.

Some muttered back, "I'm fine." Others, their mothers nudging them on the shoulders, said something in Shona, and then they said, "I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you."

There was less laughter this time, more awareness that I wasn't an alien. I knelt, to be eye-to-eye with a girl who was maybe five or six, and asked, "What's your name?"

"Rachel," she said.

"Do you go to school?" I asked.

"We're struggling, sir," her mother said. "No money for school fees. Textbooks and uniforms are very expensive, sir."

That hit me hard, that these kids weren't going to school.

I took a stick and scratched out Rachel's name in the sand, intentionally getting the spelling wrong, and she took the stick from me and made the correction. The children all laughed. And the mothers, too.

That evening I had dinner at the Mutare Club, only a few blocks away from Nigel's. I took along the tomatoes and gave them to my waiter, Bennington (yes, his real name), and ordered a pork chop and chips. The Mutare Club dates back more than a hundred years, when the all white, and all male members, would gather there to eat in a dining room that hadn't changed much since those days, I think: white, starched tablecloths and napkins, heavy silverware and china, and chairs with wicker backs. There was a bar next to it that had leather chairs stuffed with lamb's wool. On its walls were plaques listing all the club captains, dating back to 1912. Show me a British colony, and I'll

show you clubs like this one.

As I had my meal, I got to thinking about how I'd been had by David and his fake NGO, and the more I thought about it, the more humorous it became. I was starting to like Mutare and had David to thank for it. Mutare was particularly pleasant during its winter (Florida's summer). I had to wear a jacket in the evenings. There was always a fire going in a fireplace at Nigel's, but during the day the sun warmed the valley up, and it was comfortable enough to take in a round of golf, which I did from time to time, borrowing some clubs from the manager, Keith, who'd been a professional caddie, looping for the Zimbabwe hall of famer Nick Price for several years.

After a few evening meals at the Mutare Club, and more than one Golden Pilsner, I got the idea to have some fun with David, just to entertain myself, and so the next day I went to his office, which, not to my surprise, wasn't there, the A4 sheet of paper was gone. Then I telephoned him twenty or thirty times. No answer. Then I sent him emails, asking about the girls, and, finally in one email telling him that I was on to his ways, and that I was going to report him to the Zimbabwe police, believing, really, that that would mean nothing to him, that he would just continue on with his crooked ways, but that wasn't exactly what happened.

The day after I sent that email, I walked out of the Mutare Club, and as I was crossing the gravel parking lot, hearing my shoes going crunch, crunch, crunch on the gravel, but not having enough beer in my gut to not notice the crunch, crunch, crunch of others, I turned around, and, yes, there were two men who'd been following me. I stopped in the shade of an enormous tree, not under a surveillance light, as I should have, and so all I could see were their outlines at first. They were stout men, had square shoulders, and were about my height, around 180 centimeters, just short of six feet. One of them spoke (and I'm not being racist here), and that was when all his teeth, very white, were all I saw of his face. (If truth yields to PC, how can there be truth?) He said, "Mr. Lawrence?"

"Good evening," I replied.

"You've been sent from God to help some young women?"

I said, "Tell Mr. Mapfumo that he's a cheat and I'm going to report him to . . ." I had no idea to whom. So I said, "The United Nations inspector general."

The other one spoke, and I saw his teeth, too, very white. "Don't

cause trouble, sir," he said. "We want you to enjoy your stay in Mutare."

"Have a pleasant evening," they both then said, and turned and trudged off.

What the fuck? If that was a threat, then they hadn't watched enough mobster movies. "You'd like to continue to play golf?" That was a threat. Paul Newman having his thumbs broken in *The Hustler*, that was a threat.

I stood there a bit longer, watching these two would-be tough guys fade away into the dark, and I'm sure a smile started to crease my lips as I did.

A couple of days later I rented a house in Sakubva, just two rooms, one rather large, the other a small kitchen. I paid the tomato woman and a few of her friends to clean the place up and hired a carpenter to put up a whiteboard that I bought at Mutare Stationary.

I gathered up as many children as I could by going to Sakubva and telling the women there that I had set up a school. But, really, I had no idea what I was doing, opening a school. The only thing I'd taught was how to drop a one thousand-pound bomb on target from an A-6 Intruder. What the hell? I thought. There couldn't be much to this teaching thing, especially when it came to kids. If Big Bird could do it, I could.

On the first day of school so many kids showed up that they were falling out the door onto the steps. No desks or chairs, you understand, just kids, shoulder to shoulder, packed into that room, sitting on the floor – or mats that they had brought – looking up at me, eagerly waiting for me to say something. I hadn't had that much attention from members of my squadron, when I'd been a commander. And, yeah, suddenly I was nervous. I hadn't been as nervous since my first night carrier landing. I didn't have a clue what to do except to introduce myself.

"Good morning!" I said, "My name is Mr. Lawrence!"

To which they all responded in a chorus, loudly, lifting the damn roof off its rafters, it seemed, "Good morning, Mr. Lawrence, how are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you," I said. "Very fine indeed."

Featured cover artist:

BALEKANE LEGOABE (b.1995) is a visual artist, illustrator, curator and animator based in Johannesburg, South Africa. She specializes in mixed media collage working both digitally and traditionally. She matriculated from The National School of the Arts in 2013, having specialised in Visual Arts. She then went on to study at The Open Window Institute where she completed a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Communication with a specialisation in Illustration, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Film Arts specialising in Motion Design and Stop Motion and puppetry. In 2019 Balekane had her work showcased at the Turbine Art Fair as well as the FNB Jo'burg Art Fair. In the same year she was the recipient of the StateoftheART Gallery Award. In June of 2020 she had her first solo exhibition with StateoftheART Gallery titled "What it feels like to be in Water." She has taken part in a number of group shows in 2021 and showcased work at the Turbine Art Fair.

In terms of theme, her work explores the concept of liminality in relation to emotional states. With regards to subject matter, she gravitates toward the use of organic shapes and objects, specifically natural environments, plants, animals and human figures stating that these elements are living and breathing, thus we feel a stronger connection to them. She desires that her work creates a visceral experience that encourages and propels viewers to tap into the complexity and obscurity of the emotions that they feel and recognise that they exist within a liminal space.



Announcing the release of Archie Swanson's fourth collection of poetry

"Swanson's poems are emblems of a restless, interested, foraging magpie of a mind constantly turning over leaves in pursuit of words and images and truths, ever primed to pick up the stumbled-upon nugget lying in his path, examining it in the light, to weave lines about it and have a reader's head nodding in agreement, amusement or a richer sense of the ever-changing world around us."

Douglas Reid Skinner

DEAR READERS,

New Contrast has, not for the first time in its sixty-two years history, once again hit a financial squeeze: loss of institutional donations, sharp increases in printing costs, and declining subscriptions. *To avoid the possible discontinuation of New Contrast* we are *urgently* appealing to you for help in one or both of the following ways. Firstly, purchase an annual subscription for yourself or someone else by the process of buying a subscription. Secondly, *please* make a donation directly from our website <https://www.newcontrast.net/> by clicking the 'Donate' button. *New Contrast* has been the leading literary journal in South Africa for six decades, and with your help, we commit to ensuring it remains so for decades to come. Those who donate R 2 000 or more per year will receive a free digital subscription to our journal, and be recognised by having their names published as PATRONS, unless they prefer anonymity.

CONTRIBUTORS

P. R. ANDERSON has published three volumes, *Litany Bird*, *Foundling's Island*, and a long poem *In a Free State: A Music* ("Destined to be a landmark in South African poetry" – J.M. Coetzee). A fourth, *Night Transit*, is forthcoming from Dryad in April 2023. He is the recipient of South Africa's Thomas Pringle Prize for Poetry (2018) and the Sanlam Literary Award (2006). He teaches English at the University of Cape Town.

ROBYN BLOCH lives in Johannesburg with one man, four dogs and a baby daughter.

CARLA CHAIT is a dietician, practicing macrobiotics. She also has a Master's degree in English Literature and has recently self-published a fiction, *Floor 1*.

CHRISTINE COATES has four collections of poetry: *Homegrown* (Modjaji Books, 2014), *Fire Drought Water* (Damsselfly Press, 2018), *The Summer We didn't Die* (Modjaji Books, 2020), and *RED LETTER DAYS* (The Explainer's Press, 2022). Her debut collection *Homegrown* received an honourable mention from the Glenna Luschei Prize.

JAMES DEWEY'S poetry has appeared in *Dappled Things*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Off the Coast*, *Perspectives*, *Radix*, *Reformed Journal*, and *Sojourners*. Together with Robbie Taggart, James manages @ComeFollowMePoetry (Instagram) where they publish weekly poems in dialogue with sacred texts. Originally from Idaho, USA, James currently lives in Bogotá, Colombia.

TONY DIMOS, a graduate of the University of Chicago, is a fiction writer living in Greece working on a novel.

BASIL DU TOIT was born in Cape Town in 1951 and spent his formative years in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. He studied philosophy and literature at Rhodes University and now lives in Edinburgh. Recent poems have appeared in *London Magazine* and *Poetry Salzburg Review*.

LOIC EKINGA is a writer from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is the author of the poetry chapbook *How To Wake A Butterfly* (Odyssey Books, 2021). His works of fiction and poetry have appeared in *Agbowò*, *Type/Cast Magazine*, *Salamander Ink*, *Ja*.

Magazine, Poetry Potion, A Long House, Brittle Paper and *Kalahari Review*.

LEANNE FRANCIS is an English Literature and Creative Writing graduate from the North East of England. Being of South African and St Helenian descent, her poetry is largely influenced by her heritage, exploring her relationship with the motherland from afar. You can find her at @leanne.writer on Instagram.

MESHALINI GOVENDER is South African and can often be found working to further education for all, scribbling down poetry or feverishly checking off her bucket-list. She has previously been published in *Odd Magazine, Brittle Paper, The Kalahari Review*, was shortlisted for *New Contrast* and *Jack Journal's* National Poetry Prize 2021.

NICOL GOWAR is a poet and teacher in the tiny town of Makhanda. She has a BA from Rhodes University. She is currently pursuing an Honours in Literary Studies. She is an avid reader and enjoys spinning her thoughts into magic. She has been published in *New Contrast* and *Aerial* 2022.

JEREMY TEDDY KARN is

the author of *Miryam Magdalit* (APBF & Akashic Books, 2021), part of the *New-Generation African Poets: A Chapbook Box Set* selected by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani. His works have recently appeared/are forthcoming in *Olney Magazine, The Penn Review, Poetry Wales, Whale Road, Lolwe, Cheat River Review, Up the Staircase Quarterly, Native Skin*, and elsewhere. He is the EIC at *Pepper Coast Lit*. He tweets as @jeremy_karn96

KATLEHO KHAOLA (she/her) is a South African poet. Black and proudly so, she chooses to continuously challenge herself to shape and reshape the narrative of being black and a woman in this world; with hopes that those who peruse her work will be equally inspired, motivated and encouraged to be themselves without allowing the echoes of the past or voices of others to influence who they choose to be.

IYRA MAHARAJ is an educator, palaeobiologist, and writer living in Cape Town. She holds a PhD in Biological Sciences and a Life Sciences PGCE from the University of Cape Town. Iyra has been writing poetry since her matric year. Her debut poetry collection, *earth-circuit*, is due from Dryad Press in 2023.

TSHEGOFATJO MAKHAFOLA is a poet based in Johannesburg. He was the winner of Poetry Africa Louder Than a Vote 2022, a semi-finalist in the 2022 Poetry Africa Slam, and came third in Artsfestival Slam. His work was published in *Poetry Potion*, *New Contrast*, *bathmagg*, and in *Brittle Paper*.

KIRBY MANIÀ is a South African academic and writer based in Vancouver, Canada, where she teaches at the University of British Columbia. She earned a PhD in English from Wits University and holds an MA from the University of York. Her creative work has appeared in numerous South African and African literary journals, whilst her research has largely concentrated on urban ecology and postcolonial ecocriticism. She currently co-edits an eco-urban poetry journal called *SPROUT*.

Born and bred in Kwa-Zulu Natal, **LLM MBATHA** spent his childhood in KwaNongoma, where he completed his primary and secondary education. He holds a master's in chemistry and a degree in law. His work has appeared in several South African poetry anthologies and reflects his outlook on love, life, and Africa.

JEANNIE WALLACE MCKEOWN is a South African poet, writer and editor, living in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape. She has published a collection of her work, *Fall Awake*, with Modjaji Books (Cape Town), and has published widely in journals and anthologies. She is working on a PhD in anthropocene studies.

RAMTIN MESGARI is a South African-born writer with a passion for mythology and symbolism. Though he works as a software engineer, he dedicates half his day to reading and writing, striving to breathe new life into the country's literary scene. Inspired by the emotional depth of Russian literature, he hopes to showcase the rich culture and history of his Iranian heritage through his work.

PAKAMA MLOKOTI is a 28-year-old poet living in South Africa. She has had poems published in *African Writer's Mag*, *Salamander Ink Magazine*, *Kalahari Review* as well as *Brittle Paper*. Her debut collection of poems is forthcoming.

KABELO JAZZMENEER MOFOKENG is a Sowetan-born poet and cultural worker with a deep love for music. He is a graduate of the MA in Cre-

ative Writing Course offered at Rhodes University. He is the author of *Hungry on Arrival* (2023). He has co-curated spoken word and multimedia performances, as well as interactive photography exhibitions within township areas in the major Afropolitan city of Johannesburg.

SARAH MUDEEBE, a fourth-year student at Trent University, has Ugandan, Kenyan, and Canadian nationalities, and is pursuing a major in English. This poem was written and workshopped in an Advanced Creative Writing course with Professor Diana Manole, as a response to a news item. This is Sarah's first published work.

FASWILLAH NATTABI is a 22 year-old multifaceted storyteller. Living as a Black Muslim Woman who is also a first generation immigrant child has created 'an unanchored existence' which greatly informs her writing. She holds a BA in Linguistics, and is currently working as an art facilitator and a visual artist.

ROBYN PERROS is a South African writer, researcher, and multimedia artist. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing from Rhodes University and is currently a Ph.D. scholar and part-time

tertiary instructor. Her research looks at online death practices in South Africa. Her work has been exhibited, published, and presented on multiple local and international platforms. She lives in Makhanda.

MARÍ PETÉ was a featured poet at Poetry Africa in 2010. She holds a PhD in Visual and Performing Arts for which she used poetic inquiry methodology. Marí has published seven collections of poetry – often bilingual pairs in English and Afrikaans, and rendered in text, voice, and media: maripetepoetry.com

ROBYN PORTEOUS is a passionate South African, an aspiring writer, and a woman with opinions. She is currently completing her Master of Arts in Publishing at the University of Witwatersrand, while working full time as a senior writer and digital strategist. She can be followed (or blocked) on Twitter @RobynPorteous

JAMES ROTH is a writer of fiction and nonfiction. His work has appeared in several magazines and journals, including *The Bombay Review*, *Open Journals of Arts and Letters*, and *Mystery Tribune Online*. His first novel, *The Opium Addict*, is forthcoming in

the spring of 2023. A second novel, *A Prayer for My Daughter*, set in modern Japan, is a noir/literary mystery that is in progress. He has taught in Japan, China, Jordan, and Zimbabwe and likes to say he was “Made in Japan.” His parents lived there during the American occupation but he was, to his and his mother’s lasting regret, born in a military hospital in the U.S. He divides his time between Zimbabwe and the U.S.: www.jamesroth.org

JOSEPH A. SCHILLER is a high school social studies teacher in Houston, TX USA, where he lives with his wife and three boys. In addition to “The Results”, Joseph has had one other short story (“Panic”), two poems (“The Byways of My Dreams” and “The Spaces In Between”), and a fantasy novel (*Upon the Arrival of Dawn*) published.

SADIE SCOTCH (she/her) has lived outside her native United States for over 10 years and received her MBA from the University of Cape Town in 2015. Her essays have been featured in *The Smart Set*, *Flash Frontier*, *Pink Disco* and *Salty World*. You can read more at sadiescotch.com.

ABU BAKR SOLOMONS is a retired principal/ teacher who

has worked for 40 years in education. His poetry has been published in various journals over a long period: *Akal (Cosaw Journal)*, *New Coin*, *New Contrast*, Sol Plaatje poetry anthologies and Botsotso anthologies. His debut collection, *A Season of Tenderness and Dread*, was published by Botsotso in 2016. A second collection, *Inhabiting Love*, was published by Botsotso in 2021.

LUCAS ZULU is an award-winning poet, writer, editor and publisher. He lives in Emalahleni, Kwaguqa, Mpumalanga Province. His work is published in America, Canada, India, Asia, Africa and elsewhere. Lucas was recently awarded the Sol Plaatje Poetry Award 2022 for his poem “Cabanga”. He writes in English, Zulu and other languages.

SUBSCRIPTIONS & SUBMISSIONS

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS

- Local subscriptions are R600 p.a.
- International subscriptions are R1100 p.a.
- Our print subscriptions are inclusive of postage for all 4 issues.
- Electronic subscriptions are R300 p.a. worldwide.
- Current prices are shown on the website: www.newcontrast.net/subscribe
- We can only accept payment into our account in ZAR or by Telex transfer to SWIFT or by credit card on our website: www.newcontrast.net

EDITORIAL AND SUBSCRIPTION ADDRESS

New Contrast
PO Box 44844
Claremont, 7735
Cape Town, South Africa

Email Editor: ed@newcontrast.net
Business Manager: business@newcontrast.net

EFT Standard Bank, Thibault Square
Branch Code: 05-10-01
Account Name: South African Literary Journal Ltd
Current account
Account Number: 070508666
Please send proof of payment to: business@newcontrast.net

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Submit your contributions on our online portal, Submittable, located at www.newcontrast.submittable.com and visit www.newcontrast.net, where the prevailing requirements for each category are published. | Submit no more than 3 poems per submission or one short story or prose extract with a maximum of 75 lines for each poem and 5 000 words for prose pieces. | Only online submissions via our submission platform will be considered. **We no longer accept submissions via email.**

If you are submitting the same material to another publication at the same time, say so in your covering email or letter. Inform us if your work is accepted elsewhere before you hear from us. | Do not submit poetry manuscripts or novels. | Note it can take up to three months to receive a reply. | If your work is accepted for publication, you will receive a complimentary digital copy with an offer of a 25% discount on a year's print subscription. | If your work is published in *New Contrast*, do not submit new work to us for a period of six months, in order to give new writers and poets an opportunity to be featured.

A unique magazine -
inquisitive, beautiful
and rewarding.



Art, adventure, poetry, wine and much more.

Available at Woolworths, Pick n Pay, Spar, Exclusive Books, good independent bookstores as well as via us, online, at brucejack.com.



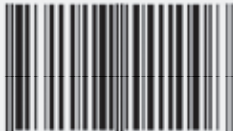
FEATURING

POETRY FROM IYRA MAHARAJ, KABELO MOFOKENG AND P.R. ANDERSON | PROSE FROM ROBYN PERROS, CARLA CHAIT AND JAMES ROTH | AND ART FROM BALEKANE LEGOABE.



www.newcontrast.net

ISSN 1017-5415



9 771017 541008 >