

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

**UNIT FOR CREATIVE WRITING
DEPARTMENT OF AFRIKAANS**

Lerato

a novel

and

***The audacious white novelist: A phenomenological study of black main
characters in selected novels by white South African authors***

a mini-dissertation

by

Desirée Homann

Student number: 88552269

Submitted to the Unit for Creative Writing, Department of Afrikaans, at the
University of Pretoria in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Masters
in Creative Writing

Supervisor: Prof HJ Pieterse

July 2011

This study is dedicated to my children, Levi and Nitzia.



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The audacious white novelist: A phenomenological study of black¹ main characters in selected novels² by white South African authors

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¹ For the purposes of this study 'black' means, for lack of a better and more politically correct term, 'non-white'.

² The selected texts are: *Toiings* (Ragamuffin) by Mikro (1934), *Cry, the beloved Country* by Alan Paton (1948), *Swart Pelgrim* (Dark Pilgrim) by FA Venter (1952), *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena) by Elsa Joubert (1978), *Kennis van die Aand* (Looking on Darkness) by André P Brink (1973), *Proteus* (Heart of the Hunter) by Deon Meyer (2002), *Bidsprinkaan* (Praying Mantis) by André P Brink (2005), and *Lerato* by Desirée Homann (unpublished, 2011)

PREFACE

“Lerato, wake up.” Her mother took her by the shoulder and shook her urgently. “It is time,” she added when Lerato opened her eyes. Then she turned away and continued to pack the last of the loose items in the hut.

Just as she did every morning, Lerato lay quietly for a few minutes before she got up, sensing the presence of the mountains all around. Although it was summer, here on the mountainside the misty morning air had an icy edge. She cherished this small daily ritual of becoming aware of the coldness outside and the warmth of her blanket around her naked body. But this morning the sensation was overshadowed by a deep loss.

It was another loss on top of that of her father whom they had buried in the hard ground three days ago. Lerato sat up and pulled her blanket tightly around her shoulders. The fact that her father was no longer there hit her hardest first thing in the morning. He had been a strong and cheerful man, known far beyond the lonely slope where their hut stood. But a few months ago he had suddenly started to grow thin and wan, his eyes watery and his hands unsteady like those of a man twice his age. Lerato and her mother would never know the name of the illness that had taken him from them, but without him her mother could not sustain the hard life of keeping their small herd of cattle on the mountainside.

Lerato crawled a few steps to the low door of the hut and went outside. Behind her, her mother was down on all fours, sweeping the hard mud floor with her grass broom for the last time. The sun was not up yet, but her brother, Kgomotso, and her uncle Caiphus were standing next to the cooking fire with the ponies already watered and packed. They were talking to two of Kgomotso’s friends who had come to see him off.

“When we hear from you again, you’ll also have a car!” one of them laughed and patted Kgomotso on the back. Kgomotso said something about a motorbike and Lerato again felt the anger well up inside of her. Having gone to initiation school the previous winter, Kgomotso, who was now sixteen, was considered a man. But he had no interest in taking their father’s place and making a living on the mountain as generations before him had. It was Kgomotso who had encouraged their mother to heed their uncle Caiphus’s advice that they should go and find a new life in Pretoria.

As a girl, and only twelve years old at that, Lerato had no say in the matter. She felt invisible as she watched the first glimmer of orange appear on the mountain tops to the east.

They reached the border post at Witsieshoek two-and-a-half hours later. Caiphus looked relieved when he spotted a man and a small boy standing by the roadside.

“Kagiso!” he called and hurried forward. When they reached them, Lerato saw that the man wore shiny shoes and a new jacket. Caiphus shook the man’s hand and walked with him a few steps further down the road. Then he stood with his back turned to the rest of them and Lerato couldn’t hear what they were talking about. Caiphus pointed to the ponies and the two remaining cattle they had brought down with them, and the man nodded.

“Kgomotso, you two, help me to take down these bags,” Caiphus ordered Kgomotso and his friends when he came back to where they were standing. Lerato stood next to her mother and watched uncomprehendingly as they loosened the thick ropes that held the bags in place on the backs of the ponies. They put the bags down on the dusty road and twisted the ropes into neat coils.

“Why are they taking the bags down?” Lerato asked, but her mother stood with her arms folded over her chest and wouldn’t answer.

Caiphus gathered the rope bridles of the ponies – Sgoro, his mare Polaseng and their foal of three years, Moriri – in one hand and handed them to the other man, who had come closer as they were loosening the packs. The man dipped his hand into his jacket pocket and handed Caiphus an envelope. Then he told the boy to take the cattle from Kgomotso. It was only when the man lifted his hand in greeting and turned back down the road that Lerato realised what had happened.

“Sgoro!” she shouted and rushed forward, grabbing the pony around the neck and pulling him back towards them. “Sgoro!”

“Lerato, stop it!” Her mother grabbed her by the upper arm and pulled her away, but Lerato wouldn’t let go and cried even louder: “Sgoro!”

Then Caiphus stepped forward and, with the fingers of one hand around her neck, pulled her off the pony like a tick. Lerato cried and stomped her bare feet on the road, bending double as she watched the man lead the ponies away. Kgomotso and his friends stood laughing behind her. Her mother looked embarrassed.

From the border post, they walked down to where the little town of Witsieshoek lay nestled in the foothills. They now had to carry the heavy bags themselves. It took too much energy to carry the bag and keep on crying, so Lerato walked in sullen silence, missing her father and wishing Caiphus dead. Some of her earliest memories were of sitting behind her father on Sgoro, shielded from the cold air by his broad back and her blanket, swaying softly with the ambling gait which gave the pony his name.

Witsieshoek was not much more than a café and a filling station. Small herds of goats wandered about on the roadside, nibbling on the sparse grass.

At the filling station her mother took Lerato into the musty cloakroom.

“Put these on,” she said and helped her put on a faded pink cotton dress and a pair of yellowed panties. Lerato had always wondered what it would feel like to wear such clothes – grown-up clothes. Yet now they seemed only to drive home the strangeness of the new life she was about to enter.

When her mother stooped to pick up her blanket and put it away in one of the carry bags, Lerato snatched it back and walked out into the sunshine, hugging it close to her.

They walked over to where Caiphus and Kgomotso were sitting at a concrete picnic table with a thatched rondavel-like roof for shade. This is where they would wait for a truck to take them to Pretoria. Every now and again, when a truck pulled up to refuel, Caiphus walked over and talked to the driver, pointing to where the rest of his party was waiting. But it was well past midday before he found one that was going in the right direction and willing to take them along for a reasonable fee.

It was a medium-sized pick-up truck with canvas over the roof and sides. Not being able to see where they were going frustrated Lerato. Now and again she could make out from shop fronts and billboards the name of the town they were driving through – Reitz, Frankfort, Villiers. Later the road became wider and there were buildings as far as she could see. She saw the sun setting and it became even harder to fight the drowsiness caused by the incessant low drone of the engine. Kgomotso had long succumbed and was lying on the truck floor, his head on one of the bags. Caiphus sat smoking in the back corner and her mother sat in the other, hands folded in her lap and a far-away look on her face.

It was already quite dark before Caiphus got up and indicated that they were now close to their destination. As the truck slowed down, Lerato could see many lights and the occasional silhouette of a tall building against the night sky.

They came to a halt and Caiphus jumped off the back of the truck. Kgomotso leapt off after him with a happy shout. Lerato heard voices and then Caiphus appeared again to help her and her mother down. She could not see clearly where they were.

Caiphus lead them in the dark to where they would sleep. Faint flickers of light lit their way and Lerato sensed that they were moving through a maze of narrow alleys.

More than once, her bare feet stepped into something slimy. The air was close and stale around them. Laughter, grunts, shrieks and the hum of conversation came from every direction. After a while, they came into a small opening where a couple of men were seated around a fire. Lerato could make out a row of shacks built alongside each other, made out of nothing more than pieces of cardboard, plastic and hessian cloth. It seemed impossible that this could be where Caiphus lived, but he stepped closer and lifted the cloth flap over the doorway of one of the shacks, bending low as he entered. After fumbling around in the dark for a few seconds, he drew a match and lit a candle that stood on a rickety wooden cupboard. The room was larger than it looked from the outside. Next to the candle on the cupboard stood a small primus stove and in one corner lay a bundle of blankets and sheeting that Lerato took to be Caiphus's bed.

She tried to read her mother's expression, but the older woman merely took the bags and started unpacking their blankets, looking neither pleased nor worried.

Her brother's face, on the other hand, told a different story. It was clear to Lerato that Kgomotso had expected much more from his favourite uncle's lodgings.

Caiphus told her mother that he was going out and signalled to her brother to follow him. When they had left, her mother stood indecisively in the centre of the room. Caiphus had not given her any instruction to cook, and it was too early to go to sleep. Eventually, she took out the cloth sack with the remainder of their travel rations and handed Lerato one of the thick slabs of cold *pap*. Taking out one for herself as well, she went to sit and eat it on the other side of the shack, legs spread out in front of her.

In the early hours of the morning Lerato woke with a jolt. Two dark shapes burst through the door flap, singing and shouting, and stumbled over her where she lay. She had been dreaming of home and for a moment she had no idea where she was. Then she saw Kgomotso's face glistening in the dim light and it all came rushing back. He had his arm around Caiphus's shoulders and the two swayed this way and that before collapsing on the floor. They were soon snoring loudly. Lerato lay in the dark listening to the strange sounds around her. She wondered if her mother was awake.

CHAPTER 1

Her mother had sent her to buy *amasi* to have with their *pap*. She was just about to round the corner of the shack, swinging the small carton between two fingers, when she heard something that made her stop in her tracks.

“But she did so well at Kopano Primary. The teacher always put stars in her book. One holiday she sent home a book that Lerato could read at home. She finished it in the first week.” Lerato hadn’t heard her mother sound this animated in a long time.

Caiphus snorted. “That was a little bush school. It’s different here. You see the school kids passing through Belle Ombre. They all wear uniforms. What do you think that’s going to cost? And books – who’s going to pay for her books?”

There was a silence and Lerato imagined him stopping to puff on his cigarette. “She’ll be grown up soon and then we can get *lobola* for her. It’ll be a waste of money to send her to school.”

“If she went to school, she could get a good job . . .” her mother cut in feebly.

“She’s not going,” Caiphus raised his voice. “You should be grateful that I let her sit around here all day. Other girls her age already work to earn their keep.”

Lerato wasn’t sure what he meant. She stood, ears pricked, waiting for her mother to respond. But it seemed as if the conversation was over. She started walking around to the front of the shack when someone called to her from behind.

“Xolo.”

She turned around and saw a plump woman who had a baby strapped to her back with a blanket, a bag in each hand and a large plastic bucket with a lid on on her head. Close behind her followed a man carrying a toddler, another bag and a

bundle of bedding tied with a piece of string. New people, Lerato thought. In the months since they had first come to Marabastad, she had seen many like them.

“Hello,” she said and walked closer. The woman nodded and said something. When she saw that Lerato didn’t understand her, she slowly bent her knees to put down the bags. When she straightened up again, she steadied the bucket with one hand and stuck the other into the neck of her dress. She pulled out a slip of blue paper that she handed to Lerato. “*Ouma Mankoma,*” Lerato read. “*Past Mala’s, 7th Street, Marabastad.*”

“Oh,” Lerato nodded. “I can take you there. It’s not far from here.” When the woman looked at her blankly, Lerato signalled for her to wait and dashed around the shack to deposit the *amasí* into her mother’s hands. She looked around quickly, but Caiphus was nowhere to be seen. When she came back to where the couple stood, she took the bags from the woman and indicated that they should follow her.

It wasn’t necessary to ask for directions. A single row of shacks had been erected along the wall on the far side of Mala’s, and as they approached an old woman came out to greet the new arrivals.

“Thank you for showing them the way,” she said to Lerato, but the other two simply stood staring at the row of shacks. It looked as if the man’s whole body had gone limp. He dropped the bag and the bundle of blankets in the dust. The child he had been carrying slipped to the ground and stood clinging to his legs.

Lerato turned and walked away. Instead of going straight back to the shack, she walked to the patch of sloping lawn at the edge of the settlement next to the main road that ran between Marabastad and the fresh produce market. Lerato wondered why the municipality kept this piece of road reserve green and trimmed while they didn’t bother with any other part of the settlement, but it didn’t matter. All

that mattered was that it was one of only three places in Marabastad that were in some small measure beautiful. The other two were the Miriammen Hindu temple and one ancient tree that grew along Steenhoven Spruit.

She lay back against the green slope and folded her arms over her head to shield her eyes from the sun. The look on the new man's face wouldn't leave her thoughts. It brought the nightmare of her first few weeks in the settlement back vividly. When they had first come here from the mountains, she had found the noise and the stench overwhelming. It had taken a long time before she was able to sleep soundly at night in spite of the constant din and movement around the shack. But as weeks had turned into months, the strangeness had worn off. Although it would never feel like home, she had become used to life in the settlement. The new people would too.

As she sauntered back to the shack, Lerato thought about what Caiphus had said to her mother. She knew that most of the women and many of the children in the settlement were sex workers. Lerato had heard that the going rate for a "full job" was two rand – less than the price of a loaf of bread. But it was ridiculous to think that her uncle would even consider . . . She shook her head to rid her of the thought.

But suddenly there were questions that kept popping up in her mind.

"Why did Ramoholo bring us here?" Lerato asked her mother again a few days later, using the respectful term to refer to Caiphus. She had just finished sweeping the shack and they were sitting outside facing each other – her mother on an upturned paint tin and she on a tree stump.

Lerato thought she could hear a soft rasp as her mother drew breath to answer.

“You know why,” she said, focusing on a spot on the ground next to her. “He’s your father’s brother. It’s the custom.” Lerato wondered why it always looked like her mother turned her face away from her when she spoke.

“But we have nothing here,” Lerato argued. “We were better off on the mountain.”

Her mother sighed and shook her head.

“And what about the money for the ponies and the cattle?” Lerato still felt like throwing up when she thought of that day. “Why did you let him take it? Now you have to ask him for everything.”

Her mother’s head jerked up and she slapped her thighs. “Lerato! Why are you being so difficult? He is the head of this family now and you should respect him.” Her chest made a wheezing sound before she continued in a gentler voice. “Don’t make him angry. It will only cause trouble.”

“I’m not afraid of him,” Lerato said and got up. Then she turned around quickly and went back into the shack. She grabbed the little transistor radio they had brought from the mountains from the cupboard and went to sit with it on her lap in the corner.

“Tick . . . augh mamba faw . . . ette. . .”

Someone had wound a length of black nylon string around the radio to keep it from falling apart, but Lerato still had to push the two sides together before it worked properly.

Although batteries were expensive, there was a radio in almost every shack, which seemed to stay on all day long. Most people just listened to music, but Lerato was glad that theirs was stuck on Radio South Africa.

“Our next hint was sent in by Mona from Westdene. Mona says if you have spilled red wine on your table cloth, simply dab it with a cloth soaked in white wine and the stain will disappear.”

As always, Lerato bowed her head low over the little radio and tried to quickly say the words after the announcer: “. . . and the stain will disappear.”

CHAPTER 2

Lerato held the bundle of clothes on her head with one hand. In the other she held the cake of green soap that was used for washing everything in the settlement. She was walking from the shack behind the oriental shopping complex where the Indian traders had their shops, across Cowie Street towards Steenhoven Spruit, the small stream that served both as a laundry and a communal bath for most of the Marabastad squatters. By now she could walk the route with her eyes closed.

Most of the vendors whose bright stalls lined the street along the way had become familiar faces. Some of the women greeted her as she passed, but others glowered at her, especially when the men whistled or called to her. Although she was not quite sixteen yet, her breasts strained against the fabric of her T-shirt as she walked, holding the bundle of washing on her head.

“Hey sugar lips,” they would call, “give us some sweetness.” Others would start singing love songs when she passed them: “I can’t help falling in love with you” or “Hello, is it me you’re looking for . . .?”

Lerato had learnt to laugh it off or ignore them.

Taking the washing down to the stream was one of her favourite rituals of township life. The best part of it, however, had nothing to do with the clothes she would wash. Just after crossing Cowie Street, she made a little detour to the right to pass behind the Boikhutsong Child Care Centre, which was run by a local woman with a passion for the children of the Marabastad squatters.

Lerato’s heart beat a little faster as she approached the rubbish heap at the back of the dilapidated brick building. Between the plastic bottles, used condoms, rotten fruit and other debris lay the customary bundle of extra-large glossy overseas

fashion magazines. They had been sorted from the rest of the magazines donated to the child care centre and discarded, Lerato thought, because the pictures in them were of no interest to homeless toddlers. She made sure she got to the magazines before the men collecting paper for recycling did.

She had discovered the treasure a short while after their arrival in the settlement. Dorcas, who ran the child care centre, had told Lerato that the magazines were brought every month by a woman who came from a wealthy church in the eastern suburbs. They had chosen Boikhutsong as one of their outreach projects.

Lerato carefully picked out the magazines from among the rubbish and placed them under the bundle of clothes on her head before she started walking towards the stream again.

When she got to the *spruit*, she quickly took down the bundle, squatted beside the edge of the water and worked up a rich lather from the bar of soap. She rubbed the clothes furiously, rinsed them and then spread them out on the low bushes nearby to dry in the sun. This was the time she had been waiting for. Taking the magazines, she went to sit cross-legged under a huge old eucalyptus – the only tree for kilometres around that had survived the onslaught of the squatters in their never-ending search for firewood.

As always, the pages were smooth and silky beneath her fingers, as always, they smelled of far-away, wonderful places. They were filled with images of exotic women dressed in creations of silk, feathers, lace and sheer synthetics. Lerato stroked her fingers across the pages in an attempt to get a little closer to the extraordinary beauty of those gowns. The names felt strange on her tongue, and she wasn't sure how to pronounce them: Versace, Carducci, Bulgari, Karan, Miyake. She

drank in every detail – every fold of gleaming fabric, every surprising combination of colour and texture. It was an experience so sensual that she felt a warm rush of blood to her head and a thickening in her throat.

As she turned the page, she gasped with delight – glued to the page was a small foil sachet – a sample of a new body lotion from the house of Marveille. Lerato was so anxious to open it that she struggled with the seal. She took a tiny corner between her teeth and tore it off.

The cream inside was thick and glossy and the fragrance reminded her of the mountains after the rain. She squeezed all of it out onto her hands and lifted her sarong to rub it into her calves. Although the sun was blazing down, the sensation caused goosebumps all over her body.

Almost inadvertently her fingers moved up over her knees and onto the exposed soft inside of her thighs. She felt her breathing deepen, until it almost met the ache at the bottom of her stomach. Surprised by what she was feeling, she gingerly touched the spot between her legs that was now almost hurting, but not quite. The sensation was shocking, but irresistibly delicious. She kept on stroking, lightly, carefully, until the need shifted to a new focus inside her.

She invaded herself with restrained eagerness. The climax caught her completely off guard, the waves of ecstatic release so intense that a little cry escaped her lips. As she fell back against the hard trunk of the tree, there was a slippery wetness between her legs.

Dazed, she flicked through the last of the magazines. But for once the images could not hold her attention. Red sequinned with pink and pale blue and billows of mountain green faded in comparison to her thrilling discovery.

When the clothes were dry, she got up to fold them and started the short walk back to the shack. As always, she left the magazines where she had found them. She didn't want Caiphus or her mother to know about them.

Her mother looked up from where she stood cooking on the primus and met her gaze as she entered the shack.

"Hello, Mme." For a moment, Lerato felt uncomfortable, but the older woman just nodded and continued with her chores, coughing softly now and again.

"You're still not better," Lerato said. "We should go to the clinic tomorrow."

The coughing had started a couple of weeks earlier and had become a constant disturbance in the long nights in the shack.

"For what?" her mother asked testily. "I have medicine." She cocked her head in the direction of the bottle of Borstol that she had sent Lerato to buy a few days earlier. "Come, hold this for me."

Lerato held the pot in which they had cooked the previous day's meat so that her mother could scrape the fat and sticky bits into the pot of pap.

They ate some of it and left the rest for the men to find when they returned. Afterwards, Lerato went to sit on the upturned tin in front of the shack and listened to the radio until it was dark. All around her, the other shack dwellers were doing the same. There was not much else to pass the time with.

Her body still tingled at the thought of what she had discovered earlier.

When she eventually went back into the shack, her mother was already lying on her side on her bedding with her face to the wall, coughing softly all the time. A candle was burning on the cupboard.

Lerato poured a little water out of the large plastic drum into an enamel bowl. She quickly stripped off her clothes. Using the same green soap she used for the

washing, she washed her face and feet. Squatting over the bowl, she lathered the tight curls between her legs. Sensations from earlier in the day came flooding back and she was tempted to take it further, but her mother's presence was intimidating. Reluctantly, she rinsed off the soap and got ready to go to sleep.

As it was every night, the air around the shack was filled with sounds. There was laughter and drunken shouts, babies crying and music wafting over from one of the *shebeens*. Lerato lay thinking of the beautiful images in her magazines and of the pleasure gift she had been given.

Finally, sleep overcame her and with it came the familiar dream.

She was standing high on a mountaintop, overlooking thousands of green hills stretching away towards the horizon. It was daybreak and the first rays of the sun were caressing the slopes – dewdrops glistening in their light. She was naked under her blanket, her face turned towards the sun. She could feel the sweet, cold air on her lips. Yet, despite the beauty around her, Lerato felt her heart fill with an infinite sadness. Suddenly the sunlight was gone. She looked up to see whether there were clouds in the sky, but there were none. Yet, when she looked around again, all light and colour had been drained from the landscape around her.

She woke, as she had so many times before, with a dry throat and a painful, throbbing lump in her chest. Every fibre in her body yearned for the mountains, for the life that had been taken from her. She didn't know what time it was, but the candle had gone out and she could hear from her mother's breathing that she was sleeping. Even so, it was punctuated by muffled, wheezing coughs.

"This old bull can still fuck you up . . . I'll fuck you up, you!"

Lerato was just about to doze off again when she heard Caiphus shouting in front of the shack. He was so drunk that it sounded like he was talking through his nose. There was laughter outside as he burst through the door flap.

For a long moment, he stood teetering in the doorway. Then he hurtled forward, coming to an uncertain halt again where Lerato lay. As was often the case these days, it seemed that Kgomotso had not come home with him. Lerato held her breath against the smell of beer and smoke that hung over him.

“Fuck you up,” he muttered again and kicked Lerato in the side.

“Ouch!” Lerato tried to roll away, but Caiphus lost his balance and came to land on all fours over her. Lerato’s blood thundered through her temples.

He was so close that she could feel his breath on her face. Without warning, he grabbed the shirt she was sleeping in and ripped it open. Lerato tried to lift her knees so that she could kick him away, at the same time clawing at his face.

“Get off of me!” she hissed.

At that moment, her mother was caught in a fit of coughing that caused her to half sit up and turn towards them. Startled, Caiphus let go of her and she quickly turned over on her stomach. Caiphus swore loudly, got up and stumbled off into the night.

Lerato lay without moving, every muscle in her body tensed almost to breaking point. Her flesh crawled from the memory of Caiphus’s hands on her. Slowly, she started to breathe again. It was a long time before she at last saw the first rays of daylight filter into the shack.

CHAPTER 3

“Who wants a balloon?” the girl in the red overall shouted over the megaphone. In an instant, the rowdy bunch of children swarmed around her and her helpers, who were carrying the bulging black plastic bags. The older ones shoved the little ones out of the way and it almost came to blows. Caught up in the excitement, Lerato pressed forward too and was soon rewarded with a shiny red balloon. On it in white were the words “Jesus loves u”, framed by a heart.

As soon as all the balloons had been handed out, the music started blaring from the Khanya Mission minibus. “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world,” the team in red sang with the recording. “Be they yellow, black or white, they are precious in His sight!”

Lerato thought of the acid yellow leather jacket she had seen in one of her magazines and pictured a person of the same colour. “Wakey, wakey!” A girl with a felted mop of hair slapped the balloon out of her hands. Startled, Lerato jumped forward to catch it before it landed on the grass. The girl stood laughing at her, displaying two missing front teeth. “Let’s play we’re pregnant,” she said and stuffed her balloon under her T-shirt. She folded both hands over it and arched her back, taking a few waddling steps.

The next moment there was a loud pop. The girl looked so dejected that Lerato felt sorry for her. “Don’t worry,” she said. “You can have mine.”

For a second, the girl stood with her mouth half open. There were sores around her lips. Then she laughed. “Don’t worry. Look,” she said and

pulled a dirty ten rand note from the pocket of her jeans, holding it so that no-one else could see. "I can buy millions of balloons."

Lerato gasped and looked from the note to the girl's face. "Where did you get it?"

"From Andy," she answered.

"Who's Andy?" The Khanyas were singing again and Lerato had to speak loudly to be heard above the music.

"He's my mom's boyfriend," the girl answered. "He's a policeman."

"And he gave you all this money just like that?" Lerato was sceptical.

"Not just like that," the girl answered, rolling her eyes at the stupid question. "He pays me."

"To do what?"

"It's a *secret*," the girl lisped, stuffing the money back into her pocket. Then she flew around and ran off to slap a balloon out of the hands of her next victim.

When Lerato got back at the shack later that afternoon, her mother was still lying in the corner.

"Mother!" Lerato felt panic lick the soles of her feet. She squatted next to her mother on the ground. "Have you been lying here the whole day?" Putting an arm around her mother's bony shoulders, she tried to lift her into a sitting position. "Why didn't you ask someone to come and call me?"

Her mother shook her head. "No, no, no," she said feebly waving Lerato off with one hand. A soft rasp of a cough accompanied every breath.

“But we have to do something,” Lerato pleaded. “I can take you to the clinic. They’ll have medicine for you.” Her mother looked past Lerato at the roof of the shack. “The clinic’s medicine cannot help me,” she said. “Leave me now. I’m tired.”

Lerato left her mother feeling helpless and angry. She set off looking for Kgomotso, whom they had not seen for weeks.

Many of the shack dwellers only shrugged when she asked about her bother. Nobody had seen him. Eventually, she came to where old Josef Dube was sitting in front of his shanty. He was one of the oldest residents of the settlement, no-one knew exactly how old. But the curls that dusted his skull were white with age, his eyes watery and the brown irises blue-rimmed. His skin was wrinkled in countless little folds around his eyes and neck. When Lerato approached him, he turned his head towards her with a slow, shaky movement that made him look like an old tortoise.

“Khotso, old father.” Lerato squatted next to the old man.

“Khotso, my child.”

“I have come to ask after my brother, Kgomotso, the one who used to walk with Caiphus Mokoena. Have you seen him, old father?”

The old man looked away into the distance for a long time and Lerato began to think that he had forgotten that she was there. But as she stood up to leave, he slowly spoke, as if to himself: “He’s gone to hell.”

Lerato frowned. “What do you mean?”

The old man sighed and closed his eyes. “He is at Mabena’s.”

Lerato felt a flicker of unease, although she had suspected something of the sort. Mabena’s was the settlement’s most notorious *shebeen* and

brothel. It was a large unpainted building on the far side of Marabastad with iron gates and bars in front of the windows. Mabena's never closed and there was a steady flow of customers at any hour of the day.

Lerato's first encounter with Mabena's had been when she had walked past there one morning shortly after they had come to the settlement. She had passed one of the iron gates when a sudden roar of lewd comments had come from the other side. At first she hadn't been able to see into the dim interior, but then she had started to make out the shapes of the drunken men inside. One of them had had his hand in the front of his trousers. He had sprung forward, and pushed himself towards her through the bars. She had turned on her heels and had run away, stopping only when she was once again among the stalls of the street vendors loaded with fruit and brightly coloured scarves.

But the memory of that dark place had stayed with her and it was with a sense of dread that she now turned from the old man to go and find her brother.

As she approached the *shebeen*, she had to fight the impulse to run away again. The smell of the place was sickeningly familiar. It was the smell of beer, sweat and urine – Caiphus's smell. At the entrance sat a large woman in jeans and a skimpy red halter neck. Her hair had been extended and pulled into a high ponytail from which little ringlets cascaded. She wore heavy make-up and her lips were painted a dark, shiny red. She was sitting at the counter, listlessly paging through a magazine and didn't look up when Lerato came in.

“Excuse me?” Lerato’s voice seemed to get lost in the din of shouting and laughing and clanking beer bottles. She moved closer to the counter, leaned over towards the woman and shouted: “Excuse me, can you help me, please?”

The woman slowly lifted her head and glowered at Lerato from beneath her lowered lids.

“I am here to see my brother, Kgomotso Mokoena.” The woman now turned her full gaze on Lerato and looked her up and down. Then she placed both hands on the counter, pushed her big body upright and waddled through the doorway to the drinking hall where Lerato could hear her shouting something. She reappeared almost immediately, indicating with a shake of the head that Lerato should go into the hall as well. Lerato looked from the woman’s face to the smoke-filled hall behind her and felt her courage wane. But then she recalled her mother’s sunken features and forced herself to move forward.

There were many people inside, even though it was not yet noon. Most of the men sat on wooden benches at long tables, drinking from brown bottles of beer. The air was thick with smoke and the smell of dagga. Some of the men had women on their laps. Others were exiting into rooms at the back of the hall, women in tow.

It took a moment before Lerato managed to locate Kgomotso in the moving, noisy mass of people. He was sitting at the third table from the entrance, laughing uproariously and entertaining the other patrons close to him. His one arm was draped around the waist of a much older woman in a

tight dress. When Lerato caught his eye, he didn't get up, but crossed his arms and waited for her to approach.

"I see you, brother," she said uneasily.

"What do you want?" he asked with a sneer.

"I have come to speak to you about our mother."

"What about her?" He was clearly irritated and the woman next to him was too.

"Can we please go somewhere and talk in private?"

"Listen, little sister," he said, his tongue dragging slightly on the words. "If you have something to say, say it and get it over with. As you can see, I am busy."

Lerato bit back the tears. "Mother is sick. I'm afraid she's going to die."

"So, what do you expect me to do? Pray for her speedy recovery?" Kgomotso laughed as he said this. He scanned the faces of those around the table. Most of them joined in, laughing along exaggeratedly.

The woman who had been standing next to Kgomotso was getting impatient. She lowered herself onto the table and slid along its edge until she was in front of him. Then she leaned back onto her arms and opened her legs. The red dress rode up over her flabby thighs. Kgomotso grinned and licked his lips. He gripped her leg high up, his thumb sinking deep into the soft flesh.

Lerato felt the revulsion rise in her throat. "It is our mother..." she repeated, more to herself than to him. Then, as she looked at him, a strange stillness came over her. She looked around the big room slowly one last time. Then she turned and walked out straight and proud without looking back. The

men who had leered at her when she came, now looked the other way. The woman at the counter raised her eyebrows as she passed.

Lerato stepped out into the bright sunshine with her shoulders squared. She would never be subservient to Kgomotso again just because he was her older brother.

But there was still the problem of her mother. Lerato knew of only one place where she might find help. She turned south and headed towards the Pulang clinic. The clinic was not in Marabastad itself. The municipality had probably not wanted to risk placing an asset in such a bad part of town. Lerato walked up past the old cemetery full of broken angels, past the bus depot and a few large industrial warehouses.

When she reached the clinic, a fairly new facebrick building, Lerato pushed the button at the security door, but nothing happened. From what she could see, the inside was deserted. Lerato felt hot from walking in the sun and lifted her arm to wipe the perspiration from her forehead. It was as if the whole world had gone into hiding from the blazing sun.

After a long hesitation, she pushed the bell again. She heard a faint tinkle, and then a young woman in a white nurse's uniform appeared. Lerato had never seen anyone look so clean in her life.

"Yes, can I help you?"

"I...I hope so," Lerato answered, trying to speak in her radio voice. "It's my mother, she is very sick."

"Well," the woman said, "the clinic is closed till two o' clock for lunch. Why don't you bring her by later so I can examine her?"

Lerato sighed and bit her lip. She shook her head. “It won’t work. She’s too sick to walk all this way and she won’t come anyway. I was hoping...” She stared down at her feet. “I was hoping you could come over and have a look at her.”

“I’m sorry,” the woman shrugged. “We don’t do house calls at all – they stopped that years ago because there was no money.” She paused. “If she’s very sick, you could try to get her to a state hospital, but the closest one is on the other side of town.”

Lerato felt her heart sink. She knew that she could never convince her mother to go to hospital.

“Listen,” the woman said in a softer voice. “I’m sorry that I can’t help you. But why don’t you come in and have a cup of tea with me before you walk home.” She moved forward and held the door open.

The clinic was smaller than she had expected. There was a tiny reception area with six chairs. Two consultation rooms and another room led out of this area. It was into the third room that the woman now took Lerato.

In the centre of the room was a table and on it stood a tray with a teapot and a cup and saucer. The woman squatted at one of the white cupboards along the wall and took out a second cup. She went to sit at the corner of the table and indicated to Lerato to sit down.

“I’m Seipathi,” she said with an encouraging smile. “I was just having some tea. It’s still hot.”

“I’m Lerato.” She realized with a little shock how few times she had said that to anyone, how very rarely anyone had cared to know her name.

Seipathi poured the tea with elegant precision. “So, Lerato, I take it you come from Marabastad. Have you been living there for a long time?”

“Yes . . . er, well no. It’s been almost four years. But sometimes it feels like a lifetime.” She forced a smile.

“Where did you live before you came here?”

Slowly, Lerato began to tell of the mountains that she missed so much, of her father’s death and how Caiphus had brought them there. She told of her life in the shack and of Kgomotso who had turned his back on them. It was the most she had ever told a stranger about her life.

Seipathi listened intently, asked questions and nodded encouragement. Lerato was surprised by the ease with which she spoke to this woman. But then again, she looked so clean and unthreatening. And the quiet clinic was a world away from the noisy reality of the settlement.

Then the doorbell rang. Seipathi looked at her watch and got up quickly. “Oh, I’m sorry! It’s past two already. I had better get back to work.”

“Of course – and I must get back to my mother.” Lerato suddenly felt out of place. But, as she moved out into the reception area, Seipathi placed a cool hand on her arm and walked with her to the door. A woman with a young toddler was waiting to come in. Thick yellow mucus had caked around the child’s nose and mouth.

Seipathi looked the pair over briefly, but then turned to Lerato to see her off first.

“I really hope you find a solution for your mother,” she said. “And please come and visit me again.” She squeezed Lerato’s shoulder before turning to attend to her patients.

When she returned to the shack, Lerato found everything unchanged. Her mother was lying on her blanket propped up on one elbow and coughing almost incessantly.

Lerato squatted next to her. “Mother, Mother, look at me.”

The older woman pressed a shaky fist to her lips and slowly looked into Lerato’s face.

“Mother, you are very sick. There is no-one here who can help you, but I will find a way. There is a hospital . . .”

Her mother shook her head violently and almost immediately collapsed into another paroxysm of coughing. “No, no Lerato, let me be.” She lifted her stick-like arm over her head.

“Please, listen to me. You need help. I will take you there, somehow I will take you.” She was grabbing the older woman’s bony shoulders, speaking close to her face, pleading with her.

“No!”

The word exploded with such violence from her mother’s lips that Lerato staggered backwards.

“Leave me! I will not go. I will not!” Again she was shaken by a fit of coughing. She closed her eyes and turned on her side.

CHAPTER 4

That night Lerato was too exhausted to be vigilant. Her dreams shifted between images of Mabena's – the whores and the drunken men, the noise and the stench – and the Pulang Clinic – cool and clean, and at the centre of it Seipathi in her white uniform. Eventually, as it always did, the dream took her back to the mountains.

She stood alone under the night sky with her blanket around her shoulders. Around her the dark mountains seemed to stretch away into infinity. An icy wind was painting eerie, ever changing patterns on the grassy slopes and made her shudder under the blanket. The wind froze the wet streaks of tears on her cheeks. She looked up into the black expanse of sky and all around at the cold, ageless mountains. Her soul screamed for companionship, but there was no answer. Then, out of the shadows and the wind a shape came towards her. Lerato tried to discern the stranger's features in the darkness.

"Mother!" She ran, flinging the blanket from her body, laughing, crying, finally throwing herself into the arms of the woman who had brought her into the world. But her mother's face remained blank, her eyes lifeless. There was no substance where Lerato had anticipated an embrace and she kept falling, falling, falling into the blackness. As she fell, she heard a long howl of laughter. There was something familiar about the sound and Lerato tried desperately to pinpoint where it was coming from.

From deep within her came a response to the sound, causing her to wake up with a jolt. She lurched upright, sweat trickling down between her shoulder blades.

The sound of her nightmare came from close by. Caiphus was standing outside the shack, laughing and shouting with a couple of other men. Despite her fear, she was suddenly aware of something else. It was the absence of the sound of her mother's coughing. She turned around slowly. Her mother lay absolutely still. Lerato crawled towards her on all fours, praying that it would not be so. But when she touched her mother's cheek, it was cold and papery beneath her fingers.

She stumbled outside to where Caiphus and his drunken company stood. "She is dead – the wife of your brother is dead!" she screamed.

Caiphus scowled, his friends looked awkward. He strode towards the shack and stood looking at the body from the doorway, the sackcloth flap hanging over his shoulder like a mantle. Then he strode off into the darkness without a word.

Lerato went back inside and sat on her blanket, her knees hugged to her chest and tears streaming silently down her cheeks. She was still sitting like that, slowly rocking back and forth, an hour or so after dawn had painted streaks of milky light through the dust-filled air in the shack.

Death had wrought a surprising change on her mother's face. In the faint light it seemed that every trace of tension and care had been erased. Her skin looked smooth and golden. Lerato knew that her mother's life had left her the day her father died. Now she was free to be reunited with the only person that had ever really been of significance to her.

Later in the morning, Caiphus arrived with three men, one smartly dressed and two in overalls. Lerato came to her feet as the men entered the shack, but they ignored her.

“So, I will return tomorrow with the forms,” the man in charge said to Caiphus and pointed the two others to where the body of her mother lay. They moved forward quickly and covered the body with a grey blanket they had been carrying. Then they lifted it between them like a sack of flour and headed for the door.

“No!” Lerato jumped in front of them, blocking their exit. “Put my mother down!”

The two men looked at their boss, who in turn looked at Caiphus. He stepped forward and grabbed Lerato’s upper arm, pulling her out of the way.

“Let go of me!” Lerato tried to yank her arm out of Caiphus’s grip.

“Keep quiet,” he said and, but he pulled her all the way out of the shack and to the side of the doorway so that the men could carry the body out.

“But you can’t let them take her.” Lerato’s voice was hoarse from crying. “What about the wake?”

“What fucking wake?” Caiphus hissed as he let go of her arm and she half fell against the wall of the shack. “This lot,” he waved at the settlement around them, “will come down like flies on a turd. I’m not spending my money so they can have a free meal.”

It’s not your money, Lerato wanted to shout, but Caiphus pushed past her and caught up with the men carrying the body. She walked after him and then stood at a distance watching as they heaved the body into a panel van branded Emmanuel Funeral Services on the door.

In the noisy, colourful streets life continued as if nothing had happened. After having wandered aimlessly for a while, Lerato realised that she was standing in front of the rubbish heap where she always found her magazines. It felt inappropriate on a day such as this, but she reached down anyway and picked up the three glossy magazines that stuck out from under a colourful assortment of discarded plastic and paper packaging.

Hugging them close, she walked on to her place by the stream. She sat cross-legged, cradling the magazines between her knees while her tears charted wrinkled courses across the pages. Today she couldn't lose herself in the colours and texture like she usually did. All she saw was her mother, serene in death, lying on the dusty floor of the shack. There must have been a time when her mother was animated, plump and real – but Lerato couldn't remember it.

“I hate you!” she shouted at the image in her mind. “You didn't even try . . . and now I'm all alone.”

Grabbing the magazines on her lap, she scratched through the pages and ripped them from the spines, flinging them away from her. Then she let her head drop into her hands and sat for a long time with a blank mind and the salty taste of tears on her lips.

When she looked up again, it had already grown quite dark. Her legs were shaky and as soon as she got up, her stomach contracted and she retched repeatedly onto the ground. She kept vomiting until only silvery threads of saliva spun from her lips. Then she straightened up and started walking back to the shack through the dark.

“Ksk, ksk, ksk,” a man’s voice called out of the darkness behind her. Although she walked faster, the sound clung to her like a spider’s web. Having reached the shack, she was completely spent. Too tired to think of cooking or eating, she weakly tore off her clothes and lay down to sleep.

She hadn’t heard Caiphus coming in during the night, and when she woke, the sun had been up for a while and he wasn’t there. But when she came out, he was sitting in front of the shack with the man from the funeral parlour. The man was reading from a form on a clipboard and filling in the answers Caiphus gave him.

“ID number?”

“Here.” Caiphus took a plastic bag from his jacket pocket, unfolded it and took out her mother’s green ID book. He handed it to the man, who opened it and wrote on the form before giving it back to Caiphus.

It annoyed Lerato that the men didn’t acknowledge her presence. She puffed out a breath through her nose and swept away from them around the corner of the shack.

The Mariammen temple was situated just off the corner of Boom and 7th Streets. Lerato stood in front of the heavy timber doors and looked up at the stepped pyramid that rose above them. Something funny always happened when she stood there. Her eyes would wander over the decorative columns and deities, some of which were covered in flaking green, red and yellow paint. As she slowly took in the repetitive symmetry of each row of decorations, her mind would go quiet. The first time that had happened, she had looked around expecting to find the street behind her deserted, but then

she had realised that it was still noisy out there – the silence was inside of her.

She stepped forward and tested the doors, but, as always, they were locked. In her imagination, the space inside would be cool and dark – a place where one could hide away from the world and never be found. More than anything, Lerato wanted to be in such a place right now.

Stepping back again, she stood with her arms folded and looked up at the tower. She tried to just see the temple and not think of anything, inviting the silence in. But her anger roared in her head, anger at her mother for leaving her and anger at Caiphus for acting as if it was a mere chore to get rid of the body.

“I wish you were dead instead,” she said out loud, and her throat hurt as she did so. An image of the men from Emmanuel Funeral Services carrying Caiphus’s big body out of the shack formed in her mind. She forced herself to focus on the tower again, willing its magic to suck her in. But it wouldn’t work, and after a while she turned away.

It was late afternoon when she finally returned to the shack. The renewed shock of her mother’s absence was so powerful that she had to stand a while, struggling for breath. Then she turned to the primus and went through the motions of cooking pap for dinner – not that she believed she would ever feel like eating again.

Afterwards, she sat in front of the shack listening to the radio as darkness fell. The wind came up and rattled the walls of the shacks, sending plastic bags and other rubbish scurrying over the ground.

Just as the first drops fell and she got up to go inside, Caiphus appeared on the other side of the clearing. Lerato waited for him to reach her.

“When is the funeral?” she asked without greeting first.

He looked at her through puffy eyes and stepped into the shack without answering.

“When are we burying my mother?” she insisted.

Caiphus sat down on a tin in the corner, scratched his stomach and sniffed loudly. “She’s going to be cremated.”

Lerato reached for a box of matches to light the candle. “What’s cremated?”

“They burn the body,” he said, sucking at his teeth. “It’s cheaper.”

She dropped the box of matches as if it had bitten her. “No!” she wailed. “Cheaper?” She jumped forward and pushed Caiphus off the tin, sending him sprawling. “She’s my mother, not a dog that died on the street!”

She heard him swear behind her as she ran out into the rain.

It was pouring now, and by the time she slowed to a walk close to the oriental shopping complex, she was wet through and through. Her chest ached as she sought shelter under a small overhang on the corner of the bazaar complex.

The complex and its parking area were only dimly lit, and the rain fell like a curtain all around. She slid down against the wall until she sat down on the smooth cement. There was nothing to do, so she sat taking in the minute details of everything around her: the way the water dripped from her and ran over the floor, how the little streams met up with the cigarette stubs and bottle tops stuck in the grooves.

She thought that some of it must be her tears. Or maybe not. She felt too empty inside to cry.

Much later, when the rain had stopped, she tried to lie down and sleep, but it was cold and she imagined all kinds of evil coming at her from the darkness.

She must have dozed off eventually, because the next thing she knew, someone was shaking her by the shoulder.

The boy who had been prodding her shoulder with his foot was nearly thrown off balance when she quickly sat up.

“Hey, watch it!” he shouted. “You spill my stuff!” He held a plastic cooldrink bottle in the air and performed a little dance to keep from falling over.

“Sorry,” Lerato mumbled and edged away from him as she got up. She stood hugging herself while she eyed him warily.

“You cold?” he asked and looked her up and down.

Lerato shrugged, moving another step away.

“Here.” He held out the bottle. “Tshwala make you feel better chop chop.”

“Thanks, I’m OK,” Lerato said, but she couldn’t keep her lips from trembling.

“You not OK, you cold,” the boy insisted. He came closer again and pushed the bottle towards her. A smell like that of a dead rat wafted towards Lerato.

“Zee! What you doing man? We been looking for you all over.” Two other boys appeared out of the darkness and when the one standing in front

of her turned around to them, Lerato quickly ducked away around the corner of the building.

“Hey! Wait, you!” he shouted, but he didn’t run after her.

Up ahead stood a row of dustbins and Lerato thankfully crouched behind them, holding her breath against the stench.

By the time the sun finally came up, she was freezing. Her throat hurt and her ears felt stuffed.

She walked to the green slope at the edge of the settlement and lay down on the grass. It was still damp, but she was too, so it didn’t matter. Lying face down, she waited for the morning sun to warm her.

A hooting minibus taxi that stopped at the side of the road next to where she was lying woke her several hours later. “Mamelodi!” The driver shouted. “Mamelodi, Mamelodi!” The door slid open and banged shut.

All the noises echoed in Lerato’s throbbing head. She rolled over and sat upright, squinting against the bright sunlight. Feeling wobbly and sore, she nearly lost her footing on the slope when she got up. “Gheee!” An old coloured man sitting a few metres from her laughed, “Phuza makes you old, Sesi. Daai dêng, ek sê!”

Ashamed that he would think she had been drinking, Lerato turned away quickly and stumbled off.

On the night of her second day out on the street, she relented and went back to the shack. She felt really sick now; the smallest movement made her whole head and face hurt, all her muscles seemed to be aching. Hot flushes were followed by bouts of shivering.

When she reached the shack, it was dark and Caiphus wasn't there. With shaking hands, she lit a candle. There was some pap left in the pot on the primus. It was sour, but she ate a handful of it. The drum they fetched water in was almost full still. She drank some, spread her bedding out and fell asleep the moment she lay down.

Late the next morning she woke in a sweat. Her throat was so sore that she winced every time she swallowed a mouthful of water.

Caiphus had not come back the previous night.

Lerato swatted half-heartedly at the flies buzzing around the pot of sour pap. She knew she should be cleaning the shack, but it was so hot, and she was so tired.

It was midday when she woke for the second time and stumbled out of the sweltering shack. It was hot outside too, but at least there was a bit of a breeze that cooled her sweating face. She fetched the radio and sat listening to it for a while. Eventually she got herself to go and scrape out the slimy leftover pap. She washed the pot and stood for a moment thinking whether she should cook some more. But as it was hot and she wasn't hungry, she decided not to and went to lie down again.

In her dreams, the mountains were ablaze and she realised too late that her mother was caught in the flames. Whichever way she turned, the flames licked and curled, crackling while her mother screamed and pleaded for help.

She woke up in a panic, struggling to breathe and feeling the air squeezed out of her lungs by a weight on her chest. Caiphus was lying on top of her, forcing her legs apart with his bulk.

“Yes, wake up!” he said against her neck. “I want you nice and lively.”

Lerato tried to push him away and close her legs, but she was pinned to the floor by his heavy body. She couldn’t breathe in deeply enough to shout, and could only manage a muffled cry.

“Don’t worry,” Caiphus grinned against her, “Soon Caiphus will make you squeal with pleasure.” He pushed himself up on his arms and she could see the gleam of his eyes in the darkness. He licked over his lower lip, reached out suddenly and ripped her shirt open.

“Show Uncle Caiphus your pretty round tits,” he said. She could taste his smell in her mouth.

He grabbed both her breasts hard, leaving Lerato’s arms free. She clawed at his face, trying to reach his eyes. But he grabbed her wrists and held them down with one hand above her head. With the other, he reached down and plucked open his trousers. Lerato was sick with panic. Blood was thundering through her head. She struggled increasingly to breathe. The air in the shack seemed thick and caustic, it stung her eyes.

She arched her back and twisted away. “Fuck you, bitch!” Caiphus swore and released his grip on her wrists to grab her hips. As her hands swept down to ward him off, she brushed against the sharp edge of the brick that was used to keep one of the cardboard panels of the shack in place. The brick felt hot and heavy in her grip. She heaved it through the air, bringing the sharp corner crashing down on top of Caiphus’s skull. As he rolled off her, she felt something slimy on her thigh. Still on her back, she scrambled away from him in horror, gasping for breath.

It was only then that she saw the orange glare that was becoming brighter through the crevices in the shack wall. She heard a rumble above the roar in her own head and she realized that the air around her was filled with smoke.

The flames burst through the roof and the far wall of the shack at the same moment. She tried to shout, but her lungs were burning. Instinct forced her to dive towards the door flap. Once outside, she crawled into the clearing and collapsed on the ground, filling her lungs with large gulps of air. As she looked back, she saw tall orange flames leaping spectacularly into the dark sky. The makeshift shacks burnt like tinder. Now and again a plume of sparks shot up and disappeared, making it look like a macabre fireworks display.

There was a lot of shouting and silhouetted figures were running around hysterically. But there was nothing anyone could do: there was no water close by to douse the flames with and no access for a fire engine – in the unlikely event that one would come.

Lerato straightened herself up stiffly. Embarrassed, she tried to hold her torn shirt together over her breasts.

She took one last look at the spectacle of flames devouring the shanty township. She knew it would lick up every last morsel until only ashes remained. Then she turned and walked away to the only place she could think of going.

Like a sleepwalker, she made her way through the city streets. Huddled behind the low wall of a flower box near the entrance of the clinic, she waited until Seipathi came to open up at eight o' clock the next morning.

As she came towards her, Lerato saw the surprise on Seipathi's face. It took a moment for Seipathi to recognize her.

"Oh, Lerato, is that you? What are you doing here so early?"

"There was a fire," Lerato answered hoarsely. "I didn't know where else to go." A cough tickled in her chest. Coughing hurt and she tried to suppress it, but without success. It rasped through her sore throat and made her wince.

"That's terrible," Seipathi said as she took Lerato's arm and led her to the entrance. "Come inside." Seipathi unlocked the security door and the wooden door behind it and then nudged Lerato inside.

"Are you hurt?" Seipathi asked and put a hand on Lerato's shoulder. Lerato shook her head wordlessly.

Seipathi put her handbag on the table in the tearoom. "How did it happen?"

Lerato opened her mouth to speak, but suddenly she could not. She was shivering violently, gasping for breath.

"Shh," Seipathi said, "shh. You can tell me all about it later." She patted Lerato's back. "Let's get you cleaned up first. There's a shower in the back. I'll see what I can do about clothes," she added when she saw Lerato's torn shirt.

The shower was clean and white, like the rest of the facility. Lerato shrugged off her clothes and stepped inside. There was a large plastic dispenser with red liquid soap fixed to the wall. It smelled like antiseptic and she washed herself from head to toe three or four times until her skin glowed and she felt rid of Caiphus's touch and the smell of the fire. But the heat of the shower didn't quite reach to the cold tightness in her chest.

When she stepped out at last, there was a green towel with the municipality's logo woven into it and a pile of folded clothes on the chair outside.

Seipathi came in while she was still drying herself. "Sorry about the uniform," she said, indicating the clothes on the chair. "It was the previous clinic sister's and I'm sure it's going to be too big. Luckily I always have an extra pair of panties in my bag."

Now that she was clean, Lerato found her voice again. "Thank you so much," she said. "I didn't know where else to go."

"I said you should come here if you needed help," Seipathi answered and helped Lerato put on the old nurse's uniform. It was made of a stiff synthetic fabric and smelled of moth balls. As Seipathi had predicted, it was a terrible fit – much too large and the most unflattering cut imaginable. The panties were perfect: White, crisp cotton with an embossed pattern of little roses.

The bell went at the security door and Seipathi set Lerato the task of making them a pot of tea while she tended to her patients. But the morning was unexpectedly busy, with many of the fire victims seeking treatment for burns and bruises. Lerato made sure that she kept out of sight, but she could hear the stories they told while Seipathi was cleaning and dressing their wounds. Torn between her hate for him and guilt over what she had done, she strained her ears for news of Caiphus.

The account of what had happened varied from person to person. One woman said that five people had died and that the fire was believed to have

been started by an Indian shopkeeper who wanted to get rid of the squatter problem.

Another, an old prostitute with a toothless grin, blamed an unattended primus stove and said she had heard that three people had died – a man and two young children.

A teenage boy came in later with a swollen eye and a cut lip, which he also claimed to have sustained in the blaze. But when Lerato peeked around the door she thought it looked like he may have been in a fight.

It was almost noon before Seipathi could join her in the tearoom. She took a neat little parcel of sandwiches from her bag and put half of them on a saucer in front of Lerato.

“So,” she said, “I’ve heard a lot about the fire. What did you make of it?”

Lerato considered for a while whether she should tell Seipathi the whole story, but then decided to leave Caiphus out of it entirely.

“I was sleeping,” she said, “And it felt as if I couldn’t breathe.” For a moment the memory of what really happened flashed back so vividly that she could hear the dull thud of the brick on Caiphus’s skull. She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head before continuing. “When I woke up, there were flames everywhere. I was lucky to get out before it all came down on me.”

Seipathi softly clicked her tongue. “I’m so sorry, it must have been awful.” She contemplated Lerato for a moment. “You sound ill. Is it the smoke that made you cough?”

“No,” Lerato answered and cleared her sore throat. “I got a cold a while ago.” And a world away, she added in her head.

“I’ll give you some aspirin. But the most important thing is that you should get some rest.” Seiphati took a long sip of her tea, and then suddenly slammed down the cup as if it had burnt her. “Oh my God!” She leaned forward and grabbed Lerato’s hand. “Your mother – she was sick too – is she all right?”

Lerato shrugged. “No.” She saw the shock on Seipathi’s face. “Oh, no, I don’t mean . . . not in the fire. She passed away a week ago. She wouldn’t go to the hospital.”

“My God, I’m sorry,” Seipathi exclaimed. “I can’t believe everything that’s happened to you.”

You don’t know the half of it, Lerato thought guiltily. Seipathi looked at her for a while before she spoke again. “Do you have any other family?”

“No,” Lerato said. She closed her eyes against another flashback of the previous night. But it was true, though. Regardless of what had happened to Caiphus after she had left, she had no-one to go back to.

“You can stay here until you’re well again,” Seipathi said.

Lerato opened the back door of the clinic that led from the small kitchenette to a courtyard of sorts. It was nothing more than a small space behind a wall where the dustbins stood, but she had come here for a while every day just to get out of doors.

She sat down on the step outside the door and soaked up the morning sun.

She had almost completely recovered now. All that was left was a gurgle in her chest when she breathed deeply. The past four days at the clinic had been like a holiday. It was so far removed from life in the settlement that it was easy for Lerato not to think of her mother's death or what happened the night of the fire. She purposefully kept her mind busy by reading everything she could lay her hands on, from pamphlets on Aids, diabetes and sexually transmitted diseases to old newspapers.

A striped kitten came around the wall and started licking a bloodstained piece of gauze that had fallen out of one of the bins. Horrified and fascinated at the same time, Lerato watched the creature's obsession with the gory cloth.

"Kitty, here kitty, kitty," she called softly and slid carefully off the step towards the little animal. But as soon as she took the next step, it bounded onto the dustbin and over the wall like a streak of lightning. Lerato bent down and, picking up the gauze between two fingers, threw it back into the dustbin.

Then she turned around and went back inside. It was almost time for tea.

When Lerato entered the tearoom, there was a big box in one corner that she hadn't noticed before. In it was what looked like wooden toys with two fat wheels at one end.

"What are those?" she asked Seipathi when she came in.

"Oh, those are our new penises," Seipathi answered proudly. She laughed when she saw Lerato's shocked expression. "We use them to teach people how to use condoms," she added. "Wait, I'll show you."

Before Lerato could stop her, Seipathi was back with a condom and was giving her a graphic demonstration of how to put it onto the wooden penis.

“Any questions?” she asked when she had finished.

“Er, no . . . thank you.”

“Have you thought about what you are going to do now?” Seipathi asked when Lerato had poured their tea.

“I don’t really know. I have nothing. I think I should go back. You know, back to the mountains.”

Seipathi looked at her for a long moment. When she spoke, there was a firmness that Lerato had not heard before.

“You could go back, if you want to have nothing for the rest of your life. Or we can find you a job.”

“A job?” Lerato was taken aback. “I have no training. I’ll never find something worthwhile.”

“Have you ever tried?”

CHAPTER 5

“It can’t be,” Lerato reached out and traced the image in the mirror with her fingers. “This can’t be me.” Then she smoothed her hands over her small waist and full hips, turning from side to side to appreciate her new look. Seeing herself in the mirror made her stand instinctively stand up straighter. Her breasts were full and firm. She leant in closer and studied her face – the high forehead, the big eyes and full lips that were emphasized by a outlined natural shiny outline.

“Well, it is and you better believe it,” Seipathi said proudly. She had brought Lerato clothes to wear for the big job hunt: a fuchsia skirt with a hemline just above the knee and a white knit blouse buttoned down the front. There was even a bra that Seipathi had bought for her on the way home the previous day. It was from a street vendor and not expensive, but to Lerato it was the greatest gift. “It’s for good luck,” Seipathi beamed. “Anyway, there’s no way any of mine would have fitted you.”

Seipathi was not satisfied until she had also tidied Lerato’s hair and made up her face. “It’s a sin to put make-up on skin like yours,” she said, stroking Lerato’s cheek while she met her eyes in the mirror, “but it will just add a bit of sophistication. People will take you more seriously.”

Lerato relished the pampering and the sensation of the soft brushes on her skin. Yet, when it was all done, she was suddenly afraid.

“I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Yes, you can.” Seipathi said firmly. “You know exactly what to do. Now go do it – and make sure you get back here this afternoon to give me a full report.”

They had spent a lot of time the previous day discussing Lerato’s plan of action. Eventually, they had agreed that the best bet would be to try at the many clothing retailers in the city centre. “Try the big chain stores first,” Seipathi advised. “They pay better.” Lerato could almost picture herself as a saleslady in such a shop – helping customers select their purchases, clucking around them and ooh-ing and aah-ing when they came out of the change rooms as she had seen the sales assistants do in some of the Indian shops in Marabastad’s Oriental Bazaar.

She thanked Seipathi one last time, mustered all her courage and set off in the direction of the city’s main shopping district.

It was a long walk and despite the fact that it was still early, Lerato was soon perspiring. By the time she reached her first stop, the large Woolworths on the corner of Church and Van der Walt Streets, her heart was racing and she struggled to keep her breathing even.

The shop had just opened and there were relatively few people about. Lerato instantly loved everything about it. The air smelled like flowers. The clothes were displayed like scenes from a magazine, with candles, throws and vases adding to the allure. There were no sales staff on the shop floor, but the women who were readying themselves for the day’s trade at the cash registers were well groomed and cheerful. They looked professional in their maroon and green uniforms.

Lerato aimed for the cashier closest to her, an older woman with a motherly look about her.

“Good morning,” Lerato said, swallowing her anxiety. “May I speak to your manager?”

The woman hesitated and Lerato wondered if she thought she was a customer.

“Wait here,” she said. She walked across the shop floor to a door on the far side and knocked reverently. The door swung open almost at once and a young white man appeared. He had short dark hair and wore glasses with small round lenses. The woman pointed to where Lerato stood as she spoke to him.

He walked over to her briskly.

“May I help you?” His voice perfectly suited his appearance.

“I came to enquire about a position.” Radio voice. Lerato had rehearsed the line a thousand times since she had left Seipathi. The words echoed in her head as if she had spoken them into a cave.

“Maybe,” he said with sarcastic emphasis, “you should first learn to read.” He pointed to a notice on the wall where the line of tills ended and slowly articulated the words. “NO VA-CAN-CIES.” With that he shot one last furious glance at the cashier, who quaked visibly, and swung back to his office.

The woman hung her head and went back to her station without paying Lerato further attention. For a long moment, Lerato stood lost in the large space, feeling as if she had been punched in the stomach. As she left the shop, she forced herself to swallow her disappointment, focusing on what

Seipathi had said that morning: “Remember, every ‘no’ just brings you closer to the ‘yes’, so see that as something positive.” She didn’t want to let Seipathi down.

She was no longer smiling three hours later. It was noon and she was hungry and tired, and despondent. Having been to eight places ranging from large clothing chain stores to mixed-up one-man clothing shops or shoe stores, she had had no success. It had been worst at the larger stores; their managers generally made the Woolworths man look civil by comparison. In the smaller shops, the people were more sympathetic, apologising for not being able to employ her and recommending other places that she could try.

But, Seipathi’s wisdom notwithstanding, after trying all morning, she was still not one step closer to getting a job than when she had started.

The sun was blazing down, causing the sour stench from the gutters to rise and hang thickly in the air around her. She walked aimlessly and no longer felt like entering any of the colourful stores she was passing. Most of them were tiny, crowded holes crammed full of merchandise from floor to ceiling, everything from plastic containers to cheap cosmetics to knock-offs of famous brand sportswear.

Lerato felt bewildered by the colours, the noise, the crowdedness of the pavements. At last she came to a bench built around the trunk of a large white stinkwood tree and sank down gratefully on it.

As she looked about wondering what to do next, her eyes met those of a man walking towards her. He looked about forty and was tanned and rugged looking. A thick gold chain glinted where his denim shirt was unbuttoned at the neck.

He approached her with an outstretched hand and a disarming smile. Having never before been directly approached by a white man, Lerato was a little unnerved. She was unsure how to react, but, not wanting to be rude, she shook his hand.

“Hi,” he said, “I’m Kenny.” He sat down on the bench facing her, sliding one arm across the backrest in a proprietary manner. “I saw you sitting here by yourself and I wondered what could be so bad that it could make such a pretty face frown?”

Lerato told him of the morning’s struggle. “But there’s nothing, not for someone like me, anyway,” she concluded.

“What do you mean, someone like you?” Kenny leant forward and put his hand on her knee, urging her to keep talking.

“Well, I mean, someone with no education,” Lerato sighed. “I just don’t have the right background, that’s all.” The man’s hand on her leg made her uncomfortable. She got up and stuck out her hand. “I must go now.”

He took both her arms in a firm grip and pulled her back down onto the bench. Lerato didn’t know how to resist without offending the man.

“Come on,” Kenny said, leaning towards her. “You were just not looking in the right place. I’m sure I could help you. That is, if you’re really serious about getting a job.”

“Of course I’m serious, but it’s just no use.”

“Let me help you, I know of a place – it’s not far from here.”

“I don’t know . . .” Lerato felt uncertain. She didn’t know why the man would care to help her. But then again, if this was her chance to find a job, she had to take it, even if it was only to please Seipathi.

“OK,” she said, giving a little shrug.

As she got up, he took her by the arm and steered her through the crowd and around the corner into Du Toit Street. It was quieter here, the shop fronts interspersed with graffiti covered walls and steel gates leading to parkades or warehouses.

“It’s just over there,” Kenny indicated a few grey steps leading to a door above which a pink neon sign indicated “Flamingo”. Next to the door on both sides were large windows, but they were hung with blinds in the same pink. Lerato could not see inside.

“Is this a restaurant?” she asked. When Seipathi and she had talked earlier, they decided that waitressing was not the ideal job for Lerato. However, by this time she was desperate enough to try it.

“Sort of,” Kenny smiled, “but I choose to call it a recreation centre. It’s a place where people come to de-stress and recharge. Our market is the high earning corporate male.”

Lerato wasn’t sure she understood a word of what he said. She felt a little stupid and very immature next to Kenny.

He opened the door and they walked into a softly lit hall with the mellow sounds of jazz in the background. It was cool inside and everything in the room seemed glitzy and shiny. In front of them was a long curved bar counter with glass shelves and mirrors behind it.

Small round granite-topped tables dotted the room. The table tops each seemed to be suspended on a chrome pole that reached from the floor to the ceiling through its centre. At the counter and at some of the tables

people sat having drinks and smoking. They were mostly men in their forties or fifties, Lerato estimated.

Here and there a man was sitting talking to a woman, usually much younger and without exception beautiful. But what intrigued Lerato most were the waitresses. They were all clad in high heels, very short black leather skirts and skimpy sequined halter neck tops.

Kenny made his way through the tables, still steering Lerato in front of him. He greeted many of the men they passed. Lerato half turned to face him. “Listen Kenny, if you were thinking . . .” She stopped and raised her hands against his chest. “It’s just that, well, waitressing is not exactly what I see myself doing. I appreciate you wanting to help me and everything, but . . .”

He pressed a finger against her lips. “Shh. Of course not – the bar is just one part of it. We provide a whole range of other services that I think you’d be much better suited to. Come.” He led her through the room to an exit to the left of the bar counter. There was a curved wall on the inside that kept one from seeing what was on the other side.

Beyond the curved wall, the doorway led into a cosy lounge with carpeting on the floor and walls in a rich burgundy. The furniture in this room was soft leather couches and chairs with wide armrests arranged around low coffee tables. There was another bar counter against one wall, much smaller than the one in the front room. On the far side, a door led into a hallway where a flight of stairs was partially visible.

A woman in a trouser suit was in conversation with a portly, grey-haired man who was seated on one of the soft chairs. When she noticed Kenny, she excused herself and came towards them. She was tall and suave, with a

severe, unsmiling face. Lerato watched her in awe. She had never seen a woman look so comfortably powerful.

“Morning, Lisa,” Kenny shook her hand formally and then turned toward Lerato. “Meet Lerato, she is exploring employment opportunities with us.”

“Lerato, this is Lisa. She manages our daily appointments schedule.”

Lisa looked Lerato up and down with cold, implacable eyes. Then her lips curled into a thin smile. She took Lerato’s hand and said “I’m sure you’re going to do very well with us.”

Lerato was sure that Kenny and Lisa both had the wrong impression of her. “I’m not sure I will,” she said, hesitantly. “You see, I don’t have any experience. I don’t know what you want me to do . . .”

“Experience is the last thing you have to worry about,” Kenny smiled. “You’ll pick up the necessary experience before you know it.”

Lerato’s eyes swept the room. A young woman with a mass of blonde curls wearing a short brown leather skirt emerged through the door on the other side of the room. Lisa cocked her head towards the grey-haired man who had since started reading one of the newspapers that were lying on the coffee table. The woman walked over to him and touched him lightly on the shoulder. He promptly put down the newspaper, got up and followed her out the way she came. Lerato noticed him touching his crotch just before they moved out of sight up the flight of stairs.

Though barely perceptible from where she stood, Lerato immediately recognized what that small gesture was about. Memories of Mabena’s flooded her mind. She could again smell the beer and the vomit, the cheap perfume of the whores.

“This place . . .” She looked at Kenny in sudden dismay. “Is it . . . a brothel?”

Lisa’s eyes narrowed, but Kenny didn’t lose his composure even for a fraction of a second. “Lerato, baby, I don’t know what you are used to where you come from. I told you, this is a recreation centre.”

Lerato hesitated for a moment. Then she took a slow, deliberate step backward, still facing him. “Listen, I’m sorry. I don’t think this place is right for me. Thanks for trying, but I think I’d better go.” Now Lisa was looking at Kenny.

Kenny put his hands together, lifted them and pushed them against his forehead. The silence grew heavy.

Then, very suddenly, he let his hands drop and swing behind his back, causing Lerato to give a startled gasp.

“Tell you what, sweetie,” He said, smiling. “If you’re not interested, that’s fine. Personally, I think you’re passing up a golden opportunity, but hey, if you’re not ready for it now, there’s nothing I can do about it.” He reached for her arm. “But what do you say we have a quick drink together before you go? Just the three of us, just to celebrate the fact that we’ve made each other’s acquaintance, even if it was only for a short while?” He was already leading her towards one of the couches. Her legs were shaky and she didn’t resist.

He sat down next to her, and Lisa hovered like a black bird behind them. “How about a nice cool glass of wine?” he asked.

“Er... no thanks. I’d rather just have a Coke or something.”

“Sure,” he nodded. “Lis’, would you organize Lerato a Coke, please, and the usual for me.” Lerato thought he looked at Lisa strangely, but then he turned his attention to her and she was no longer sure of what she had seen.

Lisa went over to the bar counter and quickly returned with Lerato’s cooldrink and a short glass of golden liquid for Kenny.

Lerato hadn’t eaten all day and she gulped the cooldrink down gratefully. Kenny had started to talk about opportunities and compromising on your dreams, but it was getting late and Lerato wanted to get back to the clinic before Seipathi left. Pushing her glass a little further from the edge of the low coffee table, she tried to excuse herself and get up, but neither her tongue, nor the rest of her body would respond. Looking around the room, she tried to steady the images that were shifting and blurring around her.

Kenny put his glass down as if in slow motion. He nodded to Lisa who came around the couch to face Lerato.

“Your little black bitch has a lot to learn, Kenny,” she sighed and bent down beside Lerato to hook an arm around her waist.

“How dare you?!” Lerato shouted the words in her mind, but they never reached her lips. The kick she aimed at Lisa materialised as nothing more than a twitch. Ice-cold fear swept through her.

“Well, she’s about to have one hell of an education,” Kenny answered, grabbing her from the other side. Together they dragged her towards the stairs.

Lerato again tried to scream, but couldn’t. Through a huge effort, she turned her head towards the bar counter. The young barman didn’t look in her

direction. He stood polishing a glass, turning it slowly as he held it up to the light.

Between them, Kenny and Lisa carried Lerato up the stairs. At the top of the stairs they entered a long corridor with doors on the one side and large windows looking out on the street below on the other. Lerato swayed against the wall as Kenny relaxed his grip on her waist to feel in his trouser pocket. Run! Lerato screamed to herself. Run! But she only managed to stumble half a step before Kenny unlocked the door and helped Lisa drag her inside.

The room was pink, with a large bed close to the window and what seemed like a bathroom leading off on one side. Lerato tried to steady herself, but it was as if she was trapped in deep water. The walls and floor undulated around and beneath her.

Kenny took Lerato over to the bed and lay her down on it. He stood looking at her for a while and then began to unbutton his shirt. "Wanna play with?" he asked Lisa, who was leaning against the window sill, her head thrown back slightly.

"Nah, I'll just watch for now."

Lerato's chest hurt. She wasn't sure that what she was seeing was real. Kenny stood at the foot of the bed and stripped away his shirt, followed by his shoes and trousers. Two long strides brought him to the bed. He straddled Lerato and began undressing her. Although she could not move, little pinpricks of sweat broke out all over her body. From the corner of her eye she saw Lisa still leaning against the window sill. She seemed to be studying her fingernails.

Now Kenny's hands were on her. She could feel his thumbs, his knees, his breath in her face. Lerato tried desperately to pull away, to scream, but she was a prisoner in her own body. She struggled to stay conscious.

There was a shadow and then the mattress moved and Kenny's heavy thighs shifted. Lisa knelt next to them on the bed and was pulling Kenny towards her. Lerato's mind was reeling. They were both almost on top of her, ignoring her as if she were a pillow.

Then all hell broke loose. The door burst open and the girl Lerato had seen earlier stumbled in, her leather waistcoat open and her curls dishevelled.

"Cops!" she shouted. "It's a raid!"

Both Lisa and Kenny reacted as if something had stung them.

"We've got to get the fuck out of here," Lisa screamed. She leapt away and darted off the bed. Kenny followed close on her heels, kicking himself away from Lerato so violently that she fell to the floor in the narrow space between the window and the bed.

She saw flashes of blue light, which must have come from the street below, reflected against the wall. There was the sound of women screaming and glass breaking. Someone speaking over a megaphone. Then she heard the familiar beeping of a police radio.

Finally, she let the darkness wash over her.

CHAPTER 6

She woke feeling cold and disoriented. It was gloomy in the room and she was lying naked on the carpet between the bed and the wall. It was very quiet. She could not remember how she had come to be there. Shivering, she tried to get up to find her clothes. Her limbs were unwilling and heavy. She struggled to get to her knees and then, slowly, shakily, to her feet.

Memories surfaced like snatches of a nightmare – the shape of the naked man towering above her, a struggle for breath. Her whole body shuddered with renewed fear. The urge to get as far from the place as possible was overpowering. Scurrying around the bed, she struggled to find her clothes in the darkening gloom. She fumbled with them before stumbling towards the half open door, almost paralysed with fear.

There were no lights on in the corridor and through the glass panes on the one side she looked down into the street below. It was very quiet. A few cars passed, and a woman walked on the opposite sidewalk clutching her handbag to her chest. A few meters down the road a couple of people hung around a table soccer machine in front of a café. It was the end of a day like any other in the city.

I could have been killed, and no-one would have known, it flashed through her pounding head.

She looked up and down the empty corridor. The place seemed deserted, but it felt as if Kenny was lurking around every corner. She simply couldn't muster the courage to go down the stairs the way they had brought her up earlier. The only way she could go was back into the room. The

window looked out on a courtyard. There was a large refuse container directly below her and a few smaller bins next to it along the wall. There were no burglar bars and Lerato climbed out onto the narrow ledge below the window. She inched closer to the edge. After one last look over her shoulder, she spread her arms towards the city sky and sprang forward. As she landed in the heap of stinking rubbish, a sharp pain shot through her arm. Gritting her teeth, she heaved herself over the edge of the container and jumped onto the cement surface below.

A narrow, dark alley led from the courtyard into the street. The streetlights had been switched on. Lerato walked a few meters looking over her shoulder. Then she kicked off her shoes and ran as if her life depended on it, hugging her injured arm close. The few people around stared in surprise, but Lerato did not mind how she looked or what anyone thought of her. She ran with her mouth open in a silent scream, fighting for breath between her sobs, tears streaming down her face.

She didn't slow down until she turned the corner into the clinic and fell into Seipathi's arms. Her legs gave way under her and she sank to the ground. Seipathi squatted next to her, holding her around the shoulders, rocking her gently until the sobbing subsided.

"Thank God you're here," she said. "I've been waiting for hours." She got up and gently pulled Lerato up after her. "What happened? Who did this?" Seipathi's shouted when she noticed the bleeding arm.

Lerato started crying again. "I was so stupid. There was a man . . . he said he could get me a job. But then," she stopped for breath, "he . . . there

was something in the cooldrink. I couldn't move. Then they took me up to the room."

The corners of Seipathi's mouth were turned down. "Were you raped?" she asked quietly.

Lerato sniffed loudly and shook her head. "No. The police came. I fell between the bed and the wall. They didn't even see me," she wailed. "When I woke there was no-one there." She paused, shaking her head from side to side. "I can't . . . can't tell you everything now. Too tired." Now that the fear had left her, she felt a deathly exhaustion.

Seipathi stood for a moment chewing her lip. Then she led Lerato into the clinic and to the back room where she had let her sleep the previous night. "I'll stay with you. I've missed the last bus home anyway." Lerato looked up guiltily, but Seipathi gave her a reassuring smile. After dressing the long, shallow cut on Lerato's arm, Seipathi took down the narrow mattress and pillow from the examination bed and lay it down on the floor for Lerato as she had done the night before. When she returned with another one for herself, Lerato had already curled up and fallen asleep.

Seipathi placed her own mattress and pillow against Lerato's. Then she stripped off her uniform and lay down next to her. She pulled the thin green blanket over them both and then closely hugged Lerato to her. It was a long time before she could sleep.

Lerato woke up the next morning lying in the same position she had gone to sleep in. It was just after daybreak and she could hear Seipathi moving about quietly. She felt safe as she lay on the clinic floor, taking in the now familiar details of the room, from the pink curtain with little white dots

filtering the sunlight through the window to the square grey state-issue waste paper bin. Her feelings surprised her. The anger was still there, and the fear, but now there was space around it. She had survived, and that made her feel lucky and quietly powerful.

“You awake?” Seipathi was standing in the door, neat as ever. Lerato nodded and sat up. The clothes she had slept in were all crumpled.

“Come, I made some tea.” Lerato followed her, thinking that, of all the medicines Seipathi administered, none could be as soothing as the tea she so lovingly brewed.

They sat in their customary places and Seipathi cradled her cup in her hand, her eyes cast down.

“Listen, Lerato.” She paused and shot a furtive glance Lerato’s way. “I just wanted to say I’m so sorry that I made you do this. It was a stupid idea. You’re so young – I should have never sent you off on your own like that. I’ll go with you to the police station so that you can lay a charge . . .”

Lerato shook her head before Seipathi could finish. “You did what you thought best for me. I’m not going to the police. I want to put this thing behind me. Right now I want to go out and find a job. I know there’s something out there for me – whether it’s scrubbing floors or digging holes, I’m going to do it.”

Seipathi’s jaw dropped visibly. “But last night, you were so upset. You can’t possibly . . . I don’t understand how you can just . . .”

“I don’t understand it either,” Lerato said honestly. “It’s just something that happened to me, in my head, I mean. It’s changed the way I think. I’m going to take charge of my life now.”

Seipathi slowly shook her head. Then she leant forward and took Lerato's hand. "Well, that's amazing. I know you're going to make it."

It was Wednesday and Lerato set out for town before eight o' clock. It had rained just before sunrise and the morning was cool and fresh. As she was about to leave, Seipathi tied a little scarf around her neck.

"You're beautiful," she said.

"You're kind," Lerato replied. She turned, smiling, and took the road leading to the city centre. When she came to where the streets were lined with shops and the street vendors vying for space in front of them, she took a turn down Du Toit Street. It was very close to Kenny's place. She wondered whether the club had been closed down or whether it was business as usual for him and Lisa. The memory of what had happened came back with such force that she was afraid she was going to be sick. Taking a deep breath, she darted into the nearest of the little grocery stores that lined this part of the street.

The shop was cramped and badly lit inside and smelled of washing powder and spice. A middle-aged coloured woman in a floral dress and apron was tidying one of the shelves. "Dumela, Mme," Lerato approached her.

"Agee." The woman had a kind, round face.

"I am looking for a job," Lerato said straight away, but the woman started shaking her head even before she finished her sentence.

"Baba Sithole and I can barely pay the rent," she said, lifting her hands toward the ceiling. "We can't pay someone to work here." She looked Lerato up and down thoughtfully.

“Why don’t you try at the big shops in the main street?”

But Lerato knew from her previous attempts that she had little chance of being successful there. Nonetheless, she thanked the woman, touching her arm briefly as she left.

The next place she saw was a furniture store where music blared loudly from two amplifiers at the entrance. The place was ugly and uninviting, and Lerato sensed that the merchandise was cheap. The coffee tables were adorned with silk flowers in pink and blue and the couches and shelves were interspersed with gaudy china statuettes of nudes, cats, dogs and owls. After letting her wait for fifteen minutes while he was chatting with a friend on the phone, the owner, a greasy looking Portuguese, chased her out of the shop like a dog.

As she moved down the street, her prospects didn’t seem to get any better. There was a dark little hole selling motor car spares, a shop selling detergents and another selling plastic furniture. She enquired at quite a few places and, although people responded to her in different ways, the answer was always the same: “Sorry, nothing at the moment.”

It was afternoon now and the sun was beating down on the busy sidewalk. Lerato’s feet hurt. She had been so positive that morning, but now it seemed that she would have to go back to Seipathi with a tale of failure once more.

To her left, there was a large fenced parking lot and a huge warehouse branded with the name *Metco* in big blue and yellow letters. There were no shop windows and she couldn’t see what was being sold there, but people,

mostly women, were entering the building all the time and leaving it carrying large white shopping bags sporting the same branding.

Lerato watched the place for a while, considering whether she should start heading back to the clinic. She could always come back the next day and try her luck at a few more places. Eventually, however, she decided to find out what was hidden behind the mysterious façade, even if it was only to satisfy her own curiosity.

She walked into the building with a number of shoppers and was a few steps inside before she first took a good look around. What she saw made her stop in her tracks. She was in a very large high-roofed space exploding with light and colour. As far as one could see were rolls of fabric of every conceivable colour and texture.

Lerato gasped. She would not have dreamt that such a place existed, yet somehow she felt that she belonged there. To the centre of the huge floor space was a cluster of counters where black and Indian women in green overcoats were unrolling and cutting material for a steady throng of customers. In their midst stood a grey haired Indian man wearing a cotton tunic over loose-cut trousers. Occasionally, he would direct one of the waiting customers to a cutting counter. When he addressed the customers, he bowed slightly towards them and spoke softly, but when he turned to bark orders at the scissor-wielding women his attitude was suddenly contemptuous.

As he moved slightly away from the hubbub, apparently searching the store for someone or something, Lerato straightened her back and walked towards him. He only noticed her when she was almost within arm's reach.

His thick brows formed a question mark above his eyes.

“Good afternoon, Sir.” He didn’t respond and she continued with her eyes cast down, trying not to betray how much this mattered to her.

“Please, do you have any job available?” She looked up briefly. “I will do anything.”

The man didn’t answer her. Instead, he looked over Lerato’s shoulder and shouted to one of the security guards who were standing a few meters away at the entrance.

“You, Jacob, come here!”

The guard hurried over and stood next to Lerato.

“How many times must I tell you not to let people in who are looking for jobs? Hey? How many times must I say something before you listen?”

Jacob looked briefly at Lerato and then at the other man.

“Sorry, Mister Omarjee. We thought she was a customer,” he explained.

“Ah, I see, because she’s clean. Now everybody who is clean is a customer, huh?” Mr Omarjee wagged his finger in Jacob’s face and promptly chased him back to this station.

Lerato was standing in front of him like a schoolgirl in the headmaster’s office. His gaze seemed to travel from her face to her feet and slowly all the way back up again. She was about to turn around and slink out of the store when he spoke again.

“You know how many people come looking for jobs here? You come late or you stay away from work or you take tea too long and you’re back on the street. You understand?”

Lerato was not at all sure that she did, but she nodded furiously. “Mayesha!” he called to a woman behind the cutting table nearest to them. “This girl starts tomorrow. See that she gets an overall and show her what to do.”

The woman looked at Lerato unsmilingly, but she made a little curtsy and said: “Yes, Mister Omarjee.”

“You have to wear this and be here every morning at eight,” Mayesha said when as she handed Lerato her overall. “Sometimes we have to work weekends as well. There’s no extra pay. And we get below the minimum wage. Don’t complain or you’ll get fired.”

Lerato cried all the way back to the clinic. As she approached the trellis door, she broke into a skip.

“Seipathi, Seipathi, I found one – I’ve got a job!” She ran into her friend’s cool arms, laughing and crying and struggling to catch her breath to tell the story.

CHAPTER 7

Lerato filled her mug from the urn and sank down gratefully on an upturned plastic crate standing against the wall. Putting the mug down next to her on the floor, she leant forward and rubbed her legs. Being on her feet all day long took some getting used to and the afternoon tea time had come not a moment too soon.

She leant back against the wall and watched the others take their tea. The girls she worked with fell into two groups. The black girls who congregated on this side of the tea room were the ones who got scolded if a customer complained. The Indian girls were always ordering them to scrub the floor, move the displays or run to the café on the corner to buy milk. They were all in one way or another related to Metco's royal family, the Omarjees.

Apart from the old man who had hired Lerato, three other members of the family featured prominently. Mrs Omarjee was short and plump, with huge upper arms and no waist. She had a ring on almost every finger. To Lerato she seemed always to be gesticulating with her hands at awkward angles to the rest of her body.

The sarees she wore were so bright, they almost jarred the eye – purple paired with fluorescent green, lime yellow with crimson and shocking pink. Lerato regularly saw her darting from the one end of the store to the other, swooping at random on the girls moving between the shelves and always finding a reason to screech at them. She picked at everything she came across, and Lerato did all she could to avoid her.

Two of Mrs Omarjee's sons were involved in running the business. Ravi was tall and thin and seemed repulsed by everything that went on in the shop. Lerato had learned from a woman who had worked there for a long time that he had been studying overseas, but had returned before completing his degree. Ravi was always leaning against a shelf, slumping in a chair or hanging on to a counter. His mother often took him to task over his laziness, flapping her arms and shouting at him in her squeaky voice. Usually, his only response was to move a few paces off like a vulture chased from a carcass.

Subesh was ten years older than Ravi. An outsider would never have guessed that the two were brothers. Subesh was also tall, but, unlike his younger sibling, he was sturdy and broad shouldered. He had a strong jaw and smooth, dark skin. While Ravi seemed oblivious to anything that was going on around him, Subesh was alert and active – constantly intervening in subtle ways to ensure that the business was running smoothly. He knew the names of all the workers and managed them strictly, forever admonishing them to work faster and talk less. Gauging the demand, he would post the girls at the different cutting tables to most efficiently meet the customers' needs.

The Indian girls twittered like birds whenever he appeared, but he seemed not to notice. Lerato liked watching Subesh unobtrusively while she worked. She looked on as he stood talking to his father or explaining to the men how they should pack the new rolls of fabric that arrived on a daily basis. There was something about the curve of his mouth that made her think of him when she was alone.

“Move out?” Seipathi’s one eyebrow lifted comically. “Where will you find a place? How will you be able to afford it?”

Lerato shrugged and tried to look confident. “I’ve already found a place. You know I can’t stay here. If someone was to find out, you’d get into trouble. And I don’t want that to happen, not after everything you’ve done for me.” She had already packed her things – the clothes Seipathi had given her, an old towel, a bar of soap and a small pot of Vaseline – in a plastic shopping bag.

“But at least you’re safe here. You can stay for another month or so and then we’ll think of something else.”

Lerato started shaking her head even before Seipathi had finished talking. “You don’t have to worry, I’ll be fine. Anyway, I’ve already paid for a month. I’m moving into one of the rooms across the street from Metco.”

Lerato knew it was going to be tough, but being able to rent a room with her own money made her feel grown up and independent.

After arguing this way and that, Seipathi finally relented. “I’ll walk with you and catch a taxi home from there.”

The building used to be a school and consisted of rows of similar rooms made of asbestos sheeting. “Here we are,” Lerato said when they got to her room, the one with a large 14 scratched into the paint on the door. She took out the key that hung around her neck.

Seipathi drew a sharp breath as the door swung open to reveal the room that Lerato had to admit was hardly better than the Marabastad shack. There was a narrow steel bed with a stained mattress in one corner and a shelf made of a piece of wood across the tops of two large steel drums in the other. The previous tenant had left a torn poster of TKZ on the wall.

“It’s not that bad, look there’s . . .” Lerato started, when someone spoke loudly behind them: “What are you doing? Did I say two for the price of one? Did I say that?” It was the self-appointed landlord, Bra Sticks, whom Lerato had met earlier that afternoon. The big Zulu wriggled past them and lifted his hands as if to shoo them out of the room. “This is a single room. You paid for a single room. Not for two people. Two people is double.”

“Ah!” Seipathi took an indignant step back. “Two people? No, Mister, not even one. Give back Lerato’s money – she’s not living in this hole.”

Lerato saw Bra Stick’s eyes narrow and quickly stepped in between him and Seipathi. “Seipathi, listen, I’ll be fine. It’s close to work, and clean. And safe – I’ll keep the door locked.” She took a step closer to her friend and lowered her voice. “Please. I have to do this.”

Then she turned to Bra Sticks who stood cracking his knuckles in front of his big belly. “Sorry, Bra Sticks, it’s just a misunderstanding. Seipathi won’t be staying here, the room is just for me.”

“I don’t want trouble,” Bra Sticks said sullenly. “You want to make trouble, you go someplace else,” he shot a glance at Seipathi and stomped off.

Seipathi stood shaking her head, arms folded. “Are you sure about this? You can still come back to the clinic.”

“I’m sure.”

She sighed. “Promise you’ll let me know if it doesn’t work out?”

“Promise.”

After Seipathi had left, Lerato sat for a while on the lumpy mattress looking at her new room. The walls were thin and she could hear babies

crying, people talking and cooking pots clanking all around her. She could imagine how the room must have looked to Seipathi. It wasn't much. But it was hers – her money and her decision.

After the long climb up the cliff, she had hoped that the cave would have been large and deep – a secret place that Kgomotso and the boys had not yet discovered. But it was no more than a hollow carved from the rock, not even deep enough to take shelter in when it rained. Standing around disappointedly, she noticed that, on one side of the hollow, a thorny bush concealed a wide crevice that seemed to cut deep into the rock. She moved the branches aside carefully and stepped into the gloomy space. There was a glimmer far ahead and she walked towards it. The light grew stronger as she came closer. It was not the pale light of the autumn sun, but strange splashes of colour flickering along the wall of the passage. Then the tunnel opened up and she stepped into a large cavern filled with crystals that seemed to glow from the inside. Lerato stepped into the centre of the space, twirling around to watch the play of light and colour around her.

It was the most beautiful place she had ever seen – so beautiful that she didn't want to keep it a secret after all. But, turning to find the passage she had come from, she saw that similar passages led off from the crystal cave in every direction. She walked a little way down one of them. It led to another large crystal cave. Or was it the same one? Dazed, she stumbled through tunnel after tunnel, praying each time that it would lead her out of the cave. But time after time the glimmer ahead proved to be that of the glowing crystals. Their beauty was terrifying.

It was dawn before she was finally roused from the dream. She threw off the towel she had used as a blanket and struggled for a few seconds to relax her jaw. Swinging her feet onto the cold cement floor, she sat up, eager to get out of the room and across the street to Metco.

Although the work was monotonous and she hadn't really made friends with any of the other girls, Lerato loved the shop. Whenever possible, she stayed in during her lunch break. Wandering along the shelves, she spent the time matching the fabrics with those she had seen in her magazines. Jacquard satin, wool gabardine, raw silk, shantung, cotton twill – it was a never-ending adventure.

There was one part of the store that Lerato loved more than any other. The bridal and eveningwear section was a spacious room connected to the rest of the store by three arches. The room had a thick carpet and was softly lit. A large couch stood in the centre and the cutting tables were interspersed with glass-topped cabinets in which expensive ornaments, buckles, clasps and buttons were displayed.

The section was managed by Gita, a tall middle-aged Indian woman. Gita seemed completely at ease with the expensive fabrics she sold and the wealthy clients who bought them.

At first, Lerato sensed that Gita was suspicious of her interest in the section. Eventually, however, she lowered her guard and began to share with Lerato the background and peculiarities of the textiles and haberdashery under her supervision. Gita spoke with a rich accent and the wonderful sing-song cadence of her voice helped fix the facts she conveyed in Lerato's mind.

One morning while the girls were drinking tea, Gita unlocked one of the cabinets to show Lerato its precious contents.

“Look at this one,” she said, picking up a button between her thumb and index finger. “It’s carved mother of pearl.” She rolled it between her finger tips so that Lerato could see the light playing over it in muted rainbow colours.

Gita put the button back and took out a couple of bright glass buttons that she held like marbles in her palm. “These are from Murano,” she said and transferred them to Lerato’s hand. Lerato didn’t know where Murano was, but she loved the feeling of the smooth, heavy buttons in her hand. After carefully replacing the glass buttons, Gita showed Lerato a set of silver ones inlaid with green gemstones. “Real silver,” she said as she passed them on to Lerato. “They’re antiques.” When Gita told her their price, Lerato nearly dropped them out of shock. One of the silver buttons cost more than she could save in a year.

There were many days that Lerato could not spare the time to sneak off to that fabulous part of the store. Although, by law, all the workers were entitled to a lunch hour, Mrs Omarjee or Ravi would often find a chore for her to do during lunchtime. Once, the old matriarch darted onto her holding a bundle of men’s shirts. “You, girl!” She waved Lerato closer. “Here.” She dumped the shirts onto a cutting table along with a spool of thread, a needle and a handful of shirt buttons.

“All of these have buttons missing. I tell you, the way they make clothes these days! See that you sew them on properly.”

Lerato had only handled a needle and thread a few times in her life. But she had often watched as some of the women made up customer orders

for curtains and cushions. She set about it as best she could, checking each shirt and replacing the buttons that were missing from those left by the old crew. It was clear whose shirts they were. There were two long cotton tunics, one with a faint blue stripe, that obviously belonged to Mr Omarjee Senior. The silky pastel ones had to be Ravi's. Lastly there were two shirts, one charcoal and one burgundy, that Lerato had seen Subesh wear. They smelled like him.

Other times at lunch Ravi would send her out to go and buy him cigarettes, or one of the Indian women would summon her to the warehouse area on the top storey to count buttons or cut elastic and petticoat lace into more manageable rolls.

Lerato tried not to let her disappointment show every time she was prevented from paying her daily visit to the bridal and eveningwear section. Often, she would turn around after having received an order from Mrs Omarjee or Ravi to find Subesh watching them. Lerato felt vulnerable knowing that he must have noticed the time she had been spending behind the three arches.

Towards the end of her first year at Metco, Mrs Omarjee pounced on Lerato one morning, ordering her to report to the sewing section.

“But, Ma'am, I can't sew,” Lerato remonstrated.

Mrs Omarjee thrust her long nose into Lerato's face. “Did I ask you if you could sew?” Lerato opened her mouth, but Mrs Omarjee clearly didn't expect an answer. “Come, come, hurry up now, Prem is waiting for you.”

Lerato hastily put down her scissors and made her way to the sewing room at the back of the store next to where the workers had their tea.

“Come in, don’t just stand there,” Aunty Prem, as the workers called her, said when she spotted Lerato standing in the doorway.

Lerato took a seat in front of one of the sewing machines that Aunty Prem indicated.

“Have you ever worked on a sewing machine?” she asked and drew a chair up to come and sit next to Lerato.

“No, never,” Lerato answered, looking at her sideways. For the first time she noticed the pink growth on Aunty Prem’s head that protruded through the greying black hair caught in a long ponytail. Lerato struggled to look away and for a moment she even had the macabre urge to reach out and touch it.

“Sit up straight,” Aunty Prem instructed and poked Lerato hard in her back. “We have a lot of orders, so I’m only going to tell you everything once. We’ll start by threading the machine.”

She yanked the spool of thread off the machine and deftly threaded it around the hooks and dials, finally threading it through the needle and pulling a length of it away from her.

“Good. You do it now,” she announced and pulled the spool out again.

Lerato wound the thread around the first hook and then around another. She wasn’t quite sure of the sequence in which it had to go.

“No!”

“Ouch!” Lerato realised what had happened only after she had yanked her smarting hand away from the machine. Aunty Prem had pulled a wooden ruler from somewhere and had hit her hard over the knuckles with it.

Lerato cradled her hand in her lap and felt the heat rise in her face. She looked around quickly to see the reaction of the other seamstresses, but although some of them were watching her over their machines, they showed no reaction to Aunty Prem having hit her.

“Again,” Aunty Prem snapped.

By the end of the day, Lerato’s eyes were stinging from concentrating so hard and she had been rapped with the ruler on her hands, her head, her upper arm and her thigh.

“So,” Aunty Prem said when it was finally time to close. “You’ll come to the sewing room every Wednesday – don’t be late.”

Having held out all day long, Lerato could not keep the tears back any longer. But these were tears of relief – she had feared that from now on she would have to work in the sewing room every day.

CHAPTER 8

Lerato lugged the last of the bulky rolls of tracksuiting to the front of the store. Despite all her effort, she could hardly call what she had created a display. Nonetheless, the festive pile of fluffy rolls was bound to catch the eye of the few customers entering the store. It was April and, as was customary, most of the Metco clientele was out of town celebrating the Easter holidays at the coast or in the scenic provinces to the east and northwest of the city. Many of the workers whose families lived in rural areas also had leave and the store was unusually quiet. The sale of tracksuiting and polar fleeces was an attempt by Subesh to get more feet into the store. It was the beginning of autumn and already chilly. But after lunch it was so quiet that Lerato took the liberty of joining Gita behind the arches.

Apart from Subesh, the Omarjees were also home enjoying the holidays with their large extended family. Lerato watched him move about the store. She tried to picture him away from the business, watching television, gardening or socialising with friends, but ended up with a ridiculous collage of images that didn't go together.

Gita sat on the couch with a wad of fabric samples on her lap. She made a fluid movement with her hand, indicating to Lerato to join her. Under the hawk eyes of Ravi or Mrs Omarjee, Lerato would not have dared, but in their absence she accepted shyly and sat down beside her mentor.

"I have something to show you," Gita said and delicately leafed through the samples. She held out one corner for Lerato to touch. "These are all natural, hand-woven fabrics."

Lerato explored the loose weave of the fabric with her thumb and forefinger. “It looks coarse,” she said, “but it feels soft.”

“Yes,” Gita said and searched through the samples. “The trend in Europe is for top designers to use these fabrics in their *haute couture* creations. Look at this one.” She moved a little closer and Lerato could feel her warmth. “This is from East Africa. It’s woven from a natural root and dyed with vegetables. It takes incredible time and effort to make just a few metres of it, but in the villages where it’s made the people are so poor that it’s still worth their while.”

Lerato sat spellbound. As she leafed through the samples, their sweet, grassy fragrance was released. Some were woven into intricate geometrical patterns. Others were decorated with beads of wood and shell. Lerato noticed the slightly irregular shape of the beads, which were obviously also handmade.

“It’s so beautiful,” she mused. “Imagine using these with the fine silks. It would be like grassland next to a river.”

Gita looked thoughtful for a moment. Then she smiled and nodded her head. “I guess it would, wouldn’t it?”

So rapt had they been in the conversation that Lerato was surprised to see that it was closing time already.

She got up quickly to go and collect her things in the little room at the back of the store where the workers kept their personal belongings in a row of steel lockers. Hurrying through the arches, she almost bumped into Subesh who was standing just on the other side of them. The way he stood glowering over her made her feel flushed and small. She suspected that he was angry

about her spending the afternoon with Gita rather than waiting at the cutting table on the thin trickle of customers.

“You’ve hardly done any work today.”

Lerato looked up at him with wide eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

He raised his brows sarcastically and Lerato’s heart thumped in her throat.

“Sorry? We’ll see about that. There’s work enough to keep you busy here all night. Go wait for me at the cutting table.”

With that he turned and disappeared towards the back exit to let the other workers out. Subesh was usually the last one out of the store every day. He would stand at the door and let all the women out one by one, checking that none of them tried to sneak out a piece of fabric or a roll of toilet paper under their clothes.

Lerato stood at the counter waiting for him to return. How could I have been so careless? she thought. She thought about the room she had rented and about Seipathi who was counting on her to make a success of things. I’ll never do anything to place my job on the line again, she promised herself. That is, if it wasn’t too late already.

She stood there for what seemed like a very, very long time. There was no sound in the whole of the store. Then the lights were dimmed and for a moment Lerato thought Subesh had forgotten all about her. Turning quickly, she started hurrying to the exit so that she would not be locked in.

Subesh stepped out from behind a shelf in front of her and lifted her off her feet. She shrieked in fright, but was too startled to resist him. Subesh took

a couple of long strides towards the pile of tracksuiting that they had arranged that morning and put her down next to it. They were shielded on both sides by high shelves.

Lerato looked up at him questioningly. He didn't look angry anymore. His breathing was deep and even, his deep set eyes implacable beneath the thick black brows. She couldn't help looking at his mouth.

He pulled her towards him with one hand on the small of her back and the other sliding in under the hem of her jersey. Feeling his hand on her breast was deliciously shocking.

He moved his knee in between her legs and she clambered hotly onto him, clinging to his shoulders as he lay her down on the rolls of cloth. She pressed the throbbing ache between her legs against the hard muscle of his thigh. His lips coursed over her neck and breasts, followed by the silky brush of his hair.

"Look at me," he said and she realised she had been keeping her eyes closed. Opening them broke the spell. Lerato was overcome with embarrassment and tried to scramble out from under him. He pulled her back and pinned her down with a kiss, using his knees to spread her legs.

"Please, please," she panted when he finally released her mouth.

"Please, what?" he asked against her throat as his hand slid in between her legs.

"Please," she sobbed, but as she arched her back towards him, she knew that she was now pleading for something else.

When it was over, they lay on the soft rolls of fabric, their limbs intertwined. Lerato felt safe and sleepy. She had a fleeting memory of sitting

wrapped in her blanket by the fire when she was a little girl, while her father told stories to visitors seeking refuge from the icy mountain wind.

Subesh had hardly spoken to her at all through that first encounter and she returned to work the following Monday, not knowing what to expect. Nonetheless, the thought of seeing him again excited her.

He wasn't there when she arrived. Later, after the morning tea break, she saw him ordering about the women on the opposite side of the store. She felt a little twinge at the thought that he had not sought her out.

"Look at this stain," an old woman, whose apricot scalp one could clearly see through her white hair, complained as she pointed to the piece of polar fleece tracksuiting that had just been cut for her. "Do you expect me to pay for this?" She stood leaning on her walking stick with one hand and gesturing over the piece of fabric with the other, her chin thrust forward in indignation.

Old Mr Omarjee hurried over to see what the problem was. With his hands held together in front of him, he looked like a praying mantis. "No need to worry, Madam. That is just a little starch. It will come out in no time the first time you wash it."

Lerato blushed, knowing that the old man had no idea what he was lying about.

That evening she lay tossing and turning on the narrow steel frame bed in her room. Since Subesh had made love to her, she had had difficulty sleeping. The whole weekend, her thoughts had been occupied by what had happened between them. She had relived it a thousand times in her mind.

Although she was tired, sleep would not come. She lay listening to the sounds of domestic activity all around her through the thin asbestos partitioning. The crevices had been stuffed with crumpled newspaper to keep out the cold. There were mothers calling for children to come off the street, pots scraping on primus stoves, people talking, laughing, arguing. She tried to blot it all out and order her spinning thoughts, to get a handle on her feelings of disappointment, rejection, even.

But what had she expected? Surely, Subesh could not have come running over to her the moment she stepped into the store – she was a lowly worker and he the Metco crown prince. Lerato pictured him in her mind, his brooding eyes, the sensual curve of his lips. She couldn't stop herself from reliving the touch of his hands and mouth on her skin.

The infinite summer sky stretched over the lazy hills. Lerato was lying on her back in the warm grass. She was aware of the gentle caress of the sun on her skin. Her breathing was slow and deep and she felt her limbs become heavy and relaxed. She was aware of all the life around her in the languid afternoon, the sap pulsing through the stems of the grasses, the tiny insects buzzing and burrowing around her. She was one with the ancient earth beneath her and its smell wafted up around her. It was a smell she had known from her birth – earthy and musty and male.

It was a bleak, windy Wednesday afternoon – her monthly afternoon off – when Lerato again set out to the clinic to visit Seipathi. She reached the clinic flushed from the long walk, her cheeks tingling from the crisp air. It was busier

than usual – Seipathi’s patients grew in numbers as the weather got cooler. Nonetheless, she spotted Lerato from where she sat behind her desk in the little consulting room and waved happily at her. “Be with you now,” she mouthed. Lerato waved back and went to wait in the tea room.

She could hear some of the patients coughing the whole time she waited. Dear God, she hated that sound. It was the sound of the slow death that had taken her mother, of the disease that sought out the poor and malnourished who lived like rats in boxes and shacks in the city’s squatter camps. Suddenly the memories of Marabastad came rushing back, mocking her belief that she could start a new life.

It was after four when Seipathi joined her, her eyes tired and full of worry. She hugged Lerato and gratefully accepted the cup of tea put down in front of her. Holding the cup between her fingertips, she let her head hang.

“You know, sometimes I wonder if any of this makes a difference,” she sighed, lifting a hand to indicate the clinic around her. “They come to me sick and dying and I try to give them a little comfort and a couple of pills, but I know it’s been days since some of them have eaten. Some of them will sleep on the bare ground tonight, sick as they are!”

Seeing Seipathi so despondent made Lerato forget her own anxiety. Up to now, *she* had always been the one in need of consolation.

“I know it seems hopeless sometimes,” she said, sliding along the table until she was next to Seipathi. “God knows, I’ve seen the suffering from up close.” She took Seipathi by the shoulders and turned her around so that she was forced to face her. “The thing is . . . you can’t let it swallow you. Hope is all you have, and hope is all you can give them. And never, *never*, tell me that

that doesn't make a difference. It makes all the difference, and I'm living proof of that."

Seipathi wiped her hands over her head and face as if to brush away the negative thoughts. Then she took both Lerato's hands in hers and smiled wearily. "Of course you are! You're my inspiration. Tell me how things have been with you."

Lerato told her about the latest treasures to be found in the bridal and eveningwear section, the funny and annoying ways of some of the customers and the goings on around her room at the old school building. She told her everything except the one thing that was burning inside her.

It was sunset when Lerato left the clinic. Walking home, she wondered what would have happened, had she told Seipathi about Subesh. Her friend would certainly have disapproved; she would have felt that Lerato's liaison with Subesh could place her job, and with it her whole new life, in jeopardy. And Lerato realised now that Seipathi needed her success almost as much as she needed it herself.

CHAPTER 9

“Mrs Rathbone is going to be very upset if she gets here and the lace she ordered is still not here,” Gita said. “I’m just going to phone and hear when they’re going to deliver it.” She turned back to Lerato as she hurried towards the arches. “Will you hold the fort till I’m back?”

Lerato nodded eagerly. Gita was the only person at work that she felt close to, and she tried to spend as much time as she could with her. In fact, the bridal and eveningwear section felt more like home to her than the room in the old school building across the street. Gita seemed to enjoy her company and her interest in the fabrics and increasingly involved her. Recently, she even let Lerato cut for some of the customers. They were mostly wealthy women like Mrs Rathbone, often mothers with spoilt daughters who never stopped bickering and would eventually leave with a purchase that one or the other was not quite satisfied with.

Lerato turned around to see a man, whom she had heard Gita call Marcus, come in and look around the shelves. He was one of a few fashion designers who came in regularly to buy fabric. Blonde and slightly chubby, he was always impeccably dressed in a casual, yet sophisticated style. He looked annoyed and mumbled to himself as he paced past the shelves. Lerato walked over hesitantly.

“Excuse me,” she said, a little flustered. “Is there something I could help you with?”

When he turned towards her, Lerato was startled by his eyes. They were a colour she had never seen before – that of mountain skies after the

rain. She had lived almost all her life among people whose eyes were brown like her own. It felt strange looking into a pair of piercing blue ones.

“Well,” he made an exasperated gesture. “I really don’t know if there’s anything anyone can do for me. It seems I’m doomed.” He dramatically shoved the paper he was holding towards her.

“What is that?” Lerato asked.

“It’s a sketch of a design a client asked me to make for her. I hate it when they do this – I’m a designer for heaven’s sake, not a tailor – *look* at this thing.” He tapped the picture furiously, indicating a grotesque, over-sized bow adorning a dress with a nipped waist and a full gathered skirt. “Whatever fabric I choose, she’s going to look like a wedding cake, a wedding cake broadcasting to all and sundry that her gown was made by Marcus Starke!” He sighed and looked around desperately.

Lerato took the sketch from him and looked at it intently for a moment. Then her eyes lit up. “It really is awful,” she said. “But I think I may have a solution.”

His blue eyes widened almost imperceptibly, but he followed her to the shelf. She pulled out a roll of one of her favourite fabrics, a heavy brocaded silk in a deep burgundy. A metallic thread in the weave gave it added depth. Carrying the long roll of fabric, she walked over to the shelf where the silk chiffons were displayed. She pulled out a roll that matched the brocade. It was French chiffon, almost transparent and light as a cloud. Standing both rolls against the shelf, Lerato first unrolled a length of the brocade and then pulled out some of the chiffon and folded it into a rough bow shape that she draped over the heavier cloth.

“If you do it this way, the focus will all be on the skirt and the bow wouldn’t be such an eyesore,” she said.

“You are a genius, girl!” Marcus exclaimed, spontaneously hugging her across the shoulders. “You’ve just saved my reputation!” He hesitated slightly before he added: “But she’s not the kind of woman to wear burgundy – we’ll have to do the same in baby blue.”

“No surprise there,” Lerato said and they both laughed.

After this first interaction with Marcus, Lerato had the confidence to approach other customers as well. She was careful not to intrude on Gita’s turf, and would only help when Gita was busy or on leave.

“I asked Mister Omarjee to let you work with me in the section every day from now on,” Gita announced in passing one afternoon. “He agreed.”

Lerato couldn’t believe her ears. She gave a little skip towards Gita, grabbing both her hands. “Oh, Gita! Thank you, thank you! I won’t disappoint you, I promise.” She wished she could run to Aunty Prem and stick out her tongue to her.

The visits from Marcus were one of the highlights of Lerato’s new position. He made a point of seeking her out to discuss the designs and the clients he was buying fabric for. When he left, Lerato always felt in some little way enriched.

Working with Gita in their own section of the store, Lerato was sheltered from Mrs Omarjee’s screeching and bullying. The old matriarch had little knowledge of the special fabrics and seemed to feel out of her depth there. Lerato was always aware, however, of Subesh’s brooding presence. Often, it would happen that she looked up from where she was advising a

customer, to find his eyes on her. After what had happened that Friday afternoon he had avoided her and she took pains to do the same. She wanted to make it clear to him that she had no expectations of him. Yet, when she met his gaze over the shelves, it made her tingle all over.

It was winter and the lushness of the bridal section seemed all the more warm and opulent because of the cold, bleak cityscape outside. It was the dry season and leaves rustled along with the litter on the dusty sidewalks. At the old school building, the air was thick with the smoke of burning wood and old newspapers. Open fires were not allowed, but for many there was no other way to cook or keep warm through the freezing nights.

Lerato missed the crisp, clear air of winter on the mountainside. More and more, the mountain seemed a world away. It remained a world for which she longed and to which she returned often in her dreams. Yet her work at Metco made the harsh life she shared with the poorest of the poor in the inner city much easier to bear. Every so often, new treasures would arrive at the bridal and eveningwear section. She and Gita would unpack them with the glee and excitement of children opening Christmas presents. One morning, an ordinary looking box came from Italy, filled with gold and silver plated buckles decorated with crystals and fine enamelling. Lerato silently vowed that she would save to buy one of them for herself as soon as she could manage to put away some money. For now, however, she found pleasure enough in handling them and the other beautiful trinkets displayed in the glass-topped cases.

When a new roll of fabric came in, she would help Gita decide where and how best to display it. Usually they would place it in a prominent spot with matching or complementing colours or textures, one piece lavishly draped to suggest a skirt and the other wound around the roll horizontally where the bodice would be. Sometimes, Gita would go and fetch one of the pattern books that lined a long counter next to the haberdashery section and they would page through it to find patterns they could recommend to customers for specific fabrics in the section. They would sit on the elegant couch with the heavy tome between them, talking softly, their heads close together as if they were exchanging secrets.

It was a particularly cold and blustery morning when Marcus Starke again blew into the store, his blonde hair swept away from his brow and a bright pink silk cravat around his throat. Lerato saw him from far away and stood waiting for him under one of the wide arches to her section. Wherever Marcus went, drama followed naturally, she thought. He always looked as if he was contending with a crisis of some sort. Today, however, it seemed his only battle was with the weather.

“Lerato,” he fluttered to where she stood and lightly blew a kiss past her cheek. “Good God, the wind just about blew me out of my socks. No one should be out in this weather. This is a day for a good cognac and a storybook by the fireside. Unfortunately some of us have to work for a living.”

Lerato smiled at the characteristic exaggeration. “What is it that you have to get so urgently, then?”

“Well, I need a huge piece of heavy black satin for a full-flair skirt, and I need to speak to you about something.”

Lerato started walking mechanically towards the shelf where the satins were packed in glistening rainbow of thin, long rolls. Satin was no longer their top seller, but she still loved it for the fluid, slippery texture. She pictured the beautiful skirt that Marcus was making and wondered who the woman was he was making it for. She would have to be delicate and tall like Gita to pull it off.

“Hmm?” She looked up at him while sliding the black roll out and standing it on the carpeted floor next to her.

“Not here. Can we please go someplace and talk?”

Lerato took a step back. “What place?” She could not imagine that Marcus would have anything to say to her that they could not talk about there and then.

“Hell, you don’t have to look so shocked! What do I look like to you? A serial killer?” His right hand swirled next to his ear and came to rest under his chin. “I just thought we could talk over a quick coffee after work or something.”

Lerato felt far from reassured. She had always felt comfortable, even safe, in Marcus’s company. Now that comfort had been stripped away and she was left feeling exposed and uncertain. What would she talk to him about outside of the store? What on earth would he *want* to talk to her about?

“I don’t drink coffee,” was all she could manage.

“You can have peach brandy for all I care. I’ll pick you up out front after work – that’s at five, isn’t it? Seven metres of that, please.”

Lerato swallowed hard. She briskly walked over to the cutting table and tried to hide her discomfort. I should have said I was busy, she thought. But it was too late now. She tugged vigorously at the roll and the sensual fabric billowed over the table before it rippled out into a smooth black pool. She

measured it, cut it and wrote the docket without thinking. When she handed Marcus the slippery bundle, she was forced to look him in the eye.

He smiled and was already starting to strut away when he half turned to say “Five, then?” Lerato nodded but couldn’t quite bring herself to return his smile.

The rest of the day went by in a blur. She served her customers like a sleepwalker. Now and again she found herself standing at a shelf, staring into space. *A quick coffee after work.* In her mind, she repeated the words over and over again. She thought of staying away, saying she had forgotten or that something had come up. But in the end her curiosity got the better of her.

When the time finally came, she again balked. Her stomach was cramping and her throat hurt. She was still hovering undecidedly at Metco’s entrance when Marcus pulled up in a red vintage cabriolet.

“Pity I had to put the roof up,” he said as he hopped out to open the passenger door for Lerato. She wiped her palms on her skirt, took a big breath and got in.

“It’s a beautiful car,” she said, lifting a hand, but not quite touching the veneer of the dashboard, “like something from a fashion shoot.”

Marcus smiled. “Sorry I was a few minutes late,” he said as he pulled away. “I thought we could go to Café Colombo in Groenkloof.”

Lerato nodded, but she wasn’t really listening. One last time she said the words in her mind: *a quick coffee after work.*

They drove a short while through the afternoon traffic to a small suburban shopping centre with a coffee shop on one corner. Although she still felt incredibly self-conscious, she drank in every detail of her surroundings. It

was a cosy little place with mosaic on the walls and a water feature on the patio. The sun hung low in the west and painted golden streaks of light all over the scene. Muted music drifted from the inside and bore with it the smell of coffee.

Marcus swaggered in in front of her. The waiter at the door smiled and showed them to a table in the corner.

“Would you like something to drink?” The young man looked from Marcus to Lerato.

“The usual for me, thanks,” Marcus said. “What would you like, Lerato?”

“The same, please.” Even as she said it, Lerato realized her mistake. She had decided earlier that she would navigate her way through the outing by mimicking what Marcus did, ordering what he did and so on. Now she had made a complete fool of herself.

But even before she could retract, the waiter looked stony-faced at Marcus and said: “That will be two decaff cappuccinos with foam then – coming right up Mister Starke.”

The fact that they had covered up her blunder didn’t alleviate the stinging humiliation Lerato felt at having made her ignorance so obvious. Her whole body felt numbed by it.

But Marcus seemed completely nonplussed and stretched back a little in his chair, one arm hanging limp by his side and the other on the table. She noticed how thin and white his wrist was.

“What did you want to talk to me about?”

He arched his brows. “OK,” he said, sitting upright again and interlacing his fingers under his chin, “let’s get right to it then. I have a proposal for you. I thought it a rather nice little proposal and I hope you’ll consider it.” He reached for the leather clutch bag that he always carried with him and took out a blank white envelope. He slid it across the table to Lerato just as the waiter placed the coffees in front of them.

Lerato backed away a few centimetres. “What is it?”

He sighed. “It’s a job offer. I want you to come and work with me.”

“Aaa...” Lerato took the envelope and studied its contents while Marcus watched her over the rim of his cup. It was indeed a letter of appointment addressed merely to “Lerato” and printed on the letterhead of Marcus Starke Fine Designs. Without reading it, she looked up at him and said: “I’m very sorry, but I don’t know how to sew dresses.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Lerato!” He threw up his hands. “Read the letter. I don’t need a seamstress – I’ve got three of those. I want you to be my assistant.”

Lerato dropped her head and painstakingly read through the letter. The offer was for the position of assistant and the tasks listed were *“to offer support and assistance to the CEO with regard to the entire suite of creative and management aspects of the business”*.

“What does this mean?” she asked.

“It means you’ll be expected to help me with all aspects of my business.”

“And is this what you are offering to pay me?” Lerato asked, pointing to the amount indicated in the letter.

Marcus nodded.

It was more than five times what she earned at Metco. She sat a long while with one hand over her mouth and the other clasping her churning stomach.

“Well, what do you think?” Marcus rocked ever so slightly from side to side in his chair.

“I don’t understand . . .” Lerato took a sip of the hot coffee and tried to swallow the lump in her throat. It was very bitter and she felt the foam stick to her upper lip like a moustache. She covered her mouth with both hands while she tried to lick it off. Her scalp pricked with embarrassment. She slowly lifted her eyes to meet the strange blue ones across the table.

“Why me?”

“Let’s see,” he said, lisping slightly on the ‘s’. “I need a black face in the business and you’re much cheaper than a college graduate would be.”

“Oh.”

Marcus again flung his hands wide before pressing them palms down on the table in front of him. “Lerato! I’m *joking*, for Pete’s sake! Stop being so uptight. You’ll go twang if someone touches you, I swear!”

Lerato tried to summon a tight little smile.

“You’re bright and honest and you have a natural flair for design. I like you, and I won’t lie to you, it helps that you’re beautiful – in this business image matters.”

Lerato took another shaky sip of her coffee, this time taking care that she didn’t get any on her face. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, I was hoping for something like ‘When do I start?’, but if you need a bit of time to think it over, that’s OK. I’ll come by the store in the next day or two and you can tell me what you’ve decided. Now drink up and let’s get you home,” he added as she nodded gratefully.

“Don’t worry, I’ll just take a taxi.” She didn’t have the money to do that, but once he left she could walk back to her room. She couldn’t let Marcus see where she lived.

“Don’t be ridiculous – I’m taking you. Whereabouts do you stay?” He looked around for the waiter, gesturing for the bill with one arm above his head.

She swallowed. “I live very close to Metco.”

“All right then.” He settled the bill – half a day’s wages for a Metco sales assistant – grabbed his bag and keys and strode out in front of her after casting a last sweeping glance around the interior.

They drove through the darkening streets and Lerato sat clutching the envelope in her lap. Very soon, she knew, Marcus Starke would know exactly who and what she was.

When they approached the now deserted Metco parking lot, Marcus looked at her questioningly. She pointed ahead.

“It’s there, just across the street.” Her mouth was dry and her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. She couldn’t look at him.

A few of her neighbours were standing around a fire built in a paint tin on the pavement. They watched curiously as the old fashioned car pulled up at the kerb.

“OK, thank you.” Lerato shot a furtive glance at Marcus as she opened the door. His shoulders were hunched as he bent over to peer past her through the passenger window.

“This is where you live?”

“Yes, I have to go.” She was standing in the car door, trying to obstruct his view of the derelict school building.

“Oh. Well, I’ll see you in a day or so then?”

Lerato nodded brusquely and walked away. She listened for the sound of the engine starting up, but it was not before she had unlocked the door to her room and gone inside that she heard the car slowly pull away.

That night she could hardly sleep. She rehashed every detail of her outing with Marcus – the smell of the car and the deep rumble of the engine, the people sitting at the coffee shop in the last golden rays of the sun, the decorated walls inside and the strong, bitter taste of the coffee. She recited the whole of the dialogue in her head, sometimes even catching herself saying the words out loud. Over and over she felt like dying when she remembered ordering “the usual” without knowing what it was. And then again her heart lifted at the compliments Marcus had paid her. In the middle of the night she fumbled with the matches for the umpteenth time, lit the candle and read the letter again.

Drifting between sleep and consciousness, she allowed herself to indulge in the fantasy: She was working side by side with Marcus, liaising with clients and putting together marvellous designs.

But how could she ever hope to be who Marcus had in mind? Such a change of fortune had to be against the laws of nature.

CHAPTER 10

When Lerato returned to work the following morning, everything seemed changed. It was cold, but sunny. The previous day's wind had swept the city clean of smog and the air around her was crystal clear. Lerato felt as if she was seeing her surroundings for the very first time. The clean lines of the buildings reached towards the sky while the bare trees threw bizarre shadows against their sides. The wide black roads cutting away in every direction shimmered in the early light.

She was still not sure whether she could accept the offer from Marcus, but was ecstatic that he had made it.

Towards the end of the day the lack of sleep was starting to tell on her. She was serving a woman with a spiky red haircut and many layers of colourful clothing. The woman ordered a piece of French lace. Dyed in a combination of intermingling pastel hues, the fabric was a masterpiece of dreamy perfection.

As she put the roll onto the cutting table, Lerato stifled a little yawn. The woman shot her an irritated look. Lerato unrolled the lace in her characteristic way, letting it billow out high before settling smoothly on the table. She fed the fabric through her hands, measuring as she went along. The summery lace contrasted delightfully with the dark, wintry colours that now graced all the store's displays.

Lerato took pains to straighten the material before cutting it in swift, smooth strokes. Having written the docket, she placed it on top of the folded lace. Then she slid it across the table and smiled at the woman who had

stood silently by. The woman did not return Lerato's smile, nor did she reach out to take the fabric. Instead, she crossed her arms over her chest and glowered at her.

"I said I wanted seventy five centimetres."

"Seventy five?" Lerato asked aghast. "I thought you said seven comma five metres!"

"I said seventy five centimetres." The woman spat each word out separately with biting emphasis.

"But . . . why didn't you stop me?"

The woman's face contorted with fury. She slammed both hands on the table and shouted into Lerato's face: "Why . . . don't *you* . . . pay attention?! *Maybe* if you had less fun at night you would be able to keep your head on the job!"

The innuendo wasn't lost on Lerato. She saw from the corner of her eye that the few other customers in the section had turned to watch the altercation. She was still considering her response when Subesh materialized next to the woman like a genie. He stood close to the customer with his back half turned to Lerato.

"Good afternoon Ma'am. Is there a problem?" His soft tone deflected the woman's vehemence.

"This girl didn't listen when I told her how much she should cut. I asked for seventy five centimetres. She stood here yawning in my face," she complained in a high voice.

"Very sorry, Ma'am," Subesh apologised. "It won't happen again." He turned to Lerato. "Cut the customer seventy five centimetres," he ordered.

When she had done so he handed the woman her fabric. “Thank you for your patience, Ma’am,” he said before turning and walking away. Lerato followed him with her eyes. She looked for some indication that he knew the woman was being unreasonable: a wink, a smile as he turned away, but there was nothing.

She got home feeling completely exhausted. The letter from Marcus was still in the hiding place under her mattress. As she sat reading it again, she was torn between hope and anxiety. She wanted to simply step up and accept the offer, but could not bring herself to do so. Despite the fact that she was tired to the bone, it was very late before her restless mind allowed her to drift off to sleep.

As she finally succumbed, her last thoughts were not of Marcus. Although she tried to suppress thoughts of Subesh and that afternoon in April, she was painfully aware of his presence during the day. At night when she lay in her room, he plagued her dreams. Instead of subsiding over time, her desire for him seemed to grow more intense as each day passed. But, more than that, she wanted him to want her. His apparent indifference was torture.

She was standing in front of the hut in the twilight, feeling uneasy. The wind came up and blew swirls of fog around her. Growing more and more restless, she paced up and down, pausing now and again to peer through the mist into the darkening landscape.

Then, at last, there it was – no more than a shadow, a smudge against the mountainside. She immediately leapt forward, stumbling over the tufts of

grass and loose pebbles. Her gaze remained fixed to the spot where she last saw him. But the fog became dense and she could no longer discern his dark shape ahead of her. When she reached the spot where she expected to meet him, there was nothing. Bitter disappointment rose in her throat. But then she saw it further on to her left – a mere hint of movement against the horizon. Again she stumbled forward, hands stretched out in front of her, eyes straining against the milky darkness.

Again and again, he eluded her. She kept hurtling forward, clutching at the vague, shifting shadow. When she looked around again, it had grown completely dark and the fog around her was thick as curd. She stood forlorn on the slope, with no idea how to get home again. Now the darkness was so intense that she lost all sense of direction. She could not even be sure where the earth was, or the sky – the darkness stretched out to infinity on all sides. At the centre of it she was no more than a speck hopelessly trying to resist the emptiness. She woke with a jolt just as she, too, was about to dissolve into the void.

It was wrong. But the urge was so strong, that she could not resist it. It unlocked a cunningness in her. All her efforts were focused on pursuing Subesh. She would no longer be ignored.

Since stepping into the store that morning, she had been seeking him out. Never overtly approaching him, nor meeting his gaze, she would flaunt her body in his view. The way she brushed against the sharp edge of the cutting table, or bent down to help one of the girls lift a roll of fabric from the floor, was intended to entice him. She was alarmed by her own brazenness,

but when she felt his gaze burning on her, it was deeply gratifying. She knew then that he had joined in the dance she had initiated. The whole world seemed to contract around them as they slowly circled closer and closer to the inevitable end.

Just before lunch his mother called him away and Lerato went to the back to fetch her tea. She needed to catch her breath. The hot steam rose against her face as she held the mug in both hands. She thought guiltily of Seipathi, who would undoubtedly view her attempt at seducing Subesh as utterly shameful.

She had hoped to get a chance to discuss the offer from Marcus with her friend, but she only had an afternoon off in another two weeks' time. Lerato guessed that Seipathi would feel that Marcus's offer was too good to be true. It probably was. Anyway, it was quite possible that, having seen how she lived, Marcus had already decided against employing her.

When she walked back between the shelves to the bridal and eveningwear section, she saw Subesh standing at the arched entrance. He was silently scanning the store from where he stood. She knew that he was looking for her.

The hours passed slowly, but at last it was time for the doors to close. She didn't hope that Subesh would keep her behind. She knew he would. For the first time in her life, she held sway over a man. She had willed him to come to her and come he would.

She was helping Gita tidy up for the day when he approached them. "Lerato, go upstairs to the storeroom. I want you to sort out the new stock that

came from Jaycee so that it's ready for tomorrow." His voice was thick and his eyelids slightly lowered over his eyes.

"Yes, Subesh." Lerato felt her own breathing quicken as she stowed her scissors and docket book in the shelf under the cutting table. "See you tomorrow," she said to Gita, who was getting ready to leave, and made her way to the stairs to the storeroom on the first floor. She was only vaguely aware of the look of concern on the older woman's face.

The storeroom was a large warehouse that smelled of incense. Plastic covered rolls of fabric of every description were stacked on shelves that reached almost to the open trusses above. To one side, large cardboard boxes stood stacked on the bare concrete floor. Some of the boxes that had already been unpacked lay flattened in a pile on the floor. Lerato didn't like the room. It was not the kind of setting in which she imagined the final act of her seduction playing out.

She was standing in the middle of the ugly space looking at the stock piled all around when Subesh burst from the staircase. He was already loosening his shirt buttons with one hand. When he reached her, he scooped Lerato close to him with the other.

He rode her skirt up over her buttocks, cupped them in his hands and lifted her onto his thigh. Half carrying her, he walked over to the pile of flattened boxes. They went down on it in a tangle of limbs. He stripped off her clothes while she fumbled with his trousers. His hands were all over her, caressing, stroking, tweaking. She clutched at him, heaving herself up against him. He taunted her, bucking away from her while he held her down. He kneaded the soft flesh on the inside of her thighs with his thumbs in slow

circular movements. Lerato groaned and thrashed her head from side to side. Then he slid her away from him on the smooth cardboard and sank his face between her legs.

“No, don’t,” she said, trying to push herself away from him, but he held her down. The thrust of his tongue caused a sensation that was almost too intense to bear. Then he slowly traced the same slippery course with his finger. Lerato was crying now, one arm lifted over her eyes. When at last he entered her, she almost felt as if the climax would be immediate.

When it was over, she lay completely spent in the curve of his arm. “You’ll drive me insane,” he said hoarsely. “You have no idea how beautiful you are.” He lazily circled the dark smudge of her nipple with his forefinger. “I see how they look at you.”

“Who?” She had almost fallen asleep.

“The men. I see how they all look at you, even the old ones who totter in on their walking sticks behind their wives. I mean, for God’s sake, even that little white faggot who comes in from time to time tries to chat you up.”

Lerato pulled away and half sat up on one elbow, frowning. “No,” she said. “Marcus really likes me. He thinks I’m talented.”

Subesh looked at her with raised brows. “O, his name is Marcus, is it?” He snorted softly. “Come on, Lerato, you earn less than the woman who scrubs his toilet . . . there’s no way a big shot fashion designer like him will ‘really like’ someone like you. The world just doesn’t work that way.”

He had an almost kindly, patronizing smirk on his face, but Lerato felt as if he had hit her in the stomach with a fist. “Oh, I see, and a big shot business manager . . . I suppose it’s just as unlikely that you could ‘really like’

someone like me?” It was suddenly uncomfortable to be naked with him. She rolled away and scurried over the floor to collect her clothes.

Subesh did not rush to reassure her. Instead, he lay quietly watching her, his gaze now guarded.

Lerato felt shaky, furious and hurt. She dressed hastily and when she had finished, she could not keep herself from delivering a parting blow: “Marcus offered me a job – not to scrub his toilet, though, but as his assistant.”

“O, really?” Subesh’s tone was bitingly sarcastic.

“Yes, *really!*” she shouted over her shoulder and ran down the stairs.

It was already dark when she exited the building from the rear. At first, she sensed the darkness coiling around her like a living thing, squeezing the life out of her. But then she realized the blackness was inside of her, ripping her up from within. Clutching her stomach, she hurried across the street to the shelter of her room.

Having reached it, she shut the door behind her and sank down on the dusty floor. She sat huddled with her knees to her chest, trying to order her thoughts. Different emotions seethed inside of her. Her childish romantic dream of Subesh was lost. She had wanted to believe that he secretly loved her, but dared not show it. She tried to laugh, but all that escaped her lips was a croak. How could she have been so base as to lure him to her, to throw herself at him as she had done? And to tell him about the offer from Marcus had been a mistake; she was certain of it.

She sat for hours picking over the same painful thoughts. At last she got up stiffly to crawl under the thin blanket on her bed. Little sobs continued to disturb her breathing even after she had fallen asleep.

When she woke, short of breath, she realized that she had been clenching her neck and shoulder muscles, painfully pushing her face into the pillow. It was not quite morning yet and she lay for a while, waiting for the usual sounds that mark the beginning of the day to reach beyond the ache in her head. Then she got up stiffly and mechanically started getting ready for the day. Feeling weak and dizzy, she could not bring herself to eat anything. Instead, she made herself a mug of sweet tea, which she gulped down before leaving.

Metco was the last place she wanted to be, but what choice did she have? Once inside the colourful store, she felt as if her shame was written over her in bold red letters.

Gita sensed that something was amiss. She walked over to Lerato and touched her lightly on the arm. “Are you all right?” she asked.

“Yes.” Lerato couldn’t look her in the eye.

“Come,” she said after a moment’s thoughtful hesitation. “Some of the rolls of lace have become unravelled. I’ll bring you the little stool so you can sit behind the shelf and tidy them up.” Gita’s kindness made Lerato feel all the more vulnerable. She kept her head lowered all morning to avoid accidentally catching a glimpse of Subesh somewhere in the store.

The mere thought of seeing him again made her stomach turn. “I have to get through this,” she kept saying to herself over and over. “Just get through it.”

But then, just before lunch, Ravi approached her, carrying a brown envelope. He stood in front of her for a while without saying anything. Lerato again noticed his sallow complexion, the dead eyes and the thin, cynical line of his mouth. He looked slightly past her when he spoke, thrusting the envelope at her.

“Your wages for the rest of the month. You can leave right now.”

Lerato took the envelope without thinking. “I don’t understand.”

Ravi looked at her with extreme irritation. “Your employment is terminated. You no longer work here.”

As the meaning of his words slowly dawned on her, Lerato shifted her gaze from him to the rest of the store. Everything around her seemed strangely distorted. She saw the other girls whispering and pointing, their eyes wide, mouths open in surprise.

She also saw Mrs Omarjee watching from a little way off, so intent on what was happening that her beaked nose seemed even more pointed than usual.

Lerato slowly turned away and started walking to the back of the store to fetch her bag. She was only vaguely aware of Gita rushing up from behind her, trying to stop her. “Lerato, wait! Ravi, please, you can’t just . . .” But Ravi just looked at her blankly before turning away and Lerato brushed her off, shaking her head wordlessly.

She went into the tea room, took her bag from the locker and had just turned to leave when she almost bumped into Amelia, one of the other cutters, who had followed her. Amelia was a plump young coloured girl with

frizzy hair and spots on her face. Lerato wanted desperately to get out, but the girl obstructed the doorway.

“I . . . I’m so sorry, Lerato,” she stammered. “We all are. We all watched you move up to bridal and evening, how you spoke to the customers. We thought you were the one who made it, you know. We all sort of wanted to be like you.” Lerato could stand it no longer and held up a hand to silence her. A girl like Amelia would never have conceived of seducing the store manager, she would never have put her job in danger, Lerato thought. A girl like Amelia understood her place in the world. “No,” she said sharply. “You will never be like me.” She pushed past the girl without waiting to see the effect of her words and left the building.

Outside in the bleak winter sunshine she stood undecided. The previous evening her head was about to explode with a myriad thoughts all crowding in on her at once. Now she felt only a chilling emptiness. She had no idea where to go or what to do. It felt like a long while that she stood there in the Metco parking lot, invisible to the world. People came and went from the store as they did every day, but she was no longer a part of it.

At last she walked reluctantly back to her room. She closed the door behind her and went to sit on the edge of her bed. It was awkward to be there at this time of the day. She got up again and paced up and down. There was no way out. She thought of going to Seipathi, but how could she tell her the truth about what had happened? She could not deal with Seipathi’s disappointment on top of her own.

After a while, she took out the letter from Marcus. She did not read it again, but merely stared at the words on the page. It was beginning to seem

as if nothing would come of it: Marcus had said that he would be by in a day or two, but it was already the fourth day since their meeting at the coffee shop and still there was no sign of him. What if he had changed his mind? In a fit of frustration, she tore the letter into small pieces that fluttered to the ground around her feet. Then, suddenly suffocated by the four walls around her, she darted out of her room again. Two men sitting in front of the long row of rooms in a shrinking wedge of sunshine looked up curiously from their game of *marabaraba*.

In the back of her mind was the knowledge that she was less than a month away from being out on the street and that she should start looking for another job right away, but she could not bring herself to do so. Without consciously deciding to do so, she slowly sauntered across the street back to the Metco store. On both sides of the steps that led to the main entrance to the store, there was a low wall built between the large concrete columns that flanked the entrance. She walked over and sat down on the one on the left where the security guards at the entrance could not see her. She sat without moving, not meeting the gaze of the customers passing by. But whenever a car entered the large parking lot, she would look up involuntarily, hoping against hope that it would be Marcus's cabriolet.

But Marcus didn't come and when the shadows lengthened she stood up stiffly and walked back to her room. She ate two slices of stale bread and then sat for some time on her bed, thinking of nothing in particular and staring blankly into space. She wanted to get beyond the emptiness, to think of something to do, somewhere to go, but it was like trying to speak under water. It was not yet dark when she crawled under the blanket.

CHAPTER 11

When Marcus finally came, she was no longer looking out for his car. For three days, she had been sitting on the wall in front of Metco.

She registered him pulling into a parking space to her left, but felt none of the relief or joy she had thought she would.

Marcus strode past her, seemingly without realising it. It confirmed the conclusion she had come to. It was quite apparent that he had regretted the offer as soon as he had made it. When he was past her, she felt that it was safe to look up and her gaze followed him in spite of herself. At that very moment, Marcus stopped and half turned towards her.

She would have looked away again, but there was something about Marcus's appearance that startled her. He looked gaunt. Instead of the usual plumpness, his face seemed drawn. Still, there was a flicker in his eyes when he noticed Lerato and walked over to her with a smile.

"Lerato! I didn't see you. Why didn't you say something?" He came to a standstill in front of her. It was his turn now to look startled. She could see him briefly looking her up and down, his expression slightly quizzical.

"I'm sorry it took me so long. There was something I had to sort out. I hope you didn't think . . ." He sat down next to her on the wall. In his one hand he held his clutch bag and car keys. The other he placed over Lerato's hand that was clenched in a fist by her side. The gesture cut through the numbness she had been feeling.

For three days, she hadn't spoken to anyone. She tried to respond to Marcus, but she couldn't manage more than a hoarse croak. "I didn't."

“Well, have you thought about it? I still desperately want you to come.”

He was there right next to her. His hand felt soft and podgy on hers and the floral scent of his aftershave wafted around them. She could see his lips move and hear the words, spoken in the over-articulated manner she had come to associate with him. She had given up on him, but now he was there.

“Yes.” She forced the word past her parched throat.

“Very well, then,” Marcus said and gave her hand a little squeeze. “Let’s go get your things.” As he spoke, he stood up briskly. Lerato had started to get up as well, but now she suddenly fell back and looked up at him in surprise. “My things?”

“Yes, my dear. It’ll never do for you to remain living in this . . .” he waved at the old school building across the street, “. . . this place.” He saw her flinch and hastily added: “I would want my assistant close by at all times and, heaven knows, there’s room enough in the house – you’re coming to live with me.”

Having not eaten for three days, Lerato felt dangerously close to keeling over.

“I can’t . . . It won’t . . .” She took a deep breath. “I don’t know . . .”

“If it’s a good idea?” Marcus stood over her with pursed lips, one fist on his hip. “Well, it is. You said you didn’t have any family here and I need you to be where you can make the biggest contribution to the business. Let’s not make a big deal out of it, shall we?”

Lerato could not think of a way to explain to him why she was reluctant to go.

But Marcus stood before her, impatient for her to come with him. She knew she could not afford to send him away again. Her options had become ridiculously limited.

“OK. I’ll go get my things.” She got up, stiff from having sat on the cold wall and now also rigid with a new kind of tension.

“I’ll come help you.” Marcus straightened up and was ready to walk with her across the street.

“No!” she snapped sharper than she had intended to. “Wait here. I won’t be long.”

Back in her room, she packed like a fugitive, throwing her scant belongings in a canvas shopping bag Seipathi had given her. She was shaking all the while, her heart beating furiously in her throat. A few minutes later she was back at the car and Marcus opened the passenger door for her with a grand gesture. She forced her shaking knees to perform a playful curtsy.

The house was not at all what she had expected. She had thought it would be large and white with gables and roses in the garden. The place was large, but that was all it had in common with the picture in Lerato’s mind. As they turned into the driveway, she lowered her head so that she could get a better view of the structure that was all right angles of dark face brick, wood and glass. There were no roses in the garden. Ground covers and tree ferns were set around a sculptural water feature. Rectangular stepping stones led to the front entrance – a huge wooden double door with carved detail and embellished with heavy wrought iron hinges and clasps.

For a moment after Marcus had switched off the car, Lerato sat transfixed, trying to take in the reality of the strange-looking house that seemed to grow out of the ridge it was built on. But when Marcus walked around to her side to open the door for her, she scrambled out hastily, awkwardly lugging the large shopping bag behind her.

The inside of the house was also different from how she had imagined it. She expected to see ornate furniture and windows with tassled pelmets, drapes and frills of the kind on display in the Metco curtaining division. But the strong lines of the exterior extended into the large open plan space they now entered. The floor was stained screed, softened only by a few large vegetable-dyed Persian carpets. The furniture was classic and sparse and the walls were mostly of the same face brick as the outside of the house. One wall, however, was entirely covered from floor to ceiling by a heavy wooden bookshelf.

Lerato stood in the large open space. She had never seen nor imagined anything like it. Something about the stark masculinity of the room resonated with her. As her gaze travelled up the huge bookshelf, she felt a little stirring of excitement. She was drawn towards the tall glass sliding doors that opened onto a cantilevered concrete deck in front of them.

“Ah.” She gasped as she stepped outside. From the deck the view seemed to stretch into infinity. The entire city lay before her in the hazy winter sunshine. Letting the canvas bag drop onto the slate floor, she lifted her chin slightly and turned from side to side to take in the full splendour of the view. She felt like an eagle perched on a cliff. It was a feeling she had yearned for since she had been taken away from the mountains.

“What do you think?” Marcus had stepped up beside her and seemed to be looking at the view as if he was trying to imagine seeing it for the first time. She was again vaguely aware that he looked more pensive than usual. “It’s . . . it’s just right,” was all she could manage, suddenly feeling inexplicably close to tears again.

He looked a little puzzled, but smiled and then spoke over his shoulder as he turned to enter the lounge again. “I’d like you to meet the girls before we have lunch. Oh, Martha, there you are . . .”

As Lerato walked in behind Marcus, she saw a tall woman wearing a crisp white apron and matching headscarf emerging from the staircase leading to the lower level.

“Lerato, come and meet my housekeeper, Martha. Martha, this is my new assistant, Lerato.” Lerato greeted the older woman in the traditional way with a soft handshake and a shallow curtsy. She kept her eyes cast down as a sign of respect. Martha pulled her shoulders back ever so slightly when they touched.

Marcus moved two steps down and then addressed the housekeeper again. “I’m taking Lerato down to the factory to meet the girls. We’ll have lunch on the deck when we’re finished – just fix us something light. Please put Lerato’s things in her room in the meantime.” He took the bag from Lerato’s hands and deposited it into Martha’s.

The blood rushed to Lerato’s face as the sum total of her earthly belongings was entrusted to the haughty housekeeper. She could still not bring herself to meet the woman’s gaze and kept her head down as she followed Marcus down the stairs.

Marcus led her downstairs to a room with large French doors looking out onto a landscaped garden that seemed lush and green despite the fact that it was winter. There was a thick russet carpet on the floor and a rail with evening dresses to one side. A carved wooden screen separated the space from the adjacent room where Lerato could hear the hum of machinery and women chatting.

Marcus lifted his hands and turned around. “This is our fitting room. Most of our clients have about three fittings before the garment is completed. On their first appointment we usually take their measurements and discuss the type of garment they need. I advise them on cut, fabric and finishing.” As he spoke, he moved over to the tightly packed clothes rail and leafed through the dresses.

“Sometimes I show them examples of garments I’ve designed for other clients, just to give them an indication of what can be done. We never make the same dress twice.” He turned away from the dresses and looked at Lerato with pursed lips and one eyebrow acerbically raised. “That is, of course, if they don’t come armed with their very own ‘Sew ‘n Simple’ ready made pattern, which, as you know, happens from time to time.” Marcus’s delicate nostrils flared as if he smelled a very bad odour.

Lerato smiled when she remembered that it was such a client that was responsible for her first encounter with Marcus at Metco.

A friendly face topped with a mop of short braids popped out from behind the wooden screen before the unhappiness that shrouded thoughts of Metco could take a hold of her again.

“Josie! How many times do I have to tell you . . . ?”

Before he could finish, the girl came out from behind the screen with her hands stretched out before her in an apologetic gesture. She wore a bright yellow T-shirt and jeans stretched tight over ample buttocks. The girl exuded a happy energy that made Lerato smile.

“I know, I know. Sorry, Marcus, but we have a crisis and it didn’t sound like you were with a client.” As she spoke, she shifted her gaze to Lerato, whom she studied with open curiosity. Lerato realized that, apart from a radio playing softly in the background, the noise from the other room had died down completely.

Marcus placed one hand on his hip and with the other he wagged a finger at the girl. “Or perhaps your curiosity got the better of you . . . Get back to work. I will come and introduce Lerato to all of you in a minute.”

Josie’s eyes widened and she made a comical semi-circular movement with her full lips as if she was chewing on Marcus’s words. “OK.” She shrugged and disappeared the way she had come.

Marcus took Lerato by the elbow and steered her aside into the furthest corner of the room. He lowered his voice so that he would not be heard behind the screen. “The girls in the factory are dying to meet you. I made the mistake of mentioning that I would be appointing an assistant even before you accepted the offer.” He cocked his head guiltily to one side.

“And they’ve been driving me crazy with questions all morning.” He glanced quickly in the direction of the screen before continuing. “If I can give you some advice, though: don’t be too familiar with them. As their supervisor, you will have to keep your distance. Otherwise you will find it impossible to be

firm when it is called for and, believe me, you will have to be firm at times, particularly in the next couple of weeks.”

Lerato had been making a list in her head. *Fitting room. Three fittings. Only one of each dress.* And lastly: *Josie.* But his last words threw her thoughts into disarray. She looked up into the blue eyes, half hoping that he was pulling her leg. But his expression was earnest.

“But, Marcus, I can’t . . . I can’t *supervise* people!” She tried to speak softly as she felt the sweat prick in her palms and her heartbeat quicken.

He looked at her with slightly narrowed eyes as if he was calculating a risk. “Listen, Lerato . . . they’re expecting me to introduce you to them today. Let’s just go in there and get it over with. You don’t have to say a word . . . just smile and nod and we can talk about everything afterwards.” He took her hand before she could turn and flee back up the stairs and marched her over to the screen.

The other side looked nothing like a factory, which, to Lerato’s mind, would have been grey and sterile like the Metco sewing room. It was cosy and colourful. Sewing machines stood on long wooden tables among bright bundles of fabric. There were rails with garments in various stages of completion and others hung with cardboard pattern pieces. A laundry basket full of off-cuts stood at the end of each table. This room, too, had French doors opening onto the garden on one side.

There were a couple of women in the room and, to Lerato’s surprise, one old man. All of them looked up expectantly from their work when Marcus entered with Lerato. Those who were standing around crowded a little closer.

Although everyone was obviously paying close attention, Marcus clapped his hands twice.

“Hello everyone,” he said, “there is someone I would like you to meet.” He pushed Lerato gently in front of him and rested one hand on her shoulder. “This is Lerato, my new assistant. Lerato still has a lot to do this afternoon, but she wanted to pop in and meet all of you before the weekend.”

Lerato felt short of breath as the attention of everyone in the room was focussed on her. But their interest seemed benign and she managed to smile and nod calmly.

The old man stood closest to them and Marcus turned to him first. He was short and thin, with a slightly humped back that forced him to tilt his head back to look Marcus in the eye. His clothes seemed too big for him and his awkward posture was amplified by the fact that his trousers were pulled up almost to his chest, where they were secured by tartan suspenders. These were matched by a cap from under which he peered at Lerato through thick-lensed glasses.

“This is Wallace, our pattern-maker,” Marcus said. Lerato held out her hand and Wallace immediately grabbed it, holding on to her elbow with the other hand. “Ah, let me see, yes, yes,” he said and nodded furiously as he blinked at Lerato. He spoke with a characteristic accent. “And, what did you say your name was, er, um? Priscilla?”

“It’s Lerato,” Marcus cut in.

“Ah, Lerato, yes, yes, well, erm, Lerato, welcome, welcome.”

Lerato nodded a thank you as Marcus steered her past Wallace to a very large woman sitting at one of the sewing machines. Her hair was combed

back into a tiny ponytail at the back of her head so tightly that her eyebrows seemed perpetually raised. Large hooped earrings dangled from her ears. She rolled back in her chair and swung her hand over the machine to shake Lerato's hand. Lerato noticed how the hand seemed disproportionately small in relation to the woman's body.

"Hello, Lerato, I'm Queen."

"Queen, Josie and Leola are our three seamstresses," said Marcus, indicating the girl Lerato had seen earlier and a plain-looking young girl wearing a brown turtle neck who sat at a sewing machine behind Queen. Lerato smiled and stepped forward to also shake hands with the other two seamstresses. "And Mitta, here," he gestured to the woman who was approaching from where she had been pressing a garment at the back of the room, "is our cutter, but she also helps out with pressing and finishing if we are very busy, like we are now."

"Pleased to meet you, Lerato." Mitta had an open, friendly face and intelligent eyes. Lerato liked her.

"Where are Johanna and Mapule?" Marcus asked Mitta, looking around in the room. Mitta cocked her head in the direction of the French doors.

Lerato followed Marcus outside, where two women sat in the sun on a large sheet with their backs against the wall and their legs stretched out in front of them. Both were short and stocky and had round, good-natured faces. They were sewing tiny pearls onto different ends of the same wedding dress with impossibly thin needles. When they saw Marcus, the two set aside the dress and rose almost in unison. It was clear that they were related.

“Hello Johanna, Mapule – I’d like to introduce you to my new assistant, Lerato. Johanna and Mapule are responsible for all hand finishing of garments: beading, embroidery and appliqué,” he explained as Lerato greeted the women. They both beamed up at Lerato. They may as well have been paid a personal visit by the queen.

Lerato smiled back at the women, but then her gaze wandered slightly over Mapule’s shoulder and the smile wavered. She took a step back and made a strange throaty noise that caused Marcus and the two women to look at her in surprise.

The bulldog was almost upon them and Lerato felt faint when Marcus lunged forward and caught the animal in an exuberant embrace. “Zeus! Come baby boy! There’s a boy, there’s a beauty-boy!” He sank onto his knees on the lawn and pressed his face into the folds of the dog’s neck. He wrestled good-naturedly with the dog for a minute or so and then laughed up at Lerato. “And this,” he chuckled out of breath, “is Zeus. Now you’ve really met everyone.”

Lerato was stunned, and doubly so. Not only had the dog not devoured her, but apparently no-one had noticed that, a moment ago, she had been terrified almost to death. She could still not trust herself to speak, so she did as Marcus had advised her earlier: she smiled and nodded.

Marcus straightened up and dusted off his trousers. “Well, that’s it then. Let’s go grab a bite to eat, shall we?” He ushered Lerato back into the factory, where he briefly attended to the “crisis” Josie had mentioned earlier – repeated unsuccessful attempts to gather a very full bright orange satin skirt to fit a brocade bodice. “Sew three rows of stitches instead of two,” Marcus

advised. “And set the stitch length to slightly longer still.” He promised to look in on them again before the end of the day and Lerato lifted one hand in greeting before following him back up the stairs.

Marcus stopped on the landing on the first floor and turned into a short corridor with a window at the end. He opened a door on the left and showed Lerato into a large bedroom decorated in blue and white. Her canvas shopping bag stood on the double bed in the centre of the room.

“This is your room. If you want to freshen up first, you can join me on the deck for lunch in a few minutes’ time.”

“Thank you.” Lerato gratefully closed the door when Marcus turned to leave.

It was a strange room that seemed very full of things. On the double bed that stood in the centre of it, was a variety of cushions in different shapes and sizes, some had flowers on them, others stripes or dots, all in shades of blue like the rest of the room.

The round bedside tables were covered in frills and the lamps on them sported ruched shades decorated with blue velvet ribbon. There was a smell in the air that made her nose tickle.

Upon closer inspection, Lerato discovered that the room opened onto a little balcony and had a bathroom en suite.

She walked over to the mirror in the corner and studied her reflection. Seeing herself for the first time in a while, she realised that she was slumping and immediately straightened her shoulders, which seemed slightly bonier than before. The expression on the face that looked back at her was so apprehensive that Lerato had to smile in spite of herself.

“Oh, come on,” she chided softly. “You’ve survived worse than this.”

When she remembered that Marcus was waiting for her, she quickly got up and rinsed her face in the bathroom and changed her underwear, which was damp from her encounter with Zeus the bulldog. Somehow even that seemed a little funny now.

When she came out, Marcus was sitting at the slatted table on the deck looking out to the horizon. She had the strange impression that there was a shadow over him. But when he heard her behind him, he got up promptly and pulled out a chair for her.

“Come sit, darling. Martha fixed us some sandwiches and tea. Hope it’s OK, I didn’t feel up to a big lunch. Is the room to your liking?”

Lerato sat down with her hands clenched tightly in her lap and nodded. “The room is fine, thanks, but . . . but are you really sure I can stay here?”

He sighed and brought his chin to rest on his hand. “Sweetie, I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t. And as I’ve explained to you earlier, it’s in my own interest to have you living on the premises. Now pour us some tea, would you?”

Lerato half rose out of her seat to pour the steaming golden liquid from the silver teapot into two delicate white cups. Her hands shook slightly as she did so. Marcus selected a few sandwiches from the platter in the centre of the table and then held it out for Lerato to do the same. The sandwiches were fresh and fluffy and stuffed fat with filling. Lerato’s mouth watered from looking at them. They tasted every bit as scrumptious as they looked. It was a relief to feel hungry again after having been dead inside for the best part of a week.

While they were talking, she twice accepted Marcus's invitation to have some more.

After making small talk for a while, Marcus leaned back in his chair and dabbed at his mouth with the white cloth serviette. Then he reached for the leather-bound diary that was lying next to him.

"I've made a list of everything we have to attend to right away in order for you to take your rightful place here. You'll have to hit the ground running, darling, as you never have before – particularly now that we're getting ready for Svenska."

"Svenska?" Lerato said, pulling a face at the strange word.

"Svenska-Afrika," Marcus explained. "It's a huge fashion event hosted by the Swedish Fashion Council and Absolut. Only a few South African fashion designers, of whom I am lucky enough to be one, have been invited to participate." He tapped with his index finger on his diary. "The show opens in six weeks' time," he added. "So we'll have to work almost day and night to be ready in time.

"But while we are working on the show, we have to teach you a few other skills. You'll have to learn to sew – not because you will be doing any sewing, but because you will have to oversee all the sewing – and you'll have to learn to drive."

"Marcus, please," Lerato pleaded, close to panic, "you're expecting too much. I can't do all this . . ."

Marcus rolled his eyes heavenward and sighed through pursed lips. "Of course you can't, honey. That's why we'll get people to teach you."

CHAPTER 12

The sewing lessons started first. At five that same afternoon, Marcus drove Lerato to Norma Jankovich's mansion in Waterkloof. Roses bloomed in the garden and, although there were no gables, the house boasted bay windows and balconies with trellis railings and twisted pillars.

Although she was clearly past her prime, the woman who greeted them at the door was the picture of elegance. She wore well-cut chocolate brown slacks and a soft caramel jersey that showed a trim figure. Her hair was dyed a very light blonde and was meticulously styled. As she hugged Marcus and blew air kisses past his ears, Lerato noticed her smiling eyes, which were accentuated by curled lashes. A heavy gold chain and mabé pearl earrings completed the picture.

"Ah, and this is your young protégé?" Norma enquired in a heavy accent as she turned to Lerato and took her hand. "Delighted to make your acquaintance."

Marcus left, promising to come and pick her up later and Lerato followed the woman into a light carpeted room with a large table as centrepiece. There were three sewing machines on the table, as well as pattern books, rulers and tape measures, chalk, scissors and a caddy with spools of thread in different colours. A large long-haired cat lay sleeping in front of an electric heater.

Norma sat down on one of two large upholstered chairs and patted the other.

Lerato felt the lively eyes scanning her briefly from top to toe. Then Norma's smart coral lips curved in a smile. "Well now, if you're as clever as you are beautiful, you'll be an expert in no time at all. You can drive?"

Lerato could not see the relevance of the question, and mumbled a startled "Er, no."

"Hmm. Pity." Norma's manicured nails tapped on the armrest of her chair. "If one can drive straight and around corners, operating the sewing machine is a cinch. But Marcus told me that we would have to start from scratch, so that's what we'll do."

"Oh, I have worked with a sewing machine before," Lerato said quickly. She didn't add that she had never gone around corners – the Metco curtains and cushions had all been about sewing straight.

Norma Jankovich was a master – not only of dressmaking, but of teaching as well. She darted around the room like a dancer, now draping fabric over a dress-maker's doll, then bowing low over the table to draw fluid strokes on large sheets of paper.

"The essence of dress-making," she announced, while circling Lerato's waist and twirling her around, "is to make the flat fabric fit to the round body. How do we do this?" Lerato had given up trying to answer Norma's questions. She was not expected to. Norma promptly grabbed a roll of fabric and twirled it around the doll's hips.

"We can gather the fabric," she stated, deftly pinching the fabric closer to the doll's waist to illustrate her point. "Or," she rolled her "r" so that it sounded as if she was saying "ora", "we can pleat it." Again the nimble fingers gathered the excess around the doll's waist in neat pleats. "These days, not

many designers use pleats for shape. This is a great pity – pleats add drama. To use the pleats, you need much fabric, you have to be little bit extravagant.”

She pulled out a folder and showed Lerato examples of knife pleats, box pleats, rolled pleats, stacked pleats and cartridge pleats.

“But how do we shape the fabric to the figure if we don’t want to be so dramatic?” Norma took Lerato’s hand and marched her over to the table. “Two ways. First one is the dart.” She pulled a pattern piece closer over the table top on which Lerato read “Skirt Front” and pinned together two diagonal lines at the edge. She held the pattern piece against Lerato’s waist to show how the dart works. “Darts are elegant, very fifties. We also use them to shape over the bust, like this.” She again pulled one of the pattern books closer and showed Lerato a classic short dress with darts under the arms on both sides. “Or in the back, then they go both ways,” she added and showed Lerato the back detail of another dress.

“The last way to shape the fabric is by shaping the pattern pieces,” Norma said and pulled closer a large sheet of graph paper. “This is where it gets tricky.”

Lerato stood close to Norma as she explained how a sleeve was cut to follow the curves under the arm and over the shoulder.

When Marcus came to fetch her again almost two hours later, it was dark and Lerato had started to grasp the basic principles of dress making. It had been an overwhelming afternoon, which included a first terrifying encounter with Norma’s state-of-the-art sewing machine, which had seemed to have a life of its own and had gobbled the fabric out of her hands. She listened as Marcus arranged with Norma to give her lessons twice a week.

The following Wednesday, Norma informed her, would be spent getting more practice with the sewing machine and learning about fasteners.

In the car, Lerato sat quietly all the way back to Marcus's house. He kept quiet too, but she saw him glance sideways at her a couple of times.

When they arrived, the house seemed quiet. Water gurgled gently over the stones in the front garden and soft light glimmered through the windows. Marcus took two shopping bags from the boot, unlocked the front door and let Lerato in.

"You must be tired after all this excitement," he said. "I bought a lasagne that I can warm up and you can help me put together a salad if you want."

Lerato had no idea what a lasagne was, and she felt a bit like a little girl who had been dropped off with rich relatives she didn't know.

"OK."

The kitchen was on the top storey and separated from the main living space only by a granite-topped counter. Lerato slowly trailed her fingers along the smooth, black surface.

Marcus dove into one of the kitchen cupboards and emerged with a glass bowl. He took a couple of packets out of the shopping bags, which he shoved towards Lerato along with the bowl. "Let's do a rustic one, just rinse them and throw them all together. And here's some feta to top it off with." He plonked the tub of cheese down in front of her as well. Lerato tried to look as if she was used to throwing together salad leaves, baby corn, rosa tomatoes, red onion rings and feta cheese for a quick salad, while Marcus took the

packaging off what she assumed to be the lasagne and stuck it in the microwave.

He set the table for them on the counter, as it was too chilly to eat out on the deck. When everything was ready, he took out two glasses from one of the top cupboards.

“Glass of wine?” Lerato shook her head vehemently. Alcohol reminded her of Mabena’s and Caiphus and of her first day in the city with Kenny at the Flamingo Club.

“Juice?” This time she accepted and they sat down to eat. When they had both helped themselves to slabs of the juicy lasagne and some of Lerato’s salad, Marcus folded his hands in his lap and looked at her with a puzzled expression.

“Is everything OK? You’ve hardly said a word all day. I’m not sure you’re happy to be here.” He sighed and slid his hand closer to her across the counter top. “Lerato, I thought you’d be thrilled. I thought this would be a dream come true for you?”

Lerato struggled for a second to get her voice under control. “I want it to be true, Marcus. It’s just that . . . it’s all new to me. It’s a different world.” She swallowed to get rid of the lump in her throat. “And I don’t know if I can do this. I’m scared that you’re expecting too much of me.” In spite of her efforts, Lerato felt the tears sting in her eyes.

Marcus didn’t respond straight away. He pulled his chair up next to her and sat for a while quietly stroking her back. “Tell me,” he said slowly, “what did you think of your lesson with Norma?”

Lerato sniffed noisily and wiped her nose on the back of her hand. “The lesson was wonderful,” she said, keeping her eyes fixed on the salad bowl. “I keep seeing pictures in my head of how to put together what Norma teaches me about dressmaking with what Gita taught me about fabrics. I loved the lesson, Marcus,” she now turned her head so that she could look him in the eye, “but I still can’t supervise people and I can’t drive and I don’t know how to make salad.” A sob erupted in the middle of “salad”.

Marcus took her by the shoulders and turned her around so that she could face him. “Listen, darling, people can be taught sewing and driving and any other skill imaginable. But no-one can be taught to have a passion for fashion.” He giggled at the phrase and Lerato made a feeble attempt to laugh with him. “Those pictures you see in your mind,” he added, serious again, “that’s your special gift, and that, more than anything, is why I need you for my business.”

He rocked forward slightly in his chair and took both her hands in his. “But you’ve got to engage with this opportunity. Make it your own. I want you to grow, to shine. I want to see Lerato, OK?”

She took a deep breath and bobbed her head up and down several times. “OK.”

“And now,” he said with a wry smile as he squeezed and then let go of her hands. “May I interest you in some cold lasagne?” While they ate, Marcus told Lerato his plans for the weekend. But she hardly heard a word he said. It had been a long day. She carefully tested the lasagne and found that it was not her favourite dish. The salad, however, was lovely.

The streak of sunlight that shone into the hut seemed inordinately bright for that time of the morning. When she got up from where she was lying under her blanket and went outside, she had to shield her eyes against the light. It shone on the hills around and below her and reflected dazzling hues of green, yellow and red. The slopes glowed and shimmered, etched against the cobalt sky and punctuated by the sparkling lines of rivulets here and there. Lerato looked about her in wonderment. She had never seen the mountains look this way.

She looked back towards the hut, wanting to call Kgomotso and her mother to come and look also, but there was no one around. She stepped forward to enter the wonderland before her. Everything was strangely quiet. Not a cricket stirred in the grass, no cattle moved or lowed against the far slopes, not a single raptor circled overhead.

Perplexed, she lifted a hand to trace the empty sky. But then she yanked it back immediately as if bitten by a snake. The liquid blue satin was rumpled where she had touched it and pulled away from the top of the furthest hills to expose the black nothingness behind it. Trying to fathom what was going on, she felt compelled to reach out again to a hilltop that seemed far off in the distance. She gasped as the wedge of lime green velvet moved under her fingers.

As her eyes adjusted to the realisation that she was looking at a picture from close by, she reached over the hills in front of her. Scraps of yellow silk and russet linen and the lengths of silvery trim, which she had thought to be streams, gave way to her touch. Where the flimsy image had been disturbed, more black cracks emerged. She saw now that she was standing on a

precipice, ready to be sucked in by the void beyond. She tried to turn back to the hut, but she had already lost her footing and was falling forward. When she grabbed at what was left of the picture, the soft pieces of fabric offered no resistance and simply twirled around her like autumn leaves as she tumbled slowly and inevitably into the abyss.

CHAPTER 13

She woke short of breath and with her heart hammering against her ribs just as the pale light of dawn illuminated the room. It took a few seconds to come out of the nightmare. She padded across the carpet towards the window and pulled the heavy drapes aside. The door to the little balcony squeaked as it opened. Her gaze travelled over the frosty garden and the hazy treetops beyond to where she could vaguely make out the tall buildings of the inner city. Just behind them lay Marabastad. It was a while before her heartbeat steadied and her breathing found its natural rhythm again. Then she turned and stood in the doorway looking at her room, her arms folded over her chest.

“It’s real,” she muttered defiantly to herself as she gathered her things to go and wash up and get dressed for the day. “It’s real . . . it’s all real.”

When she got to the kitchen, Marcus was already making coffee. He wore a short navy robe over striped flannel pyjamas, with padded blue slip-on slippers. Lerato greeted him and smiled a little broader than she had meant to, because he looked so comical.

“Oh, Lerato, morning,” he said and stifled a half-yawn. “Are you always up this early on a Saturday? I thought I’d be able to sneak a cup of coffee and get dressed before you came up. Like some?” he added while gesturing to the coffee pot.

They sat drinking their coffee in the sun on the deck. Marcus managed to fill Lerato in on their agenda for the day in-between scanning the headlines of the weekend paper.

As it turned out, the most memorable part of Lerato's first full day with Marcus was not on Marcus's agenda at all.

It was late afternoon and Lerato was still trying to catch her breath after a marathon shopping expedition. Marcus had insisted on buying her clothes. "Of course, in time we should fit you out in my designs, but there's no way we can do that now before the show," he had said. The small boutique he had taken her to after lunch was in a quaint cluster of shops tucked away in the heart of the leafy suburb of Waterkloof. Lerato's vehement remonstrations notwithstanding, they had left about an hour and a half later with three bags bulging with clothes and four pairs of shoes that Marcus ruefully remarked "should do for a start".

She had felt a little frayed at the edges when they had returned home with their loot. Marcus had unlocked the door and had stepped aside for her to enter.

"Marcus, I don't know how to . . . You shouldn't have spent so much on me." The mixture of gratitude and misgiving she was feeling had made a mess of her attempt at thanking him. Although she appreciated his generosity, it made her stomach turn to think that one of those pairs of shoes cost more than everything she had owned at any given time in her life.

He had worn that cynical, mildly irritated look that she had come to associate with him and which in a strange way made her feel secure in his presence.

"Lerato, really. I didn't spend anything on you. I spent it on the image of the business. And in this business, as I have told you, image is everything."

She spent a while in her room unpacking her new clothes. Although all of it was everyday wear, nothing more than smart casual, the designs were beautiful and the fabrics expensive. She trailed her fingers over the buttons and perfectly finished collars and hems. The used chain store clothes that Seipathi had given her and which Lerato had held so dear, looked like rags next to these pieces. Yet, she thought with a little pang, Seipathi's gift had been a pure act of kindness to her personally, not part of a business strategy.

She had just finished unpacking everything and was walking back to where Marcus sat reading in the large living room when the doorbell rang. As Martha did not work on a Saturday, Marcus got up to get the door himself. Lerato hovered behind him uncertainly, not sure whether she should stick around or go back to her room. She soon regretted her choice.

"Mother." There was something about the way in which Marcus said the word that indicated to Lerato that he was not altogether thrilled by the unannounced visit. The woman who walked into the room ahead of Marcus was large and blonde. She wore bulky jewellery and very red lipstick that feathered slightly into the little lines around her mouth. When she saw Lerato, her eyes widened slightly. They were the same blue as Marcus's eyes.

"This is my new assistant, Lerato," Marcus said from behind his mother. "Lerato, meet my mother, Mercia."

"Assistant?" Mercia asked in a loud voice as she focused on Lerato. "I didn't know anything about you hiring an assistant."

As Lerato shook the woman's hand, she thought Mercia Starke had an unpleasant look about her. It reminded her of Mrs Omarjee of Metco.

“No, I don’t think I’ve mentioned it to you.” Lerato was surprised at how curtly Marcus spoke to his mother. “Let’s go through to the kitchen. I’ll make us some tea.”

“Oh, I’m sure you can manage that on your own, Marcus. Lerato and I will sit here and have a nice chat while you make the tea. What do you say, Lerato?” She promptly sat down on one of the leather chairs and motioned to Lerato to join her. Marcus stood for a moment before turning on his heels and stomping off to the kitchen.

To Lerato the few minutes she spent alone in Mercia’s company felt like an eternity. Mercia lambasted her with a volley of rapid-fire questions, hardly pausing for breath between Lerato’s flustered answers. “Where did you study? . . . What line of work are your parents in? . . . Do you have brothers and sisters? . . . When did you start working for Marcus?” and even, to Lerato’s ultimate horror, “How old are you exactly?” There wasn’t a single one of the questions that didn’t make Lerato uncomfortable. She tried as best she could to evade some, she fibbed ever so slightly in answering others, but at this last one she sprang up and made for the kitchen, breathlessly mumbling over her shoulder that she thought she should give Marcus a hand with the tea after all.

She almost bumped head-on into Marcus who was just then emerging from the kitchen with a tray in his hands. He gave her stricken face one look, rolled his eyes and marched back into the living room, glowering over the tray. His mother smiled coolly as he set it down on the coffee table.

“I see you’ve taken down Arnold’s picture,” she said, gesturing in the general direction of the bookshelf. Marcus’s head snapped up and Lerato

found herself looking in the direction Mercia was pointing at. Who was Arnold?

Marcus didn't answer. He bent over the tray. "Can I pour for you?" he gritted.

"Of course," his mother responded nonchalantly. "I hope it's not too strong. You know I can't drink strong tea."

The conversation that followed was almost as excruciating as the interrogation Lerato had to endure. That is to say if what passed between them could be called a conversation at all. Mercia did all the talking. She began by ranting about how lasting relationships had become a thing of the past because people just didn't "know the meaning of the word commitment anymore". She told Lerato how she had stuck by Marcus's father for forty-odd long years. Many of which, she assured her, had been decidedly less than rosy. Then she seamlessly switched to a tirade about young people these days expecting everything to fall into their laps without lifting a finger to earn it. Between all of this she still managed to notice dust on the furniture and warned Marcus not to be too "soft" on Martha just because she had been working for him for a long time.

"You know how it is," she said, looking pointedly at Lerato. "You offer these people the little finger and before you know it, they grab the whole hand. Best to keep them in their place from the start."

Lerato's jaw dropped in indignation. But before she could respond, Mercia had already shifted her gaze back to Marcus, enquiring about several of his clients and his preparations for the show. She fired the questions at him in quick succession as she had done with Lerato earlier.

Marcus's answers were terse and Lerato noticed that he took pains to divulge as little as possible.

When at last Mercia decided it was time to leave, Marcus showed her out with ill disguised haste. He leant against the door for a while after closing it behind her, staring into space before he straightened and focused on Lerato.

“Well, Lerato – you had your baptism by fire a little sooner than I would have liked. But at least that's behind us now. Welcome to the Starke family.” He came forward and gave Lerato a little hug around the shoulders. She shrugged him off with a click of her tongue, and went to sit in her room for the rest of the afternoon.

Lerato looked up and saw the first rays of sunlight bathe the garden in a pale golden wash. She had been coming to the factory before dawn every morning to plan and prepare for the day's work. These first solitary hours of the day had become her special time, and she felt a quiet power as she lugged around rolls of fabric, completed the cutting sheets and laid out Marcus's latest sketches for Wallace to make patterns from. Pattern pieces that had already been cut were pinned together and laid out in neat bundles next to the sewing machines for Josie, Queen and Leola to start working on the moment they arrived.

Picking up a bodice part of the turquoise evening gown that had been cut the day before, she walked over to the cabinet in the corner. Its tiny wooden drawers were full of beads and other adornments. According to Marcus, the cabinet was an antique salvaged from an old pharmacy. Lerato

had seen to it that a few new elements were added to the treasure store of beads and decorations. The glass, crystal and pearls complemented the fine silks and satins of some of Marcus's creations beautifully, but Lerato had convinced him to buy beads and ornamental buttons of polished bone, wood and horn to use on the raw silks and more loosely woven linens.

They had already made two pieces using these: a long skirt with overlapping sections and a tailored jacket. Marcus had given Lerato free reign with the embroidery and she had sat for hours with Mapule and Johanna, explaining what she wanted them to do. She had hidden the garments from Marcus until they were finished and ceremoniously "unveiled" them to him one afternoon in the factory. Marcus had been pleased with the end result, which in turn had thrilled Lerato and her two accomplices.

Lerato took a few of the tiny plastic sleeves from the top drawer of the cabinet and carefully filled them using a small plastic scoop. The freshwater pearls she had chosen were of a shade just darker than the fabric. She also picked out small crystal spheres of a colour so light they seemed almost transparent. Only when held against the fabric could one discern the tinge of aquamarine on their sparkling facets. Two colours of fine tubular glass beads, one an opalescent black and the other a metallic teal, completed her selection.

There was a rail at the back of the room where the design sketches, pattern pieces and fabric samples for each of Marcus's designs dangled from large metal clips. Lerato unclipped the one for the gown and took out the template Marcus had drawn of the beading for the bodice. Then she went to sit at one of the long wooden tables and meticulously sewed one of each

bead onto the sheet of paper to indicate to Mapule and Johanna what should be sewn on where. Finally, she fastened the template and the little bags of beads to the bodice parts with a pin. Her preparations completed, she got up to place the bundle in the basket with the other pieces that had to be embellished.

Shortly after she first arrived, Lerato had suggested to Marcus that all beading and embroidery be done before the parts were sewn together, with only minor finishing touches to be added once the garment was complete. This made the work easier and faster and the end result much neater. It also cemented the two craftswomen's loyalty to Lerato.

Lerato looked around her in the now familiar space. She briefly scanned the schedule Marcus had drawn on the large whiteboard on the back wall of the factory indicating everything that was to be done in the run-up to Svenska. It was a tight schedule with the first two weeks and part of the third dedicated almost entirely to finishing the fifteen designs that would be showcased at the event.

The last week and a half would be taken up by fittings and rehearsals and, for Marcus, several media interviews. Lerato checked the notes written on the board in Marcus's broad scrawl. Having started off slower than they should have, they were now slightly behind schedule.

She looked at her watch. It was seven o'clock now and she reluctantly turned towards the stairs to go and join Marcus for breakfast. It would have been easy to just keep going until the girls arrived, but Marcus insisted that she had a proper breakfast every day and, to be honest, she relished their morning strategizing over Martha's bacon and eggs.

As she rounded the corner at the top of the stairwell, she saw Marcus sitting alone at the table on the deck. He had been suffering from a cold and Lerato felt concerned as she looked at him. He sat slightly hunched in his pyjamas and robe with the sunlight glinting on his thinning hair. The morning paper lay on the table in front of him. Something about the way he sat bent, pressing his index finger where he was reading on the paper, made him look vulnerable and lonely.

Martha bustled past her with a tray, shaking her out of her thoughts. “Morning, Martha,” she said, and immediately felt the by now familiar awkwardness. She was trying too hard, she knew, and feared that it made her attempt at friendliness seem insincere.

“Hello.” As usual, Martha’s response was curt. She did not turn to Lerato as she spoke. It stung Lerato to see the older woman’s attitude change to one of caring attention the moment she entered Marcus’s company.

But the way Marcus looked up and smiled as she stepped out onto the deck pushed the housekeeper’s aloofness to the back of Lerato’s mind.

“Ah, Lerato, darling. You’ve been up with the lark again, I see.”

He held out a limp hand and Lerato took it as she sat down, frowning at him.

“You shouldn’t be sitting out here in the cold. You’re still not well.”

“You’re sounding just like Martha now,” he said, half to Lerato and half to Martha’s departing back. “But you needn’t worry about me – the fresh air is exactly what I need.” He scooped some of the scrambled egg Martha had brought onto his plate and passed the bowl to Lerato. “Anyway, you’re the one we should be worried about. I came to the kitchen after midnight and your

light was still on. And this morning I heard you going downstairs before sunrise. You should take things a little easier, sweetie – the last thing we can afford now is for you to get burnt out.”

Lerato took the dish he offered, but placed it back in the centre of the table and helped herself to a slice of toast from the basket in front of her instead. She shook her head gently as she did so.

“I know I shouldn’t be reading so late,” she admitted ruefully, “and every night I promise myself that I’ll go to bed early.” She took the small dish of butter curls Marcus now sent her way. “It’s just . . . well . . . some books are hard to put down.” The night before, she had read an autobiography of a holocaust victim from beginning to end. She felt a little guilty for having spent the whole night reading something not remotely linked to fashion design, especially now that they had to focus all their energies on Svenska.

Marcus stopped chewing for a moment and dabbed at his lips with his serviette. “Well, don’t overdo it. And I hope that’s not all you’re planning to have for breakfast?” He waved at her plate with the serviette still in his hand.

Lerato looked down at the single slice of buttered toast as if it was the first time she noticed it. She smiled disarmingly. “Oh, stop trying to fatten me up, will you? I’ve told you I can’t eat so much this early in the day. I’ll make up for it at lunch.”

The truth was that now merely looking at the creamy scrambled egg and the fat glistening on the plate of bacon was enough to make her stomach turn. Marcus shook his head and went back to eating his own very substantial breakfast.

When Martha had cleared the table, Marcus picked up a sheaf of papers from the seat of the chair next to his and Lerato took up the reporter's notebook she now carried with her wherever she went. She had filled one such book in her first week and was now three-quarters into the second one.

Marcus went through the latest emails he had received from the Svenska organizers. "Make sure we note these dates," he instructed Lerato. "This one is about the rehearsal for the show, and here are the arrangements for the reception," he said as he handed them to her. He rifled through the pages again. "There was also a . . . Ah, yes," he said as he pulled one out, "a programme for the talks and media interviews they want me to do. You'll have to keep my diary, make sure I get to where I'm supposed to be."

"Got it," Lerato said and nodded her head vigorously. Her fingers tingled as she jotted down cryptic reminders and items to do.

"How are things going in the factory?" Marcus asked.

"We're doing OK, I suppose," Lerato said. "It's just that . . ."

"That what?"

"Well," she bit her lip. "Wallace doesn't seem to be handling the pressure to well. He's all over the place and seems terribly forgetful."

Marcus rolled his eyes heavenward. "The old man always starts chasing his own tail just as we enter the home stretch to a big event. You'll just have to take control of him. Give him clear orders and watch that he gets the work done. And keep the girls out of his hair. If Wallace loses the plot now, we might as well withdraw from the show."

Lerato nodded. She would have to keep a lid on her own anxiety and focus on getting her team to perform.

“Oh, and by the way, a client will be coming in for a consultation this afternoon. I’ll handle it as usual, but I’d like for you to be there.”

Lerato’s head jerked up from her notebook. “But, Marcus, I can’t . . . there’s no time . . .”

He gave a casual shrug. “Of course you can. I’m sure the girls can survive an hour or two unsupervised without burning the place down.”

Lerato looked at him thoughtfully. She suspected he was referring to when she had tried out the press just after she arrived and accidentally set a piece of fabric smouldering. She squared her shoulders. “Fine. Who’s the client?”

CHAPTER 14

When Lerato dashed into the fitting room at a minute past three that afternoon for the consultation, she felt a new wave of resentment towards Marcus for having squeezed the appointment into their already over-full programme.

Her resentment was heightened when she emerged from the screen separating the factory from the fitting room.

Marcus hadn't told her that his client, the sixty five year old Livia Scribante, was in a wheelchair.

But the anxious pulse Lerato felt at the base of her throat was not due to the sight of the white-haired woman sitting in the wheelchair with a walking cane across her lap. A thin, tall man stood slightly bent behind the wheelchair, his hands resting on the handlebars. His olive features were unsmiling as he looked suspiciously at Lerato.

"Lerato," Marcus strode towards her, took her gently by the elbow and steered her towards Livia, waving magnanimously with his other hand. "I'd like you to meet Liv, my number one client," he winked at the older woman, who reached out with both hands to take Lerato's. "And this is her son, Matt. Matt also has the dubious privilege of being the lawyer who looks after my affairs."

Lerato had no choice but to reach out and shake hands with the man. She looked down and hoped that the fact that she blushed went unnoticed. For the remainder of the consultation, she kept her focus on Liv and Marcus. She smiled and nodded with the same false sincerity as when Marcus first introduced her to the staff in the factory.

But the masterful way in which Marcus plied his trade once again swept Lerato off her feet and eased the tension she had been feeling. Livia, or Liv as Marcus called her, would be travelling to Italy in a month's time to witness the christening of her third grandchild and wanted Marcus to design something for her for the occasion.

Marcus flipped through thick volumes of fabric samples, drew lines on the flipchart in the corner, lovingly draped pieces of fabric and lace over Liv's shoulders to check the colours against her complexion and made fluttering gestures over her to indicate where he would add fullness or detail. Lerato was in awe when, a little over thirty minutes into the consultation, he presented his client with a proposal for a softly structured trouser suit in a smart muted pink to be worn with a white silk blouse with soft swirls of lace at the neckline and around the cuffs.

Lerato found herself looking at Marcus as if she was seeing him for the first time. He was engaged, vibrant and purposeful. It was difficult to reconcile this image with that of the lonely, vulnerable man she had seen at breakfast that morning.

She wondered silently how much of Marcus's genius was lost on Liv and on Matt, who had been standing by disinterestedly while the maestro was at work. Apart from the colour, which would perfectly complement Liv's pale skin with the dark, intense eyes and white hair, Lerato knew that Marcus had given careful consideration to every single aspect of the outfit he proposed: The fabric itself was a recent innovation that had the look of the more traditional wool suiting, but which had a slight multi-directional stretch, resulting in a superbly comfortable fit. Seeing that Liv was in a wheelchair,

trousers were a more flattering choice than a skirt, which was also the reason for the added length that Marcus proposed for the jacket. The blouse would add a touch of femininity and understated glamour. Despite her physical frailty, Lerato suspected this extravagance was a perfect reflection of Liv's personality.

Liv rolled her wheelchair a little closer to the flipchart, peered intently at the sketch Marcus had made and then turned around to face her son. "So Matteo, what do you think?" Her black eyes glittered expectantly. "Will you be able to accompany your old mother without being embarrassed if I'm wearing this?"

Matt stepped forward, took his mother's face in his hands and bent down to plant a kiss on top of her head. "You'll embarrass me regardless of what you're wearing," he chuckled and hastily ducked the good natured slap the old woman aimed at this upper arm.

"See what I have to put up with," Liv said and winked at Lerato, who smiled stiffly in return. Then the older woman shifted her gaze to Marcus. "I think this will do very nicely, Marcus. Shall I come back for a fitting in a week or so?"

Lerato waited for Marcus to politely say that it would be absolutely impossible to do a fitting so soon with the fashion week coming up, but he merely smiled and patted Liv's arm. "Lerato will call you as soon as we're ready."

When it was time to leave, Matt wheeled Liv to the bottom of the outside stairs where she got up on shaky legs, leaning heavily on the walking stick. With Marcus's help, she made her way laboriously up the stairs. Lerato

found herself right behind them next to Matt who was carrying the folded wheelchair. Marcus joked with Matt and Livia about how he would have to install a chairlift.

When they finally reached the top of the stairs, Liv was transferred back into her wheelchair and after pushing her a few metres further, Matt lifted her effortlessly into the passenger seat of his large black SUV. Marcus and Matt spoke briefly about other business through the car window before they said their goodbyes. Lerato caught Matt casting a quick look in her direction as they spoke. When they drove off, she walked back down the steps next to Marcus, her arms folded across her chest. When they got to the bottom, she turned to him accusingly.

“You could have told me, you know, that she was in a wheelchair and . . . and that her son would be here too.”

Marcus looked at her sideways, lips slightly pursed and one eyebrow arched. “Would you have liked me to also fill you in on her shoe size and her medical history?” He drew a sharp breath and blew it out through flared nostrils. “Look, Lerato, there’s a lot going on. Some things you will just have to do on the fly. You’ll never make it if you keep being so fragile all the time.”

Lerato felt the heat rise in her cheeks. Marcus started gathering his sketches in the fitting room and she swung away from him into the factory, trying to regain her composure before facing the girls.

As it happened, however, no-one noticed her coming in. Josie and Queen were standing on opposite sides of the table on which the sewing machines stood, yanking a bundle of fabric to and fro between them and hurling insults at each other. Wallace was hopping up and down at the short

end of the table, trying to get the two women to calm down, but adding to the chaos instead.

Mitta stood next to the press on the other side of the squabbling pair, shaking her head in stern disapproval.

Lerato cleared her throat – twice – but when that had no effect, she lifted a thick volume of fabric samples above her head and smacked it down on the table nearest to her with a resounding “whack!”.

There was a stunned silence as all four faces, and those of Mapule and Johanna who had come in from outside to see what all the commotion was about, turned to Lerato.

“Will someone tell me what the hell is going on here?!” The frustrated anger she still felt gave her voice the edge that told them she meant business. She looked from Wallace, who could only muster a whimper, to Queen whose blubber was still shuddering with indignation, to Josie, who finally yanked the half-sewn garment from Queen’s grasp and then looked up guiltily at Lerato.

Mitta now stepped forward and in turn relieved Josie of the crumpled bundle. “This is the skirt of one of the day dresses. I was gathering it to the bodice when I noticed some stitches have been missed on the seam. One of the sewing machines isn’t working properly, but none of these two . . .” She shot them an annihilating look over her shoulder, “. . . are willing to admit that it’s their machine that’s giving trouble.”

Once again the piece of fabric was snatched from its bearer as Lerato grabbed it in alarm. She unfolded it and stared in horror at the uneven stitching. There was a little flicker of panic in her chest. With only a fortnight to

go before the show, this was the very last thing they could afford now. But she kept her expression neutral and her voice steady.

“What do you usually do when a machine breaks?” she asked Mitta without looking at Queen or Josie again.

“We call Gunter.”

“Where’s his number?”

“It’s in the file in the fitting room.”

Lerato nodded. Then she stooped and picked up one of the bright remnants from the basket at the end of the sewing table.

“Excuse me,” she said and motioned to Queen to move off her chair. Queen got up with a grunt. Although she didn’t say anything, her full lips made little twitching movements and her eyes were wide and glistening.

Lerato sat down at the machine, placed the scrap under the presser foot and “whirred” off a couple of stitches. She sat motionless for a moment, then lifted the foot and got up with the sample clenched in her fist.

She turned to Queen, whose mouth was now twitching more furiously than before.

Lerato stepped towards her until her face was only centimetres away from the moving mouth. She spat the words in the fat woman’s face. “Don’t you ever, ever keep quiet about something like this again. And if I catch you lying one more time, your days here are numbered.”

She turned on her heels to go and find Gunter’s number. She was already on the other side of the screen when she heard Josie mumble “poepol” from the other side. Whether it was directed at Queen, at Mitta, or perhaps at her, she couldn’t tell.

When she entered the fitting room, Marcus was standing at the counter making notes on one of his sketches. Lerato was about to ask him where the file was when Martha came rushing down the stairs, looking uncharacteristically flustered.

“Marcus, your mother . . . Mrs Starke . . . is here. I offered to bring her tea in the living room, but she says she’s coming down to see how things are in the factory . . .”

Lerato could already hear footsteps approaching on the stairs behind Martha. She stood rooted to the spot like a hare caught in the headlights. A perfectly awful day had just got worse.

Mercia emerged behind Martha from her pointed boots up. “So, this is where you’re hiding!” she announced loudly as she came into full view. She rested the long red nails of one hand on Marcus’s shoulder and blew kisses past his ears.

“Oh, hello, Lerato,” she added and Lerato thought Mercia literally looked down her nose as she did so.

“Hello, Mrs Starke.” She failed to sound enthusiastic.

“Mother.” Marcus took her by the hand and swivelled her around to face the stairs again. “I didn’t know you were coming. Things are a little hectic down here. Why don’t you go back up and I’ll join you for tea in a minute.”

“Nonsense!” Mercia exclaimed and yanked away her hand. “I want to see what you’ve been up to.” Lerato drew a sharp breath as Mercia turned and headed for the factory. When she reached the wooden screen in front of the entrance, she turned and looked questioningly at Marcus. “Well? Aren’t you going to show me around?”

“No.” The word hung in the air like a pistol shot. “Lerato is.”

CHAPTER 15

It was Thursday and only two days to go before the start of the fashion week. “Oh, by the way . . .” Marcus said before interrupting himself with a forkful of the tuna salad they were having for lunch. Lerato looked on as he patted his lips with his serviette before continuing. “I’ve decided that you’re off this afternoon. I’ve arranged something for you with Irene – just a little pampering to relax you before the show. We’ll take a proper holiday after Svenska, I promise.”

Lerato placed the palms of both hands on the table and pushed herself out of her chair. “Marcus! There’s no way I can be away this afternoon. There are a million things left to do . . . who’s Irene?”

Marcus eyed her steadily. “Yes, sweetie, you can. I know what needs to be done and I’ll get it done, don’t worry.” He held up a hand to silence her just as she drew a breath to protest again. “And Irene . . . I guess you could say she’s a sorceress of sorts.”

“But I . . .”

Marcus’s hand jerked upward again while he made a sound like “hubbub”. “This is not a suggestion, Lerato. It’s an executive decision, so I suggest you deal with it,” he said while making a note in his diary.

Lerato snapped her mouth shut and finished her lunch in sullen silence.

With slow persistence the fragrant strokes on her skin, the clear notes of the music and the steady, hypnotising rhythm of the blonde nymph’s breathing as she bent over her, coaxed the obstinate tension out of Lerato’s muscles.

When she'd realised that the "surprise" Marcus had bulldozed her into would involve having her naked body touched by a complete stranger, she had been both livid and extremely embarrassed. For a few seconds after the nature of her afternoon "treat" had dawned on her, she considered putting her foot down and refusing to go along with it.

In the end it was something about the woman whose hands were now casting a spell on her that had made Lerato choose to stay. She had forgotten the woman's name, although Marcus had told her earlier. She was lean and toned with a beautiful open face and wise green eyes. From the moment Marcus had introduced them, she had seemed completely focused on Lerato. In a good way. With her bare feet and long skirt, she looked almost ethereal, like a woodnymph.

Under her deft touch, Lerato felt herself relax completely. Her whole being became heavy and liquid. The last remnants of resentment towards Marcus, all the niggling thoughts and worries about the preparations for the fashion week, gradually evaporated until all that remained was a glorious sense of blissful surrender.

The run-up to the fashion show was turning out to be a nightmare. They had spent the entire week doing fittings and practicing their routine for the show. Now they were getting ready for the full dress rehearsal, the last hurdle before the big event.

"Oh, if it isn't the little princess again." The remark from the tall brunette lounging against the wall of the backstage dressing room drew sniggers from

the rest of the girls, most of whom were sitting in dressing gowns and slops, getting their make-up done.

From the outset, Lerato had been the odd one out. She was much shorter and younger than the rest of the models and they were openly resentful of her being chosen to model Marcus's showstopper. Initially, she had been scared of modelling the exquisite gown in front of so many people, but, once the idea had sunk in, she had caught herself daydreaming about it. Of course, in her dreams the models she would share the ramp with were as kind and supportive as they were beautiful.

As it turned out, they were neither beautiful nor kind, Lerato thought as she briefly glanced at Sonya, the model who had made the remark. Sonya looked like a corpse without make-up. She was tall and extremely thin with lank, lifeless hair and no warmth in her face.

Looking straight ahead of her again, Lerato made her way to an empty seat in the row of barber's chairs that faced the mirrors along the opposite wall.

The girl next to her was having her hair done by Ricca and Lerato had to squeeze past her to get to her chair. Ricca was a butch blonde who was virtually covered in tattoos. Although she seemed perpetually angry, she was by far the nicest person Lerato had met in the run-up to the show. She turned sideways for Lerato to pass and greeted her with an unsmiling "Hi".

The bored-looking model she was working on leaned forward and shook a cigarette from the packet on the table in front of her.

As she put it in her mouth and lifted the lighter she turned her head to look at Lerato. "Ciggy?" she asked from the corner of her mouth.

“Er, no thanks, I don’t smoke.”

The girl took the cigarette from her mouth and let her hands rest in her lap for a second. “Ah, so she’s a prissy little princess, is she?” She lit the cigarette and pulled on it deeply. She threw her head back and looked at Lerato through half-closed lids as she slowly blew the smoke into her face. Her expression didn’t change as Ricca took her head in both hands and turned her back to face the mirror.

Lerato blinked to get rid of the stinging in her eyes. The rest of the three hours before the rehearsal started passed in a blur. As was the case with the previous rehearsals, the pressure increased as time passed, except that tonight it was ten times worse as a result of everyone having to change in and out of the various creations.

Anika Westerlund, chief organizer of the fashion week from Svenska’s side, managed the rehearsal with military precision. She was a severe blonde with a sharp tongue that she used to whip the models into shape. Lerato felt a quiet satisfaction at the way they scurried to obey Anika’s orders, which she punctuated now and again by impatiently clapping her hands.

It felt like a lifetime later that Lerato stood dressed and waiting her turn to go on stage. There was no denying that she did feel a little bit like a princess in the beautiful gown Marcus had chosen to end his show with. Cut away over one shoulder, the deep yellow creation fitted snugly over her upper body, hips and thighs and then fell away just above her knees in an almost full circle flair. The shape of the dress was simple and classic, but close up the tailoring was intricate, with eight long pattern pieces shaping the front.

Wedge-shaped inserts of silk chiffon in the exact shade of the rest of the dress filled out the flair at the hemline.

Alone amidst the frenzied backstage activity, Lerato had a brief vision of herself as a little girl standing on the hillside, wearing nothing but a blanket.

“Come on, you’re next!” Anika jerked Lerato forward and kept her in an iron grip by her side. She stood so close that Lerato felt her breath on her naked shoulder. She smelled of sweat and stale perfume.

As the girl who was up just before Lerato swept off the ramp past them, Anika nodded and sent Lerato off with a little shove.

Although Lerato had tried to keep her nerves in check all evening by reminding herself that this was just a rehearsal, it felt frightfully real once she was out on the ramp. Blinded by the spotlights, she felt as if she was moving in a dark tunnel throbbing with the music she had heard a hundred times over the past week. They had practiced so many times that she now moved like a machine: walk to the end of the ramp, brisk, long strides, head held high, pause at the end and lean over to one side, hold for a moment, lean to the other side, hold, turn and walk back to where Marcus will be waiting backstage. They will wait a moment before Marcus will take her hand and they will lead the models back onto the ramp for Marcus to take his bow.

She reached the end of the ramp and paused, counting as Anika had coached her. But as she turned, she immediately knew she had been too hasty – a mistake Anika had scolded her for many times during the week.

The heel of one of her shoes caught on the hem of the dress. Her arms flew up in an attempt to find her balance, but there was nothing she could do. For a moment, time stood still. Then there was silence. Darkness.

The voices came from far away and she could only make out nonsensical snippets of what was being said: “. . . stable . . . take the IV out . . . cranium intact . . .” She stirred and opened her eyes. The light sent a serpent of pain writhing through her skull. Whiteness. Two faces hovered near her, but when she tried to focus on their features, her head started spinning. Her eyes closed again as she succumbed to the delicious pull of forgetfulness.

“Miss, Miss . . . wake up.” The words called her back and she reluctantly opened her eyes again. Slowly the room around her, the woman leaning over her and gently shaking her by the shoulders, came into focus.

Lerato tried to speak, but her tongue felt thick and dry. She lifted a hand to her head. “My . . . head.”

“Yes, yes, you hurt your head. Do you know where you are?”

Lerato swallowed thickly and shook her head.

“You’re in hospital. You fell, remember? At the concert.”

The concert? Then, slowly, the images filtered through the pain: Anika Westerlund shoving her onto the ramp, the music, the lights, the turn that she had made too quickly.

She looked up onto the nurse’s kindly face as what had happened dawned on her. “The rehearsal . . .” She struggled to sit upright. She had to get to Marcus, to tell him how sorry she was, she had to . . .

“No, no, no.” The nurse gently pushed her back against the pillows. “Calm down. There’s no need to be so upset. Everything will be fine. You’re fine . . . and so is your baby.”

CHAPTER 16

During the drive home Lerato kept dozing off, only to wake with her heart hammering against her ribs. It was impossible to cut through the fuzz in her mind to order her thoughts. She felt like the struggling caracal kitten that Kgomotso and his friends had caught and stuffed into a mealie meal bag. Suddenly, the idea of it made her want to throw up.

When they got home, Marcus helped her out of the car. He supported her elbow and put an arm around her waist. Inside he led her to her bedroom.

“You should go straight to bed. Tomorrow is going to be a long day. And if you need anything during the night, just call me – I’ll be right here,” he said as they reached the door.

Lerato turned groggily to face him. “Marcus, we need to talk. I . . .”

“Shh.” He placed a finger against her lips. “We’ll talk later. Right now you need to rest. Go on, get some sleep.” He kissed her on the forehead, turned her around again and nudged her forward into the room. Then he turned and walked back down the corridor.

It was a strange sensation, this knowledge of all life around her. Even in the icy pre-dawn hours there had been a myriad of impressions – among them the minute shuffling as an egret broke free from the shell. There had been the inaudible drone of roots drilling deeper.

Now, as the first golden rays caressed the hills, there was an explosion of sight and sound. Paws scratched, scales slithered, hooves clicked and wings rustled. Tiny buds opened and released the slightest whiff of a

fragrance, but she knew of it as she knew of the smell of the vultures and the carcass they were hopping around and that of the hard high ground and the rocks and the sludge along the river bank.

In the midst of the screeching, the cries, the yelps and the sighs, she was still as she had always been, immovable and knowing – knowing not as one witnessing from afar, but as one who had given birth to it all. She was the eternal mountain mother.

The next day was the main event of the fashion week. Lerato hardly saw Marcus as he was in interviews and workshops the whole day. There was a persistent dull ache at the back of her head, but she hardly noticed it. Not for a moment could she stop thinking about the news she had received at the hospital. In her mind, she kept hearing the words the nurse had said. Sometimes, she would catch herself almost saying them out loud: “You are fine . . . and so is your baby.”

Although Marcus had assured her that it would be all right if she didn’t, Lerato had insisted on participating in the fashion show as planned. She steeled herself for the usual taunting as she entered the dressing room that afternoon. Instead, there was a slight hush. Most of the girls studiously avoided her.

After having worked so hard and looking forward to the show for so long, the experience passed her by. She felt as if she was watching the whole affair from afar, as if the body moving along the runway was not her own.

Having made a perfect turn, she floated back to where Marcus was waiting.

“You were stunning,” he whispered.

Anika materialised from the side with a bunch of flowers. Then she walked back across the ramp with Marcus, followed by all the models who had participated in his show. The other models clapped with the audience when Marcus took her by the elbow and led her backstage for the last time.

“Oh, wow!” Lerato exclaimed when they entered the reception hall. Large illuminated ice-sculptures of African wildlife stood amidst breathtaking arrangements of fruit and flowers. They created pools of soft light around which the guests came together to talk and sample the food, all of which was presented as bite-sized works of art.

In contrast to what Lerato had become used to from the other models, the guests at the reception were very kind. People kept coming up to them, complimenting Marcus on his showing and Lerato on how beautiful she looked in the ball gown. But, despite the breathtaking setting and the praise, Lerato could not lose herself in the magic of the evening. It reminded her of her nightmare of the crystal cave. She responded mechanically, wearing a forced smile that made her face hurt.

Marcus, too, was tense. He responded graciously to the praise that was heaped on him for his collection, making a point of giving credit to Lerato for her part in it. But she could see the strain in his eyes. At times the guilt and anxiety threatened to overwhelm her, but she had to keep the façade in place until they could excuse themselves without seeming rude.

On the way back home she must have opened her mouth to speak at least a dozen times, but the words wouldn't come. At last she decided to take the coward's way out and let him speak first.

“Have a seat so long,” he said without looking at her when they finally reached the house and he had unlocked the front door. “I’ll go make us tea.”

Not coffee, she thought. Coffee would be bad for the baby.

Her hand automatically moved to her tummy. She realised that, although not bulging, it had been tight as a drum for some time now.

She looked around her in the space she had come to love, feeling as if she was saying goodbye to it: The bookshelves with the books and magazines that had opened a new world to her. The couch and chairs where Marcus and she would sit and talk on chilly evenings. And the deck out there where they had sat every morning for the past month to plan the day and the big fashion show, which was now all of a sudden a thing of the past. She had let herself believe that it was true, that she had left her old life behind and had miraculously been granted a new one. She snorted softly.

Marcus came in, put the tray down wordlessly and poured for them. He handed Lerato her cup as he sat back with his own, but he didn’t say anything.

The pressure was too much for her to remain quiet. “Marcus, I’m so sorry . . .”

“Sorry about what?” he interjected, looking up at her strangely through hooded eyes.

“That I’m . . . Didn’t they tell you?” She looked down at her lap. “I’m pregnant.”

“And you only found out yesterday?”

She nodded.

“God, you’re so naive.” He said it half to himself, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. It hurt.

“I’ve never been . . . regular.” She squirmed in her chair while the silence dragged on. “I’m sorry,” she repeated feebly.

“No, Lerato. I’m the one who is sorry. I should have known better.” He was still not looking at her. “When I came across you at Metco, I thought you were a gift from God. I was so desperate that I refused to see beyond the dream I had for you.” He paused for a moment and rubbed across his eyebrows with his thumb and forefinger. “It never really crossed my mind that you had a life of your own, relationships and all the rest of it, or that you had dreams of your own.”

Lerato sat forward in her chair. “Marcus, please, let me explain. It’s not the way you think it is . . .” But again his hand shot up to silence her, so she sat with her heart in her throat, waiting for him to finish.

“I had it all perfectly worked out, even had Matt draw up the necessary paperwork. All that without knowing the first thing about you.” He gave a small, bitter laugh. “Of course I knew that you had a brilliant natural feel for design, that you were beautiful and bright, but I knew very little about the rest of you – didn’t care to. All that mattered to me was what you could mean for my business, that there would be someone to carry on with my life’s work. That it would not all have been for nothing.” His voice broke on the last words.

Lerato had expected to be obliterated by Marcus’s fury and disappointment. She was caught off guard by this unexpected vulnerability and self-reproach. What he was saying wasn’t making sense.

“Anyway,” he continued after a short silence, “that’s all academic now. I understand that you will be moving in a different direction. I don’t know what your situation is with the . . . the father, but . . .”

“Marcus, listen, please . . .” Lerato was desperate to speak now. She had to. But Marcus continued speaking as if he hadn’t heard her. “I’ll make sure that neither you nor the baby want for anything.”

“No, Marcus,” Lerato finally broke in. “You’re wrong about me, about my life.” She stopped for a moment to fight back the tears, but they came anyway, dripping on her lap as she hung her head. “When you came to fetch me that day at Metco . . .” It was a huge effort to breathe. “. . . when you came there, I was sitting outside because I . . .” She forced herself to look up at him. “I had been fired three days before. I messed up everything through a stupid, stupid mistake. When you came, I thought I had been given another chance, but I’ll understand if you are also going to fire me because of it.” She took a ragged little breath and waited for him to take the opening.

“I’m not going to fire you.”

“Does that mean I can keep on working for you?”

He took a deep breath and slowly let it out, focussing on a spot in the distance. “That you would be working for me was never the plan. Not in the long run anyway.”

She sat looking at him uncomprehendingly. The silence stretched on and on. He gave a bitter puff of a laugh before he spoke again.

“I needed you to take over from me. To carry on with the business after I’m gone,” he said. “I’m sick, Lerato, in case you haven’t noticed that either.” He turned his head to look at her for the first time. “I’m dying.”

Lerato's jaw dropped in shocked disbelief, but before she could say anything, he got up and turned away from her towards the empty fireplace. "Until shortly before I brought you here, I had been in a committed relationship for four years." He snorted softly. "That is to say, *I* was committed. Turns out he wasn't."

"Arnold," Lerato said, but he continued as if he hadn't heard her.

Lerato jumped out of her seat and came towards him, but he continued speaking with his back to her. "He had known for more than two years that he was positive. He did everything in his power to make sure I got infected too." He turned back to her now, weeping.

"The worst thing," he sobbed, "is that I was so trusting. I didn't suspect a thing. I kept getting these colds that wouldn't get better and finally my doctor suggested we test for HIV. At first I was furious, but eventually I agreed." He sniffed loudly. "It was only then that I found out . . . about everything."

Lerato moved forward and gently took him by the hands, leading him back to his chair. She sank down next to him on the armrest and hugged him to her.

When he had calmed down, she slid down onto the carpet and knelt before him, again taking his hands in her own. She was shaking inside and out, but she tried to sound brave and reassuring. "I have a friend who works at a clinic in town. She told me that people can live for many years with Aids. It doesn't have to be a death sentence if you just look after yourself."

"Lerato," he sighed, pulling his hands free. "*Please* don't patronise me. I wish to God I was just being pessimistic, but I'm not. I have the best medical care money can buy, but we're losing the battle. It's just a matter of time."

It wasn't dreaming in the sense she was used to. It was more like remembering her whole life: Metco and the mountains and her mother and Marabastad and Marcus Starke – all in a jumble, all at once, for hours on end. It was still dark when she could no longer endure it and fled downstairs to the factory.

There was no reason that it should, but the place felt different on a Sunday. Or maybe everything feels different today anyway, she thought to herself as she started tidying the space, which was in disarray following the mad rush that had preceded Svenska.

She went over to the whiteboard at the back and wiped it clean. The detergent had a pungent chemical smell. Lately, smells seemed stronger. Picking up the red marker, she wrote in large letters on the board: pregnant pregnant PREGNANT. Under the words, she tried to draw a baby, but it looked a bit like Zeus lying on his back and she quickly wiped everything off again.

Resting her head against the board, she stood trying to take in the reality of it all, not just that she was going to have a child, but also that Marcus could be dying. That part she wasn't quite ready to believe.

Sighing, she turned around and finished getting the factory clean and ready for when the girls and Wallace would come in the following day. Soon everything had been neatly ordered and put away and the wooden surfaces of the tables were once again bare and gleaming. Bringing order to the space around her had calmed her thoughts somewhat. She hopped onto the cutting table and sat there for a while, clasping the edge with her hands and slowly

swinging her legs. It would have been so good to have someone like her mother to talk to.

She slid off the table and went upstairs.

As she rounded the corner into the living room, she heard Marcus's agitated voice. "For Pete's sake, Matt, she's *nineteen*. . . . I understand your concern, but that's for me to judge. Do you have to be so damn cynical all the time?" Just then, Marcus turned around with the receiver at his ear and blushed a bright pink to the roots of his hair when he saw Lerato standing at the top of the stairs. "I've got to go," he said awkwardly and put the receiver down as if it had burnt him. He stood rooted to the spot with his hand still on the phone, looking at the unsmiling Lerato like a schoolboy caught smoking in the toilet.

"That was Matt," he finally said and looked down quickly. "He was just surprised to hear that you're pregnant."

He was trying to be kind. But Lerato knew that for Matt the fact that she was pregnant probably confirmed every suspicion he ever had about her. He would now be more convinced than ever that she was a little gold digger looking to worm herself into Marcus's life for her own benefit. "Tea?" she asked.

He exhaled slowly through his mouth. "Coffee, please."

It had taken courage for Lerato to come to the clinic after she had disappeared without a word to her friend three months ago. When she entered she immediately spotted Seipathi standing in the door to the small examination room with a patient, an old man with yellowish white hair who

clutched his weathered hat to his stomach. When he turned to leave, Seipathi's eyes swept the small number of patients who sat waiting on the white plastic chairs. It was then that she saw Lerato standing close to the entrance.

With her senses heightened by a guilty conscience, Lerato saw surprise and reproach flash across Seipathi's features. But then Seipathi turned towards her patients again. Lerato stood waiting until she had finished tending to them. When the last one, a woman with a grotesquely swollen eye, left, Seipathi avoided Lerato's gaze and disappeared into her office.

Lerato followed her, feeling like a louse. When she reached the door to the small room, she saw Seipathi standing over the desk, straightening a stack of brown cardboard folders. "Hi," she said feebly. The word drifted in the thick air.

Seipathi turned around slowly and faced Lerato. "Hi." It sounded like an accusation.

"Sorry I couldn't come earlier."

The corners of Seipathi's mouth pulled slightly downward. "I thought you were dead. I looked everywhere for you."

"I'm sorry."

"When you didn't come to visit on the day you said you would, I went to Metco. When I got there, that woman in the bridal section said you'd been fired."

"Gita."

“Yes. So I went to your room, but the landlord told me you had left without telling anyone. He said you were supposed to have given him a month’s notice. He wanted money from me.”

“Oh, no. I’m so sorry, Seipathi.”

Seipathi stood with her arms crossed over her chest and looked at Lerato silently for a long while. Then she gave a little sigh and dropped her gaze. “What happened?”

“I’ll tell you everything,” Lerato said gratefully. “You deserve the truth.”

CHAPTER 17

Much of the breathtaking scenery around them passed Lerato by completely. Every now and again she had to consciously relax her arms and loosen the death grip of her sweaty, cramping hands on the steering wheel.

To spare Marcus the exertion, and seeing that she had recently got her driver's licence, Lerato had foolishly insisted on driving them to their holiday destination.

She regretted it now. They had long left the busy freeway behind and turned into a wide dirt road where Lerato could drive at a speed she was more comfortable with. Yet her shoulders were still bunched up and her forehead throbbing from the intense concentration.

They had stopped twice along the way and both times Marcus had offered to take over the driving, but she had stubbornly refused. She was about to pull over to the side of the road and belatedly take him up on his offer, when she saw the dusty signpost indicating the turnoff to The Craggy Mountain Lodge fifty meters ahead to the right.

Here the road changed to a paved single lane that curved along the incline. Lerato was terrified that someone would come speeding towards them from the other direction. It was a relief when the road suddenly opened up and the hotel, a stately old manor house of a building, appeared before them. She parked the car under a huge pepper tree in the gravel parking lot. Looking sideways at Marcus, she breathed a long, loud sigh of relief.

"We're here."

“So we are, thanks to you.” He smiled and gave her knee a little squeeze. “Well done, Lerato.” He looked past her to the hotel entrance. “Let’s go check in. They can bring up our luggage afterwards.”

While Marcus checked them in and collected the key, Lerato wandered out to the back of the hotel where a grassy terrace overlooked a manicured garden and the mountain landscape beyond. It was September and the spring awakening was evident in blooms and new growth all around.

Lerato’s heart leapt into her throat as she took in the splendid view. She didn’t know exactly where they were – only that it was in the Northern Drakensberg and therefore close to where she had grown up. But the smell of the breeze, the texture and colours of the hills around her, the feel of the place were achingly familiar. These were her mountains.

Instinctively, she cradled the tight bump of her belly in both hands through the cloth of her sundress as she stood looking out to the horizon.

“Hey, there you are . . .” Marcus came walking out through the French doors but stopped short when she turned to him and he saw the emotion on her face. He looked from her to the view behind her. Putting down his clutch bag and the form and keys he had collected on one of the terrace tables, he opened his arms to her.

Despite his physical weakness there was comfort in his embrace and they stood together for a while without speaking. At last he took her by her upper arms and gently pushed her back. He stroked her cheek and leaned forward when he spoke. “Why so serious?”

“It’s this place.” She indicated the mountains around them. “It feels like yesterday when they took me away. I know it sounds stupid, but it still hurts.”

He slid an arm around her shoulders. “The mountains will always be here, you know.”

Lerato nodded. She loved Marcus for understanding and for trying to console her. But the old wound was still there.

The garden suite they were staying in was a spacious self-contained unit with two bedrooms, a large bathroom and a cosy carpeted living area. Both bedrooms had views of the mountains.

It was almost time for lunch and they decided to spend a bit of time in the airy hotel living room cum library before moving out to the terrace again.

After the fashion show Marcus and she both needed a holiday, but Lerato particularly hoped that the break would be good for Marcus. Although he never complained and waved aside any mention of it, Lerato could see his health deteriorate almost daily.

She studied him unobtrusively as he picked up a book and slowly leafed through it. She thought how few people knew Marcus the way she had come to know him – as a man with a big, generous heart, the bravest person she knew and a brilliant, visionary artist.

Marcus looked up and smiled at her briefly before looking down again at the bird guide on his lap.

Lerato looked around in the cosy room and then picked up the book that lay in front of her on the coffee table. It was an oversized, beautifully illustrated atlas of the Drakensberg. She sat back in her chair and turned the large, glossy pages one by one.

About a third through the book, she gasped and sat upright, the index finger of her right hand pressing on a photograph.

Marcus also suddenly sat forward and she realized guiltily that he had dozed off and that she had startled him.

“What is it?” he asked. He put his book down, got up stiffly and moved over to her side of the coffee table. He sat down next to her and she wiggled closer to him so that the book lay across both their laps. Lerato’s finger was still glued to the picture, which showed what looked like a grassy knoll and beyond that in the background a sweeping vista of the mountains.

“This is where I lived,” Lerato said, stabbing at the picture. “Right here! Our hut was just behind this. I stood here many, many times . . .”

Marcus looked up in surprise at the huskiness in Lerato’s voice. He pulled the book closer to peer at the picture and its caption. Then he shifted his focus to the map printed on the opposite page. He looked at it through narrowed eyes.

“This is it,” he said after a long moment, tapping the page. “Eagle’s Crest. It’s not far from here. One should be able to get there on one of the hikes from the hotel.”

They sat on a rock in the shade of a gnarled tree – one of the very few in the grassy landscape – and drank the small cartons of fruit juice Lerato had carried along in her rucksack. They had wanted to make the excursion two days earlier, but the day after their arrival Marcus had suffered from a stomach upset. Then, yesterday, they were surprised by an early spring shower just as they were getting ready to set off.

Today, however, the mountains lay shimmering in the bright sunshine and there wasn't as much as a speck of white in the endless blue sky above them.

Lerato had chuckled that morning at how the pair of them looked in their khaki outfits, hats and hiking boots. When they had come in for breakfast she had seen the hotel staff grin – they had probably never seen a stranger couple.

As he sat sipping his juice and fanning his flushed face with his hat, Marcus looked better. But Lerato knew there was no way that he would be able to make the steep hike all the way up to Eagle's Crest.

She took the folded map she had been given by the receptionist from her pocket, opened it and smoothed it out on the rock next to her.

On the black and white photocopied map the "Red", "Blue", "Yellow" and "Green" hiking trails were difficult to tell apart. Fortunately, the actual trail was 'n well-trodden footpath and every fifty metres or so a red footprint painted on a rock or tree trunk reassured them that they were indeed on the right track.

Lerato couldn't make out much of the contours on the map, but she knew that they were basically heading to the top of the mountain. Having set out just after breakfast, they were already almost a third of the way up now. Lerato breathed the fresh spring air and peered out from under the rim of her hat to where the footpath curved out of sight up ahead of them. The smell of the mountain was everywhere. She heard the rustle of the wind through the grass and the collective hum of life around them. It was a sound that spoke to something that had been slumbering within her. It called her name.

She lifted the map closer to her face and studied it carefully. “We’ll be coming to a stream in a little while,” she said waving the map in Marcus’s direction. “I want you to turn back there. I’ll climb up to Eagle’s Crest on my own and meet you at the hotel when I get back.”

Marcus sat up straight with his hat covering both his knees. She expected him to try to stop her, or to insist on coming along, and, for a moment, it seemed as if that was what he was going to do. But then he merely gave a little sigh and his shoulders fell slightly forward. “OK, darling. But promise me you’ll stick to the trail. And don’t dawdle and make me worry about you.”

Lerato smiled, stood up and offered a hand to help Marcus up as well. She was surprised when he clung to her hand and stood leaning on her heavily for a while to steady himself.

It was almost noon and the sun was stinging Lerato’s head and shoulders through her hat and the khaki fabric of her shirt. The rhythm of her breathing, the crunch of her hiking boots on the trail and the indistinct, but ever-present, drone of the veld around her merged into a hypnotic hum.

She was anxious about leaving Marcus to make his way down to the hotel on his own, and this made her push herself to reach the top. She knew this was irrational – however fast she climbed, it would be several hours before she would be back at the starting point. But over the past couple of weeks, ever since Marcus’s startling confession about his illness, she had been painfully aware of his vulnerability. And that, in turn, had made her feel over-protective and anxious for his safety.

She rounded a low ridge and expected to see another one. This was the way of the mountain, ridge upon ridge that keeps tricking you into believing you have reached the top long before you actually have. Her footsteps dropped out of the sounds around her as she came to a sudden halt. Instead of a ridge, what lay straight ahead was a solid black wall of rock reaching up a good 25 metres. A well-worn chain ladder hung down it.

Lerato stood for a while with her hands in the small of her back, peering at where the ladder curved over the cliff's edge high above her. Then she turned around and looked down the mountainside the way she had come. Far below a group of four hikers slowly snaked up the footpath. Even though the group was probably out of earshot, and couldn't even see her, it was reassuring to know that she was not completely alone.

Lerato pressed her hat firmly onto her head and walked towards the chain ladder. She gave it a careful tug. It seemed secure enough and she mounted it gingerly. Heart hammering against her ribs, she quickly made her way up the metal rungs. She was aware of how her body worked to heave itself up the ladder – shoulders, buttocks, knees. She had to hang back a little to make space for her belly. At the back of her mouth, she could taste the metal of the thick chains mingled with the muddy sulphur of the cool rock. Here and there in the crevices close to her face grew ferns and little tufts of grass. Even in this austere environment, ants, beetles and lizards crawled along the cracks, ignorant of her passing.

She glanced down without thinking. Suddenly a wave of panic swept over her. She, too, was nothing more than an ant against the face of the cliff. Despite the coolness of the rock, her hands became sweaty and threatened to

slip off the metal rung she was clutching in terror. The muscles she had pleurably felt working a moment ago were now locked in a painful spasm.

It took an almost superhuman effort to turn her head back to face the rock in front of her, not because she wanted to keep looking at the chasm beyond her trembling feet, but because she was convinced that even that slight movement would cause her to lose her grip and fall. Strangely, at that point, the fear was so overwhelming that she almost wanted to close her eyes and let go.

“Come on,” she gritted through clenched teeth. It took all her willpower to loosen one clenched hand from the rung next to her cheek and lunge towards the one above her. Swearing one moment and crying the next, she forced her mutinous limbs upward. Inching up the rock face, she focused only on the rung above her and the next, and the next until finally she hauled herself over the edge.

She crawled away a few paces on all fours before she collapsed on the footpath. She rolled over onto her knapsack and lay there with her face to the sun and tears dripping from the corners of her eyes into her ears. She lay with her knees pointing skyward and her hands spread loosely over the dome of her belly.

When the waves of terror and relief had subsided sufficiently for her to feel the sting of the sun and of the sharp stones and grass stubble, she rolled back onto her hands and feet, pushed herself off the ground into a squat and stood up.

Only then did she realise that she had reached the top of the mountain. Her gaze swept along the grassy plateau that curved away slightly to her left.

Then she gasped and took a quick step forward, her eyes riveted to the rocky outcrop right at the tip of the wide half moon eaten out of the mountain's side through aeons of erosion.

Her hat was still dangling behind her back and she lifted a hand to shield her eyes against the sun, straining to see further, clearer. But while her mind sought confirmation, her heart had already sent the blood rushing through her ears in recognition of the place where she had been born and where she had lived the first twelve years of her life – the place she had visited so often in her dreams in the years since then.

She had often dreamt of her homecoming. Running through the grass, she would leap into her father's waiting embrace. Now, as she stood there, she felt her father's presence, but none of the wild jubilation she had expected.

In her dreams, she returned to the mountain and everything was as it had been. But things were different now. This was not a homecoming after all. It was a laying to rest.

She reached behind her for her hat and hooked her thumbs under the straps of the knapsack before she quietly started walking towards the outcrop.

It was further away than it seemed. When she reached the spot where their hut had stood, the low, crumbling circle already stood knee-deep in its own shadow. A little way beyond the ruin of the hut, the stone kraals where they had milked the cows and kept the small calves were still surprisingly intact, albeit overgrown by bristly grasses.

A few steps away, Lerato paused, savouring her recognition of the place. She moved forward almost reverently, entering what remained of the hut.

Once inside, she turned back towards the doorway and sat down on the floor. It was still smooth and bare and, despite the years that had passed, still resisted the invasion of the wild grasses. She took off her boots and socks and placed her bare feet on the ground. But the sensation of her bare soles touching the floor of the hut was not enough to conjure up the way she had experienced the place as a little girl. Her dreams of the mountains had achieved that far better than being here in real life.

After a while, she got up, picked up her boots with the socks stuffed in them and turned to climb over the low crumbling wall at the back of the hut. The grass pricked her soles as she made her way around the larger kraal to the oblong mound of stones that lay half in the shade of a crooked hardwood tree.

Lerato sat down on the ground next to her father's grave to survey the damage done by the weeds and the weather in the years since she had said goodbye to the mountains. She picked up one of the stones that had rolled off and put it back on top.

She sat there in the dappled shade trying to find the words to say to her beloved Ntate, listening for the message he would surely have for her from beyond. But there was nothing. Even the hum of life on the mountain top, the rustle of the breeze through grass and leaves, seemed hushed.

Lerato stretched her arms across the stones on the grave and leaned forward to rest her head on them.

She woke reluctantly from a growing awareness of the dull pain in her arms, trying to hold on to the dream. It was a feast of some sort. Everyone was there – her mother and father, even Kgomotso, Marcus, Seipathi and, strangely, Livia Scribante. They were all sitting in a circle around a fire, singing and clapping and passing around pots of beer. It was so real that she could still smell the smoke.

Lerato slowly sat up straight. Every inch of her body ached from having dozed off in such an awkward position. She was thirsty.

Still groggy, she half turned to take the knapsack from her back to retrieve another carton of juice. Then, suddenly, there was a whisper in the grass, the flash of a shadow. She froze with the knapsack slung forward over one shoulder.

The snake stood poised to strike no more than a metre from her at the foot of her father's grave. It was so large that it looked down on her where she sat.

Lerato knew she should look away to protect her eyes from the blinding venom, but she couldn't.

Mesmerized, she stared into the black beads of the snake's eyes. She could discern every detail of the regal markings on the cowl spread out on both sides of its head. The blackish brown scales glinted like metal in the sun, the black tongue flicking obsessively in and out of the upturned V at the centre of its lipless jaws.

Lerato sat breathless. She felt her chest constrict and her heart beat in her throat. She felt fear, but beside that, reverence, even awe at this visitation

from one of the most powerful of the animal spirits that dwelled on the mountain.

The snake held her transfixed in its glassy stare. For a long moment, everything else seemed suspended by its magnificent presence. But then it turned and sank into the grass and was gone just as suddenly as it had appeared.

It took another moment or two after the snake had gone before Lerato could bring herself to move again. She righted her knapsack and pulled on her socks and boots over her dusty feet. Although the sun was still shining, there was an icy edge to the breeze and Lerato hugged herself to ward off the chill that was creeping down her spine. She didn't stop to drink something as she had wanted to, but headed back the way she had come, suddenly restless and aware that it was already late afternoon.

She had progressed a little way along the curve of the mountain top when she saw the family of hikers that were behind her that morning up ahead. It seemed that they had stopped for a picnic close to the top of the chain ladder and were now packing up and getting ready to hike back down the mountain.

Lerato forced a friendly smile as she passed them. But as she moved closer to the edge of the cliff, she was suddenly faced with the daunting prospect of having to make her way down the ladder again. Going back over the rim, there would be no way to avoid looking down. She felt her heart leap into her throat at the thought of it. She was still trying to muster her courage when the other group caught up with her. The man who led them walked up to her briskly.

“You waiting for someone?” he asked.

“Er . . . no,” she said apologetically and moved away from where the top of the ladder curled over the lip of the rock.

The man turned and looked back up the trail and across the grassy plateau as if to make sure that she was telling the truth. “Didn’t you read the rules?” he asked when he turned towards her again. “Hikers must always be in groups of two or more. Otherwise, no-one will be able to get help if something happens.” Lerato felt like a naughty child caught somewhere she was not supposed to be. The man’s tone was not altogether unfriendly, but she was not sure how to answer.

With the rest of his family now standing around him ready for the descent, the man addressed his wife. “I’ll go first. Let the girl go next and then you come. Jaco, you go last,” he added, nodding in his son’s direction.

With that, Lerato was summarily made part of the group and lost the luxury of further fearful prevarication at the top of the ladder. She clambered down after the man, careful not to step on his hands as she moved down the rungs. The descent was devoid of the drama she experienced on the way up and very soon she jumped down onto the dusty ground below where she stood looking as the other three came down after her.

She stood undecided for a moment, not sure whether to set out on her own again or to continue with the group. But when everyone was down, the man asked: “Ready?” and swept his gaze over all of them, including Lerato, who nodded in response. He led the way and she let the family fall in behind him before taking up the rear.

They made their way down the mountain in silence for the most part, only stopping occasionally to point at a bird or a butterfly along the way. Soon the sun was setting and the mountains around them were bathed in a golden glow.

As the back of the hotel came into sight, Lerato could make out a speck of a man standing on the lawn and leaning on his walking stick as he peered to where the hiking trail emerged from between the hills. She wanted to walk faster, to run towards him and reassure him, but she had to keep the pace of the party in front of her.

When at last they reached the lawn, the family split off to the right and Lerato forced herself to smile a goodbye. But her heart was beating in her throat as she looked up into Marcus's drawn face. "Hello," she said and tried to keep her voice light.

Marcus straightened up and half turned away from her. "Where were you all this time?" he asked quietly. "I was worried sick."

Lerato walked over to him and slid one arm around his back, while she rested her head on his chest. "I know," she said. "I'm sorry."

They walked back to their suite in silence. After Lerato had showered, they sat sipping cooldrinks on the veranda. Little by little, Lerato told him of her day. She talked all through dinner and she was still talking as they sat in front of the fireplace in the living room afterwards. As they sat there, she had the strange sensation that part of the significance of the day was telling Marcus about it.

CHAPTER 18

Driving home from the hotel seemed much easier than driving out there only a week ago. Lerato was almost surprised when the city's skyline appeared in the distance. Although they had only been gone a couple of days, everything looked a little different.

She felt excited to be back. Her head was bursting with ideas for new designs and she couldn't wait to start putting them on paper to show to Marcus. She looked at him sideways as they pulled up in front of the house.

"Home sweet home," he said, but his smile was weak. Marcus had seemed so much better after the first few days of their holiday, but just before they had left, he suddenly had a turn for the worse. Although he was weak and listless, he was not sleeping well. The slightest exertion left him completely exhausted. His attempt at cheerfulness was heartbreaking.

Lerato helped him out of the car and guided him to one of the large leather chairs in the living room. Martha came rushing out to greet them. Lerato was surprised when she turned to her smilingly and gave her the same warm greeting she had given Marcus. She went with Lerato to fetch their baggage from the car, helped her unpack the bags and sorted the washing. Martha made tea and, although Lerato was eager to get down to the factory where Mitta had been holding the fort during their absence, she first sat for a while with Marcus in the living room.

It was only after dinner that she got a chance to start sketching some of her new ideas. She caught herself smiling as she sat down at the heavy wooden desk next to the bookshelf. Seipathi had phoned that afternoon,

bursting to tell her friend what had happened while they were in the mountains. Thomas, whom, as Lerato had only recently learnt, Seipathi had been going out with for almost a year, had asked her to marry him. Lerato chuckled as she recalled how excited and full of giggles the normally calm and collected Seipathi had sounded over the phone.

Marcus had gone to bed early and Lerato sat drawing in the quiet house, completely immersed in what she was doing. The only sound was that of her own breathing and the scratch of the pencils across the pages of her sketchpad. Having put the finishing touches on the fifth sketch, she yawned and looked at her watch. It was already well past midnight.

She tiptoed down the hall to her room, careful not to wake Marcus. But when she passed his room, she heard muffled moans. She carefully opened the door and walked over to where Marcus lay tossing and turning, mumbling in his sleep. She switched on the reading light and carefully laid her palm on his forehead. He felt feverish and she pulled the sheets back to cool him down. At first she thought that he was drenched in sweat, but then she got the warm waft of urine.

“Marcus, Marcus,” she shook his shoulder to wake him up. When he did, he looked startled to find her standing over him and tried feebly to prop himself up on one elbow.

“Come,” she said. “We’ve got to get you out of these pyjamas.” She opened a drawer and found a clean set. “Put these on,” she said and helped him sit upright. “I’m just going down the hall to get you some clean sheets.” She left quickly without giving him a chance to respond.

When she got back carrying the folded sheets, he was in the bathroom. He came out as she was straightening the duvet over the newly made bed. “O God, Lerato. I’m sorry. I feel like such an idiot. I can’t believe you had to see me like this . . .” his voice sounded close to breaking and his thin white hand fluttered to his lips.

“You don’t have to apologise. You’re sick,” she said matter-of-factly and tried not to show how upset she was. “Come, lie down and try to get a bit more sleep.” She took him by the elbow and ushered him towards the bed.

Back in her own room, Lerato sat down on her bed, wringing her hands in her lap and chewing her lower lip. Although the night was mild, she was shaking. Up to now, they could cope with Marcus’s illness by making light of it. She would tease him about acting weak so that she would have to do all the work, or jokingly scold him for being a sissy. But now things were getting serious. And she had no idea how to deal with it. She sat for a while longer, hugging herself to keep the shivers at bay and trying to figure out what to do.

Much later, sleep still would not come and she lay in bed rigid as a pole, straining her ears for sounds from Marcus’s room.

There were two numbers in the file next to Matt Scribante’s name. Lerato tried the cell phone first, but it just kept ringing, not even giving her the opportunity to leave a message. She tried the landline, which was promptly answered by a secretary. The woman hesitated when Lerato asked to speak to Matt. “Who should I say is calling?” she asked officiously.

“Um . . . it’s Lerato Mokoena . . . from Marcus Starke,” Lerato choked, wondering if it had been a good idea to phone Matt after all.

“One moment please,” the woman said. Lerato was left listening to a tinny snippet of piano music, which was interrupted after a few seconds. “Going through.” Lerato wondered whether she was imagining the hint of disappointment in the woman’s voice.

“Morning, Lerato.” Matt’s voice was neutral. “What can I do for you?”

Lerato swallowed. “Hi, Matt. I . . . I was hoping I could speak to you . . . somewhere . . . not here. I need your advice on something. It’s about Marcus.”

For a moment there was silence at the other end and Lerato thought she should probably rather have phoned Marcus’s doctor. She was about to make an excuse and drop the phone when Matt spoke again.

“Well, all right. The only time I don’t have appointments is between eleven and twelve. I could meet you at that coffee shop down the street from your place.” He hesitated a moment before adding. “Or is it so urgent that I should come right now?”

“No, no,” Lerato assured him. “Eleven is fine. I’ll meet you there.”

Lerato was early. An evening gown that they had repaired for a client had to be dry-cleaned before they could deliver it and she had used this as an excuse when telling Mitta she would be out for a while. Having handed the dress in at the dry-cleaners a few shops down, she now sat waiting for Matt in the same coffee shop where Marcus had first made her the offer. Lerato’s gaze travelled over the mosaic and mirrors set in the wood panelling on the walls and then to the table where she and Marcus had sat that afternoon. Two young lovers now occupied the table, their hands joined and their faces only centimetres from each other.

The details of that discussion with Marcus would probably be etched in her mind for ever. On the one hand, she remembered it as if it was yesterday. On the other hand, although only six months had passed since then, it felt like a lifetime ago.

She was so lost in thought that she didn't see Matt coming in. She gave a little start when she realized he was standing next to the table.

"O, sorry, I didn't see you," Lerato said and half got up out of her seat to point to the chair opposite her. Matt made a dismissive gesture, shook her outstretched hand, pulled out the chair and sat down. Lerato was again struck by how tall he was. The dark business suit accentuated his harsh features. She wondered briefly what he would look like if he smiled. As he sat down, he looked at her sharply – first at her face, but then markedly at her now clearly pregnant belly. He leant back slightly in the chair, and then bent forward, hands dangling between his knees. It was a different body language from what she had become used to with Marcus. The thick brows lifted slightly when he spoke. "So? This is about Marcus?"

"Yes," she said, looking down at her hands on the table. "He's sick."

"I know."

Lerato remembered that Marcus had told her that he had discussed his illness and his plan for Lerato to succeed him in the business with Matt.

"Yes, but . . ."

She was cut short by a waiter approaching. They ordered and she sat quietly until the waiter had left and they were alone again.

“The thing is,” she went on when Matt looked at her questioningly. “He’s getting worse. And I don’t know how to look after him. I . . . I don’t know what to expect.”

Matt’s mouth hardened to a thin line. “How bad is it?” he asked.

Lerato told him how things had been deteriorating since they had come back from the Drakensberg. She tried to keep the emotion out of her voice, but had to swallow the lump in her throat when she told him what had happened the previous night.

Matt looked shocked. “Joseph warned me, but I didn’t expect it to happen so soon,” he said, as if to himself.

“Joseph?” Lerato had no idea who he was talking about.

“Joseph Kannemeyer. Marcus’s doctor. The three of us have known each other a long time – since high school. I spoke to Joseph after Marcus had told me he was sick. I asked Marcus if I could. Joseph said it was only a matter of time. He said that Marcus was not responding to the treatment.”

Lerato nodded and again there was as short silence as the waiter put down their coffee and rooibos tea. Lerato poured milk in her cup and then looked up at Matt as she lifted the teapot. “So does this mean . . .?”

“It means its going to get worse – probably a lot worse – and we will have to make some arrangements to deal with it,” he cut in tensely.

“Oh.” Lerato put the teapot down and then lifted it again to pour.

Matt took a sip of his coffee and swallowed quickly. “I think you should get help – a nurse. At first she can come in daily. Maybe later she can live in.” Lerato shuddered at the progression his words suggested. “I’ll make some

enquiries if you want. Maybe Joseph can help. And we'll have to discuss it with Marcus. Are you going to talk to him about it?"

Lerato wished he wouldn't approach the whole thing like a military operation. She was feeling weepy and the lack of sleep the previous night wasn't helping. She sniffed softly. "I suppose I will, thanks."

Matt enquired briefly about their holiday, the business and, rather aggressively, about her own health. She recalled the heated conversation Marcus had had with Matt over the phone after it had become known that she was pregnant.

"I'm OK," she said quietly. "I was just so worried about Marcus."

It looked like he was going to say something, but then the moment passed. He drained his cup and got up, taking out his wallet. He took some money from it, which he slapped down on the table in front of Lerato, who was still sitting with her cup of tea half full in front of her.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said brusquely. "I have to be in a consultation in fifteen minutes. I'll phone you tomorrow."

Lerato nodded and he left quickly without looking back. She looked at his back as he walked out of the coffee shop. His shoulders were rigid, his head slightly forward as if he was bracing himself to face an unseen adversary.

Once back at the house, Lerato immediately went to check in on Marcus. He lay fast asleep in the foetal position, snoring softly.

She went to tell Martha that Marcus would be having his lunch in bed and that she would be joining him in his room. The older woman nodded and, although she didn't say anything, Lerato could sense her concern for Marcus.

It painted the usually bright kitchen gloomy. Martha took two trays from the cupboard and carefully arranged the cutlery and serviettes and the plates of quiche and salad on them. "I'll bring the coffee just now," she said, lifting one of the trays and waiting for Lerato to bring the other.

Martha knocked softly on the door to Marcus's bedroom. When he didn't answer, she stood slightly to one side for Lerato to open it. Marcus woke when they put the trays down.

"Come on, lazy bones, time for lunch," Lerato said and helped him to sit up while Martha opened the curtains. When she brought their coffee, he had not touched his food. He sat limply against the pillows, turning the salad leaves with his fork.

Lerato chattered about the weather, the work in the factory, the daffodils in the garden that were budding.

"A woman phoned just now," she said. "She needs a dress for her daughter's wedding. She's coming in tomorrow morning."

"You know you'll have to see her by yourself, don't you?" he said quietly.

Don't be silly, she wanted to say, *you know you're going to be fit as a fiddle by tomorrow*. But she couldn't lie.

"I . . . yes, I suppose I do," she admitted, hanging her head. "Speaking of which," she added quickly, "I was thinking that we should maybe get someone to help you during the day."

"You mean someone to help *with* me," he said and she looked up to see him smiling ruefully. She felt so guilty she could die.

CHAPTER 19

“Yes?” Lerato looked questioningly at the woman who had rung the doorbell. She was short like Lerato, but stout, with grassy grey hair.

“Hello,” the woman said and stuck out a stocky arm. Lerato’s gaze swept down to the hem of the nurse’s uniform that almost touched the striped socks she wore with her white trainers.

“You must be . . .”

“The nurse,” she confirmed gruffly.

Lerato tried to hide her surprise. She had expected someone like Seipathi.

In spite of Lerato’s misgivings, the nurse seemed to know what she was doing. She addressed Marcus as Mister Starke and they got along well. For the next couple of weeks things settled into a rhythm that was, although not quite comfortable, at least predictable.

During the week, Lerato spent her days running the business, popping up for lunch with Marcus whenever she could. In the evening most of her time was spent with him. Although the nurse had offered to sleep over, Lerato chose to look after Marcus herself at night. Martha had insisted on sleeping over on weekends.

Lerato had to admit that she would not have been able to cope on her own. It was difficult to keep the business and the household going while she was worried about Marcus on the one hand and preoccupied with her pregnancy on the other. The one moment she would feel the baby move

inside of her and feel a rush of excitement, but the next she would sit next to Marcus's bed and realise that his condition was getting worse by the day.

Having just come back from walking Zeus one afternoon, Lerato was pouring herself a glass of water in the kitchen when Martha came in, looking happier than she had been in a while. "Joseph's here," she announced and set about preparing a tray with coffee and biscuits.

Lerato had phoned Joseph after her conversation with Matt in the coffee shop. He had made a house call the following day and had since dropped in every couple of days to check on Marcus.

It was clear that Joseph was not only Marcus's doctor, but also a close friend. Every time he came to the house he managed to lift Marcus's spirits. The same could not be said about Mercia. Lately when she came to visit, she always seemed to be on the edge of hysteria and everyone breathed a sigh of relief when she left.

"I'll take them their coffee and visit for a while," Lerato said and took the tray from Martha. When she reached the door to the bedroom, she stood outside for a while, listening to the two men laughing.

"Like that time we hid the little firecracker in Dup's cigarette," Joseph laughed, slapping his knee.

"I'll never forget it," Marcus laughed. "He got such a fright that he knocked over his roommate's fishbowl . . ."

". . . all over his chemistry assignment," they said in unison and burst out laughing anew.

Lerato looked around the door to see Marcus wiping the tears from his eyes. He was so thin that she could see the bones in his forearm. “Ah,” he sighed. “I swear I’ll never forget that as long as I live.”

It was the last day before the factory closed for the Christmas holidays and Lerato had promised the girls and Wallace that they could leave early. For the morning tea time she presented them with a large chocolate cake and cooldrinks. Then she handed out Christmas crackers that had come in a box with paper hats. Everyone put on a hat before they pulled the crackers.

Lerato was just about to tell them they could go, when Wallace approached her, nervously twirling his cap in his hands.

“Lerato . . . um . . . er . . . we were thinking,” he said, looking up quickly to the girls who were all standing close to them, “we . . . um . . . we can’t really leave without saying goodbye to . . . erm . . . you know, to Marcus.”

Lerato shook her head. “Oh, Wallace, I don’t think he’s up to it. He’s really weak. And, anyway, he’s probably sleeping now.”

“Please, Lerato.” Mitta now stepped forward. “We won’t be long,” Josie promised. “Just to say goodbye,” Johanna said and everyone nodded.

She had no choice but to lead them up the stairs to Marcus’s bedroom. Martha gave her a questioning look as they passed her on the landing and Lerato could only give a little shrug in response. Martha fell in behind Queen, who was last up the stairs. They waited quietly as Lerato knocked on the half open bedroom door.

There was no response, but as she pushed the door open, Lerato saw that Marcus was awake, his head turned towards the door. She walked over to where he lay and soon everyone was standing around the bed.

“Hi,” she said softly, taking the hand that lay across his stomach. “Wallace and the girls just wanted to come and say goodbye before they leave for the holidays.” Marcus nodded weakly and she saw his adam’s apple bob as he swallowed.

Then, without warning, Queen’s big body moved and she started singing in a deep, beautiful voice. The single long drawn-out word hung in the air: “U-j-e-s-u”.

“Ujesu ungowethu,” the rest of the group joined in.

“Siyavuma . . .” Queen sang, her bosom heaving.

“Siyavuma,” they sang, “ungowethu ngempela.”

“Siyavuma,” Leola’s voice rose high above the others.

“Sithi amen, amen, siyavuma.”

They sang the same song a few times over, taking turns to lead. When the last notes had died down, each of them came around to where Lerato stood to shake Marcus’s hand. He answered them with quivering lips.

Lerato walked back down the stairs with them. Her heart was still beating furiously when she saw them off at the factory door.

It was difficult to eat while Marcus wouldn’t. For a while now, Lerato had been taking all her meals with Marcus in his room. But for the past couple of days he had refused everything she brought him. She had tried to feed him, had

threatened and begged, but nothing had worked. She forced down a few mouthfuls of her own food and then put her plate aside.

The veins were visible through the thin skin stretched over his forehead and temples. Above the prominent cheek bones his blue eyes looked unusually large. For a moment, an image of Marcus as he looked when she first met him at Metco flashed through her mind. There was nothing left of that chubby, witty exhibitionist now. She bit her lip and looked up at the window on the far side of the room.

Marcus reached out and weakly grabbed her wrist. The blue irises shuddered as he exerted himself to focus on her face. The vein in his temple bulged to a livid welt.

She wiped her eyes with her free hand and gave a guilty little shrug. “Sorry,” she said in answer to his gaze. “It’s just . . .” She tried to find the words for what she was feeling. “It’s so unfair. Disease has taken away everyone I’ve ever cared about.”

The bird’s claw on her wrist tightened as Marcus struggled up against the pillows. His eyes seemed to bulge as the thin lips pulled away over his teeth. “Don’t,” he breathed. “Don’t make me part . . . of what went wrong in your life, Lerato.” He shook with the effort it took for him to speak.

Lerato jumped up out of her chair. “Shh, Marcus, don’t. I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just . . . you don’t deserve this.”

She bent over him, cupping his face in her hand. His eyes seemed unfocused again, but his drawn features relaxed and his grip on her other arm loosened.

“Love you,” he whispered and for a second a little spasm of a smile flashed across his features.

“Love you too,” she answered, sniffing. She sat back down and smoothed the sheet over his chest and shoulders.

After a while, his ragged breathing slowed and he slipped into sleep. Cradling her large belly in her hands, Lerato slowly got up and tip-toed out of the room. Once in her own room, she gratefully stripped off her clothes, threw on the light cotton shift she slept in and climbed into bed. She was exhausted.

When she woke it felt as if she had just fallen asleep. But through the window the faintest glimmer of morning was already showing. The child inside of her was kicking wildly, making her aware of her painfully full bladder. She got up and walked barefoot over the carpet to the bathroom.

She was on her way back to bed when she decided to go and look in on Marcus. The past couple of weeks, she always left both their bedroom doors open so that she could hear if he called her during the night.

Standing quietly in the doorway she saw Marcus lying on his side with his legs curled right up, facing away from her. In the dim light the bony angles of his hips and shoulders were visible under the sheet. Having almost turned away again, she decided to go closer and cover him with the light chenille throw hanging over the foot of the bed.

She moved closer, opened the throw and moved around to pull it up over Marcus’s sleeping form.

As she came around the bed on the other side, she saw his face in the dim glimmer coming from the window. She gasped and dropped the throw. Her legs threatened to buckle beneath her as she lunged forward, grabbing

Marcus by the shoulder. His body was rigid and cool under the sheet, his eyes open, but unseeing. Her mouth moved a couple of times before she could speak his name.

“Marcus! Marcus! O God, Marcus, wake up, please wake up!” she sobbed. She sank down on her knees and rested her head on her hands on the edge of the mattress. She sat crying and cursing God for taking Marcus from her until the light of dawn painted vague oblong shapes over the room. She sat back on her heels and took in the full horror of Marcus’s lifeless face staring at her. She pulled the sheet over it, wiped her eyes with her hands and hoisted her unwieldy body up against the bedpost.

She walked slowly to her room, pulled on a bathrobe over her nightshirt and went to the living room to call Matt.

When Matt pulled up in front of the house fifteen minutes later, Lerato was waiting for him at the front door. She hadn’t been able to muster the strength to change into her day clothes. When she saw the expression on Matt’s face, she started crying again. He brushed past her into the house. “Where is he?” he asked curtly.

Lerato gestured with her head in the direction of Marcus’s bedroom. Matt strode down the hallway and came to a halt at the bedroom door. After a moment’s hesitation, he entered the room and stood next to the bed, staring at the shape on the bed. Lerato stood in the doorway looking at his rigid back and the slight jerk of his head as he pushed his fists into his trouser pockets. She expected him to pull the sheet back from Marcus’s face, but he didn’t.

He turned around slowly to face her.

“I . . . I just wish I was here when it happened,” she stammered.

His head snapped back and his eyes narrowed suspiciously. “You weren’t here?” he asked accusingly. “Where were you?”

Lerato cast her eyes down guiltily. “I was in my room, sleeping.”

“Oh.”

The rest of the day was characterised by the ebb and flow of emotion as different people arrived. When Martha came in at seven as usual, she read what had happened from Lerato’s expression and immediately sank down on the ground, keening and wailing uncontrollably. Lerato knelt down next to the older woman and tried to comfort her. Matt, who was standing next to her when Martha walked in, turned around and briskly walked out onto the deck.

The nurse came in half an hour after Martha. Her face remained expressionless as she heard the news and offered Lerato and Matt perfunctory condolences.

Lerato’s biggest worry was not being able to reach Mercia. She had tried to call her just after phoning Matt, and every fifteen minutes since. Lerato suspected that the phone just kept ringing because Mercia had unplugged it for the night and was possibly not up yet. She was contemplating whether to drive over to Mercia’s house when the ringing on the other end was finally interrupted and Marcus’s mother answered in a groggy voice. “Hello.”

“Mercia.” Finally getting an answer caught Lerato off guard and for a moment she couldn’t find the words she had been rehearsing in her head for the past couple of hours. “It’s Marcus.”

Mercia Starke was not going to make things easy for her. “Who’s this?”

Lerato took a deep breath. “It’s Lerato. I have bad news about Marcus.”

There was a stunned silence on the other side, and then a soft click as Mercia put the phone down in Lerato’s ear. She sat for a while with the phone dangling between her knees, not knowing whether she should phone again. She looked up to find Matt standing behind the sofa on the other side of the room. She shrugged and placed the receiver back on its cradle. “I got through to Mercia. But she just put the phone down. Must I try again? Or should I go over there?”

Matt’s face remained grim. “I’ll go,” he said simply and turned around to scoop his car keys from the small table next to the front door. “Joseph will have to come and issue the death certificate,” he said over his shoulder. “I’ll phone him and I’ll arrange with the undertakers.” He walked out and the door slammed shut behind him.

Lerato was still standing on the exact same spot, her arms wrapped around her and her throat aching with the effort to keep back the tears, when the door was flung open again a few seconds later. Matt stood on the threshold, his shoulders slightly hunched. He hesitated there for a moment, staring intently at Lerato. “I’ll let you know about the arrangements.” Again he hesitated. “Phone me if there’s anything you need in the meantime.”

Lerato only moved when he had again shut the door behind him. In the kitchen, she found Martha sitting at the table, staring into space and sniffing noisily from time to time.

Lerato took out two mugs and made tea for both of them. Then she sat down opposite Martha and they sat drinking it in silence.

CHAPTER 20

The funeral was held a week before Christmas. The morning was overcast and Lerato felt leaden as she got dressed. She stood for a while in front of the mirror in her room, holding her bulging stomach through the soft fabric of her dress. It was the first dress, she thought absently, that she had bought with her own money.

She clipped on her earrings and took the little purse that lay on the dressing table before she went out to the living room to meet Martha, Mitta, Josie and Wallace who would be driving to the church and cemetery with her. The others would meet them there.

Since the factory had closed for the holidays, Lerato had only spoken to the girls on the phone. Seeing them and Wallace again for the first time after Marcus had died, was emotional. They stood in a close group hug for a few silent moments before Lerato stepped back and dabbed at her eyes.

“Come, on. Marcus wouldn’t want us to be a bunch of cry babies now. Let’s get going.”

They all piled into the little delivery van and drove to the church.

As they got out, Lerato saw a large number of people standing in little groups around the beautiful stone building. Most of them were smoking or speaking in hushed tones. But to one side of the door, a woman was sobbing uncontrollably. She was obscured by the people who were trying to console her, but as Lerato came closer, she saw that it was Mercia. Since Matt had gone to see her on the day of Marcus’s death, Mercia had not been to the house. She had made no secret of the fact that she did not approve of her son

involving Lerato in the business and Lerato was suddenly afraid of a confrontation.

“Lerato, there you are,” Seipathi stepped in front of her and hugged her gently, obscuring Lerato’s view of the emotional upheaval surrounding Mercia. “I know this is a terrible time, but I would like you to meet my fiancé,” she said softly, turning to the man following one step behind her. “Thomas, this is Lerato. Lerato, Thomas.” Thomas smiled, his teeth impossibly white. “Sorry we have to meet this way,” he said and stuck out his hand. Lerato gave a wan smile. “I’m glad you came.”

The small party attending to Mercia ushered her into the church and some of the people who had stood waiting outside also started moving slowly towards the entrance.

“I suppose we should also be going inside,” Seipathi said, smiling at Lerato and then at Thomas. Lerato nodded and they joined the slow stream. She saw Norma Sinovich’s svelte figure in front of them, and then saw Matt’s dark head bob above the others as he helped Livia’s assistant lift the wheelchair up the two stone steps at the entrance.

The gleaming wooden casket stood on a trolley in the foyer under a large wreath of white flowers. The light that shone through the narrow stained glass windows was augmented by small lamps fixed to the dark wood panelling of the wall. A thin man with a blue shirt and a well-worn jacket that seemed too large for him, stood to one side, his hands clasped solemnly in front of him. Lerato assumed that he was the undertaker. She moved closer to the casket and trailed her fingers along its polished surface. A hard lump ached in her throat.

It was cool inside the church. The high domed volume was filled with the rich notes of the organ, punctuated now and again by Mercia's sobbing. To Lerato's surprise, Matt scooped her up by the elbow just as she passed the first pew and steered her to the second row from the front. Lerato was grateful to see Martha also sitting there and sat down next to her.

When the organ stopped playing, the minister, a big man with fleshy lips and a comb-over, got up heavily from behind the pulpit.

The sermon was followed by tributes from a few people who knew Marcus well. Joseph managed to deliver a moving message without breaking down himself.

Mercia got up next. Lerato could now for the first time see her face. She was shocked to see the state the woman was in. Her watery blue eyes were almost swollen shut. Her nose and cheeks seemed inflamed and her normally perfect hair was dishevelled. She stood in front of them and took a deep, ragged breath, staring for a long while at the sheet of paper that was shaking in her hand. "Marcus," she said brokenly at last, "Marcus . . . was my son. He . . ." Her face contorted as she struggled to control her voice. "He . . ." But now the sobs again wracked her body and she couldn't continue. She lifted the paper in front of her face and simply stood there, crying helplessly.

It was as if no one knew what to do in the face of such raw emotion. Lerato got up to go to Mercia, but another man, one of the party that had accompanied Mercia earlier, was already out of his seat.

The drive to the cemetery felt very long. The girls in the back were now less subdued than they had been that morning. They were chattering about their

plans for Christmas and what they had done since the factory had closed for the holidays. Lerato could not think of anything to say to Martha, who sat silently next to her in the front passenger seat, her hands clasped in her lap. Only a couple of weeks ago, she had been making Christmas plans of her own, inviting a few friends and even Mercia to the house for lunch on Christmas day. She had known that it would probably be Marcus's last Christmas and had been determined to make it wonderful for him. But now the day was going to be very different from how she had planned it.

She tried to picture what it would be like at the cemetery. She remembered a feature in one of Marcus's magazines of models in evening dresses photographed in a cemetery. The images had fascinated her and, to Marcus's amusement, she had sat peering at them for the best part of an hour one Saturday afternoon. There had been a dark magic about the flowing gowns set against the mossy headstones, marble angels and trees of the shady cemetery. The shoot seemed to have been done at dusk and the soft light lent an eerie beauty to each scene. Lerato was surprised at the detail she could recall of those pictures – the bluish sheen of skin and the darkly made up eyes.

It was Martha's hand that suddenly leapt out of her lap towards the steering wheel that brought Lerato out of her reverie. She gasped and stepped hard on the brake. The slow snake of cars in the funeral procession had come almost to a complete standstill. At the head of the procession, Lerato saw the shiny black hearse turn into the cemetery. The rest of the cars proceeded to the large tarred parking lot.

Lerato stood next to the van's door, which was still open, and stared at the cemetery through the wire fence. It was a barren stretch of land, the ochre soil pockmarked with mounds. Except for a row of eucalyptuses demarcating the far boundary, there were no trees. How could Marcus with his love of all things beautiful be buried in a place like this?

They slowly made their way through the cemetery gate to where the hearse stood next to an open grave. Three or four other groups of mourners also gathered far from each other in the brown landscape. The grave Matt headed for was the only one where a few white plastic chairs had been set out under a green canvas pagoda. Mercia and her family headed straight for the chairs and Matt also indicated to Livia's assistant to bring the old woman's wheelchair into the shade. He went and stood next to his mother with one arm resting on the wheelchair's back.

Lerato walked around and stood on the other side of the grave. She was followed by Martha, Wallace and the factory girls. Norma, Joseph and a few of the other people who had initially clustered around the pagoda, also stepped around to join them.

The coffin had been placed on thick canvas bands stretched between the long sides of a frame that had been placed over the grave's opening. Bright green mats of dusty synthetic lawn had been placed around the grave and hung down the sides. Marcus would have hated that. A click made Lerato look sideways. Thomas was standing next to Seipathi taking photos.

The early clouds had cleared and the sun blazed down on the little group as the minister read thunderously from his bible. Now and again he

produced a crumpled check handkerchief from his trouser pocket to wipe the sweat off his face.

Lerato heard nothing of what the minister said. She stood thinking of Marcus as he was before he got too sick to work: sitting by the fire on a winter's evening with his sketchpad on his knee, playing with Zeus, talking to clients, eating breakfast, running the factory. Being Marcus. The realisation that she had lost him forever tore through her while the minister barked a prayer and the sun scorched onto the bulge of her belly.

The coffin was lowered into the grave through a mechanism that slowly gave slack to the canvas bands it rested on. When the wheelbarrow-like creak of the machine fell silent, Mercia, who had still not stopped sobbing, got up drunkenly. She tottered towards the edge of the grave, supported by family members on both sides. As she dropped one of the red roses handed out by the undertaker onto the coffin's surface, her knees buckled and she swayed forward dangerously. The men lifted her away in the nick of time to a collective gasp from the other bystanders, who had also moved forward to throw their roses in the grave.

Lerato waited until almost all the other people had thrown in their flowers. Then she moved forward with hers, a small bunch that she had taken from the garden early that morning. She moved forward and sank down at the rim of the grave, letting the blooms in her hand drop onto the coffin below.

In the past couple of days she had thought many times how she would say this final goodbye. But now no words came to mind. There was nothing beyond the searing emptiness in her chest. The people around her seemed far away, the only reality the hole in front of her that was sucking her in.

Then Seipathi touched her on the shoulder and Lerato straightened up clumsily and stood staring at the ground.

Finally, the minister lifted his arms to pronounce the blessing. There were dark sweat crescents down the sides of his jacket. “May the grace of God the Father, the love of His Son Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”

There was a muttered “amen” in response. Then they walked slowly through the yellow dust back to the car park.

“It was a nice ceremony,” Seipathi said. Lerato looked away. She felt like all the air had been squeezed out of her lungs.

The following day, Matt was sitting across from her at the living room table. Although he was dressed in jeans and a golf shirt, his expression behind the square-rimmed reading glasses was far from relaxed. He had wanted to come and see her straight after the funeral, but she hadn’t had the strength. So they had arranged to meet the following day instead.

Now, she was glad he had come. With the factory closed and the big house so quiet and empty, there seemed to be too many hours in the day. All day, she had been battling ghosts of the past, feeling sick with guilt over Caiphus and imagining horrors that had befallen Kgomotso. It haunted her that she didn’t know where her mother had been buried. And all the while there was an ache in her chest from missing Marcus.

“I take it you know what this is about?” Matt asked, looking at her over the rim of his glasses.

“I think so,” she answered with a little shrug. “It’s about when I have to move and everything.”

Matt sat looking at her silently for a moment. “Lerato, let’s get one thing straight, OK? I’m here to do a job, because Marcus asked me to. You don’t stand to gain anything by playing the innocent with me.”

Lerato bit her lip. She had never been as close to saying “fuck you” out loud to anyone in her life. “I’m not playing anything,” she said instead, lifting her chin defiantly. “Why did you want to speak to me?”

“Are you trying to tell me you don’t know about Marcus’s estate?”

“I know,” she answered flatly, “that he wanted me to keep on with the business. But it’s OK, I don’t expect . . .”

“Oh, *come on*, Lerato!” Matt slammed his palms onto the desk and rose from his seat, shouting. “He’s left you *everything!*”

Lerato felt the blood rushing to her head. “No, that can’t be true. It’s not possible. I can’t . . .”

“Can’t take over the business, run the house?” He made a soft snorting sound that didn’t quite qualify as a laugh. “That’s exactly what I told Marcus when he discussed it with me. But he seemed to think you can. As a matter of fact, he insisted on it. It almost ruined our friendship.” He picked up the document lying in front of him and threw it back onto the table. “Unfortunately, in the end I had to admit that it was his decision. And I am here to see to it that it is executed.”

CHAPTER 21

She moved through the house restlessly in the grey gloom, straightening the cushions in the living room and fussing with the vase of flowers on the mantelpiece. It struck her that the whole place needed a thorough cleaning. Martha would be there in an hour or two, but Lerato didn't want to wait that long. In the kitchen she filled a bucket with warm water and detergent, eager to start mopping the living daylight out of the tiled floor. The bucket was heavy and, with her pregnant belly in the way, she struggled to lift it out of the sink. Having finally managed to plonk it onto the floor, she straightened to reach for the mop. For a stunned moment, she looked at the bucket. But the wetness between her legs had not come from there.

It was six hours later and Lerato was aware of only two things: the pain that was ripping her apart and the ugliness of the delivery room. The white tiled walls and the low ceiling closed in on her as she struggled for breath. Seipathi, who she had phoned to drive her to the hospital, was allowed to stay with her because she was a nurse. She stood by Lerato's side, speaking soft words of encouragement and wiping her brow with a damp cloth. Joseph had been by earlier, but had left again after making sure that she was in good hands. Lerato had never met the obstetrician and felt ridiculously exposed as he kept poking his gloved hand in between her legs while she lay with her feet hoisted in the stainless steel stirrups.

“I can feel the head,” he said and looked over to the heart rate monitor from between her knees. “With the next contraction, I want you to push down on my hand as hard as you can. Ready?”

Before she could respond, the pain gripped her again, an unbearable pressure in her lower back that made her cry out in anguish.

“Push!” the doctor shouted. “You have to push now!”

Clenching her teeth, Lerato gripped Seipathi’s hand with her one hand and the sheet with the other and bore down with everything she had.

“The baby’s crowning, you’re almost there.”

With a roar, she lifted her upper body off the pillows and pushed back against the pain.

Then, it was all over. There was a rush of liquid as the doctor lifted the baby away from her and Lerato saw him for the first time.

In an instant, everything she was about, her hopes and fears, her entire being, shifted to the baby boy in the doctor’s hands.

Later that evening, after supper, Lerato lay propped up against the pillows in her room with her little son sleeping on her chest. Seipathi had helped her get settled in with breastfeeding the baby. Although her body was completely exhausted, Lerato’s mind was humming with the wonder of her son’s birth. She could not get enough of him, of how he looked and moved and smelled and felt. It was as though every fibre in her body had been programmed to nurture him.

She was lying back against the pillows with her eyes half closed, basking in the delicious intimacy of the soft little body against her skin, when

Matt's gangly frame appeared in the doorway, where he hovered uncertainly. "Joseph let me know," he said.

Lerato sat up straight, self-consciously pulling the front of her cotton nightshirt closed over her breasts. "Hi," she said uncertainly and adjusted the sleeping baby in the crook of her arm so that Matt could see his face.

Matt entered hesitantly and walked over to the bedside, his eyes fixed on the baby.

"He's . . ." he half whispered and cleared his throat before continuing to speak. "He's very small." He pulled up a chair and sat down, leaning forward to study the little face from up close.

"And perfect," she cooed. She carefully pulled the blanket away so that Matt could see more of him. Matt sat forward a little more and lifted the tiny digits of one of the baby's hands with his finger.

"He is," he answered quietly. "What are you going to call him?"

"I'm not sure." She hesitated. "I was thinking that maybe I should call him Marcus."

Matt's eyes widened slightly and then he quickly lowered his gaze. He again cleared his throat. "I've spoken to Mercia about the will."

"Oh."

He looked up again. "Obviously, she isn't thrilled."

"Obviously," Lerato echoed. Suddenly, she had a horrible hot flush. She adjusted the blanketed bundle in an attempt to get more comfortable. The gesture was not appreciated. One tiny eye popped open first, followed quickly by the other. The little face reddened and scowled. And then the infant made his presence known in a voice that belied his diminutive size.

Matt sat for a moment looking on helplessly. Then he got up mumbling an excuse and made for the door.

Lerato stayed in hospital for two days. It became a time of reflection and healing. The staff were friendly and every now and again someone would come to visit, bringing gifts and good wishes for her and the baby. The room was full of flowers and Lerato had settled comfortably into the routine of caring for her little son. She slept most of the time, waking only to feed and change him.

They were released from hospital on Christmas morning. Seipathi and Thomas came to pick her up at eleven.

“You must be eager to get home,” Seipathi said when she saw Lerato standing dressed and ready next to the bed with the baby in her arms.

“H’m,” she nodded. And she was, although it was awful to think that Marcus would not be there to welcome them home.

When they reached the house, Lerato was surprised to see cars in the driveway.

Thomas carried the suitcase and diaper bag to the front door, Seipathi and Lerato following close behind him. The sound of Christmas music drifted towards them from inside the house.

The door opened and Martha hurried towards them. “Nkosi yam’!” she exclaimed, pressing her hands to her mouth as she looked at the baby. Lerato hugged Martha and then carefully handed her the precious bundle.

“What on earth . . .?” Lerato asked as she stepped inside. A very large Christmas tree stood in the centre of the living area and the whole room was made up with tinsel and strings of fairy lights.

“Merry Christmas,” Seipathi whispered as she came up next to her. She was beaming.

Chatter came from the deck where a couple of familiar faces sat around a festively laid table. Mercia was the first to get up and walk over to greet them.

“Hello, Lerato,” she announced loudly, “Welcome home.” She leant forward, kissed the air on both sides of Lerato’s face and then turned to take the baby from Martha. “What’s this?” she asked and tugged at his blanket. “He isn’t properly wrapped – you’re letting him get cold.”

Seipathi shared a knowing look with Lerato before leading her onto the deck where she was welcomed by Joseph, Matt and Livia.

“To Marcus,” Matt proposed and lifted his glass as they were about to start the meal.

“To Marcus,” they all echoed. The atmosphere was sombre for a moment before the conversation started up again.

“Martha, you’ve outdone yourself,” Joseph said as the housekeeper reluctantly agreed to join them at the table. The rest of the guests joined in the praise. It was a feast of pickled ox tongue, gammon and turkey cuts, all served cold with a variety of salads. Lerato suspected that Mercia had supervised the preparations and felt sorry for Martha.

The smallest guest was on best behaviour, and only woke for a feed while everyone was relaxing before pudding. Lerato excused herself and

Seipathi walked with her to her bedroom. She sat cross-legged on the lower end of the bed, facing Lerato, who sat nursing the baby with her back against the headboard. Although it was wonderful for Lerato to be back in her own room, it made her miss Marcus all the more.

Seipathi smiled at how the baby searched for the breast, sucking wildly in the air until Lerato gently helped him to latch on.

“It seems that being a mother comes naturally to you,” she remarked. “Most first-time mothers have a difficult time getting started with the breastfeeding.”

Lerato looked down at the little face against her breast. “It’s hard to believe – I’ve only known him for three days, but I can’t imagine my life without him.”

Seipathi nodded knowingly and they sat for a while in silence. Lerato shifted the baby to her other breast and they watched together as sleep slowly overtook him, forcing his eyes to droop and finally close completely. Lerato carefully pulled the nipple from his mouth. A rivulet of yellow milk ran down over her stomach.

“I guess we don’t have to worry that he’ll go hungry,” Seipathi chuckled as Lerato laid the baby down on the bed. Her face sobered as she looked at the little body that now lay completely surrendered between them. “So,” she continued without looking up, “Matt tells me that Marcus has left you his whole estate.”

Lerato didn’t answer right away, forcing Seipathi to look up.

“And you can’t believe that something like that could happen to someone like me.”

One corner of Seipathi's mouth pulled slightly and Lerato wished she could take it back.

"No, Lerato," Seipathi responded quietly. "What I'm wondering is whether you're going to live this opportunity – whether you'll be brave enough to make it your own . . ." She looked down and reached out a hand to gently touch the sole of one of the sleeping baby's tiny feet, "or whether you are going to keep looking for excuses not to make it happen." She looked up again. "It's all up to you now."

"Oh, God, Seipathi, I'm sorry," Lerato said and scrambled across the bed to grab her friend's hands. Seipathi gasped as the mattress heaved violently, jostling the baby from side to side. But he simply curled up with his eyes still closed and started sucking the back of one little hand, oblivious to the commotion around him. "It's just . . . I'm not sure I can do this. I don't even know where to start."

"You'll figure it out as you go along. But for starters you can stop acting like you're attending a party at Mercia's. She's going to rule your life if you give her half chance," Seipathi answered and kissed Lerato on her nose. "Come on, let's go have pudding."

They had their dessert and coffee and liqueurs and sat chatting until the sun painted long shadows on the deck and streaks of orange on the horizon.

When everyone was finally ready to leave, Lerato stood at the door to see them off. "Thanks for arranging everything," she said to Mercia. "It was a wonderful day."

“It was either that or sit home alone,” Mercia replied honestly and repeated the air-kissing ritual she had greeted Lerato with that morning.

Seipathi, Thomas and Joseph left in a group. “I’ll phone you so we can chat about New Year’s,” Seipathi said over her shoulder.

Matt pushed Livia’s wheelchair to just inside the front door and Lerato bent down and gently hugged the old woman. Livia seemed to have enjoyed the afternoon in spite of the fact that she had spent most of it napping in her chair.

Matt stepped from behind the wheelchair. “We’re off, then,” he said. “There’s some paperwork we have to attend to. I’ll phone you tomorrow and then we can go through the documents.” Lerato nodded, registering only vaguely that the following day was a holiday.

After Matt had helped Livia into the car and driven off, she stood for a while looking out over the front garden and the quiet street.

When she turned to go back into the house, she saw Martha, who had earlier retired to her room, carrying a tray full of dishes from the deck to the kitchen. Lerato quickly set to work helping to clear the table.

They were almost done washing the dishes when Marcus junior woke and demanded his supper with a loud wail.

As it was only the two of them in the house, Lerato brought him into the kitchen and fed him while Martha finished cleaning up. Afterwards, Martha made tea and they sat drinking it in companionable silence.

Lerato yawned and they both laughed when Martha also yawned. The baby, however, was not amused and protested loudly.

“It’s been a long day,” Lerato said when she finally managed to pacify him again. She stifled another yawn and giggled softly. “I think the two of us must be off to bed,” she added, rising slowly so that she would not disturb the baby again. “You must also be dead tired,” she said as Martha got up as well and put the empty teacups in the sink. Lerato took a step toward her and touched her on the arm. “Thank you for today.” Martha looked as if she was going to say something, but then she merely touched her headscarf and made a shallow curtsy.

CHAPTER 22

It had been the hottest January Lerato could remember and it hadn't rained for weeks. When she went down to the factory in the mornings after the four o'clock feed, there was a touch of pre-dawn freshness in the air, but half an hour later, just after sunrise, the heat had already crept into every corner. The two creaking desk fans she had set up in opposite corners of the room seemed to do nothing more than push the hot air to and fro, while tugging at the cardboard pattern pieces and flipping over the corners of pieces of fabric that had already been cut.

"Mitta," she called her cutter when Wallace and the girls arrived a few hours later. "I want you to start cutting the silk for the wedding dress straight away." She helped lay out the pattern pieces and watched anxiously as Mitta cut the precious fabric.

Lerato had put her whole heart into the design. Several long pattern pieces would create the illusion that the dress had been poured onto the bride's body with no visible seams connecting the little cap sleeves to the bodice or the bodice to the glorious flowing skirt. The effect was enhanced by cleverly disguising the vertical seams with small light reflecting beads and crystals. Seipathi was going to love it.

When Mitta had finished, Lerato went to check on Queen and Leola, who were doing alterations and on Josie, who was finishing the stitching on a dress for a client who was attending a prize-giving ceremony.

"Our team didn't win," the woman, a lecturer at the local university, had said, "but I'm damn well not going to sit in the corner and sulk about it." It had

taken all Lerato's skill to convince her client that "a cat suit of something shiny" was possibly not the most suitable choice. She had had to laugh when she imagined what Marcus's reaction would have been. She could picture him so vividly, standing with one hand on his hip and rolling his eyes. Sometimes when she was sitting working on a design in the evening, it was as if she could hear him talk. "If you want to do asymmetrical, do it properly, for Pete's sake – otherwise it just looks like you can't sew straight," he would say, drawing a bold line onto the sketch she had been labouring over for hours, or: "If you're going to cram that much detail into one dress you might as well use sack cloth – no-one's going to notice the fabric."

She moved on to Wallace, who was drawing a pattern for a design that Marcus had created months ago for a beauty pageant. They had been notified only after his death that his ball gown was one of the twelve that had been selected from the many designs submitted.

All too soon, another sweltering day was drawing to a close and Lerato gave the girls a last round of instructions before heading up the stairs to go and give her baby his next feed. Although she had just fed him a couple of hours ago at lunchtime, Lerato could hear him crying indignantly as she made her way to the upper level. When she reached the living room, she saw an exasperated Martha walking up and down and trying in vain to console the angry little bundle by gently bouncing him up and down, singing breathlessly all the while.

Lerato hurried over and took her son from Martha. He immediately stopped crying, grabbing onto Lerato's blouse with both hands and wildly nuzzling through her clothes in search of her breast. Lerato laughed. With her

free hand she took the light blanket from Martha and went to sit in one of the leather high back chairs facing the deck. Martha gratefully left the room as mother and baby settled into the by now familiar routine. Lerato relished this quiet time at the end of each busy day. As the little mouth eagerly took to her breast, she surrendered to the blissful sensation of everything around them fading into oblivion.

After a while, Lerato gently lifted him to switch him to the other breast. At almost a month old, he was an exquisitely beautiful baby. He was plump and strong, his creamy caramel skin irresistibly smooth and soft. The features of the little face were relaxed now, the eyes wide and placid as he focused on her face, one fist in danger of being crammed whole into his mouth.

Lerato could still not fathom the miracle of his existence. He was central to this new contentment she was feeling – the conviction that, regardless of the challenges that lay ahead, everything would turn out well.

She smiled down at him, gently pried the little hand away and presented him with the other breast, which he eagerly accepted.

She lay back against the chair, closing her eyes briefly. When she had finished feeding him, she would go and see what Martha was cooking. Matt was coming over later to discuss a contract with a boutique and she had invited him to stay for dinner.

She emerged from the dark tunnel that the river had carved from the rock over the ages and stood for a moment in the bright sunshine, squinting against the shards of light reflecting from the surface of the water. Her eyes followed the course of the river over a series of ridges to where it pooled and widened in

the green valley far below her. She took a big step onto a large round stone that lay almost in the middle of the stream.

The stone was smooth and hot against her skin as she sat down on it. She plunged her feet into the icy water, gasping at the thrill of it. She leant forward with her head between her knees, looking through the glassy water at her toes between the colourful pebbles on the riverbed.

She let her arms dangle next to her legs, looking at how the slow current caused the water to swirl around her fingers.

The gentle babble of the water over the stones, the soft sucking as it lapped against the shallow hollows in the banks, slowly drove all conscious thought from her mind.

She was no longer something apart from the landscape around her – her breathing was one with the rhythm of the river. There was no past and no future – only the blazing sun and the icy water, the solid rock and the moving stream.

She looked up, allowing the illusion to carry her away like she had often done as a child: suddenly the river stood still and it was the mountain that was moving and Lerato and the stone she was sitting on. She was on a journey from nowhere – and going nowhere – but moving all the while.

It was a subtle shift, a soft sound that had fallen silent, that tugged her back to consciousness. She woke to find little Marcus sleeping against her chest, his hands curled against the breast that had slipped from his mouth. She lowered her head until her cheek rested on her baby's downy scalp and slowly became aware of her surroundings again. When she lifted her head and

looked out onto the deck, she could see a billow of white cloud in the afternoon sky.

Holding the little body close, she slid out of the chair. She walked over to where his day crib stood against the wall and paused for a moment before laying him down. Her breathing was slow and even, her heartbeat steady under the soft warmth of the child in her arms. She smelled his sweet baby smell, mixing with that of Martha's cooking coming from the kitchen and something else – the breeze wafting in from the deck doors carrying the promise of rain. The awareness struck her with such force that she almost said the words out loud: I am Lerato. And this is my life.



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIT FOR CREATIVE WRITING

DEPARTMENT OF AFRIKAANS

The audacious white novelist: A phenomenological study of black¹ main characters in selected novels² by white South African authors

Desirée Homann

Student number: 88552269

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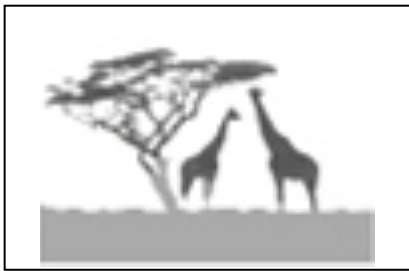
Supervisor: Prof HJ Pieterse

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¹ For the purposes of this study 'black' means, for lack of a better and more politically correct term, 'non-white'.

² The selected texts are: *Toiings* (Ragamuffin) by Mikro (1934), *Cry, the beloved Country* by Alan Paton (1948), *Swart Pelgrim* (Dark Pilgrim) by FA Venter (1952), *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena) by Elsa Joubert (1978), *Kennis van die Aand* (Looking on Darkness) by André P Brink (1973), *Proteus* (Heart of the Hunter) by Deon Meyer (2002), *Bidsprinkaan* (Praying Mantis) by André P Brink (2005), and *Lerato* by Desirée Homann (unpublished, 2011)

The mast head of Deon Meyer's website, where I searched for initial clues on how he came to choose a black man as the main character in his acclaimed novel *Proteus* (Heart of the Hunter) (2002), boasts a small picture of two giraffes under an acacia tree. At the bottom of the text on the inside of the back cover of Etienne van Heerden's *Asbesmiddag* (2007), which I read searching for clues about the relationship between fiction and reality, there is a small picture of the same two giraffes (it must be the same two), their necks twisted like a koeksister. Notwithstanding the claim by the cynical Irish redhead in Van Heerden's novel that this act of neck-knotting is a physical impossibility, as I progressed through the study, I spotted the giraffes (whom I nicknamed Fact and Fiction) performing their amazing tricks in each of the eight selected texts. Can you spot the knot?



“All ‘truths’ are only ‘our’ truths, because we bring to the ‘facts’ our feelings, our experiences, our wishes. Thus, storytelling – from wherever it comes – forms a layer in the foundation of the world; and glinting in it we see the trace elements of every tribe on earth.”

Frank Delaney in the author’s note to his novel *Ireland* (2004)

“Ek het dit vrywillig aanvaar soos dit aan my oorgelewer is, en ‘n mitiese moontlikheid kan waarder wees as feite”

Josef Malan in André P Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand* (*Looking on Darkness*) (1973)

“In these respects therefore, the story is not true, but considered as a social record, it is the plain and simple truth.”

Alan Paton in the author’s note to the first edition of his novel *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948)

ABSTRACT

The study takes an in-depth look at eight novels by white South African authors in which the main characters are black. The novels that were studied fell into two main categories, those that highlight (although not always to the same extent) the differences between white and black people and those in which the author takes care to depict the black main character as ‘a person just like any other’, or in which the emphasis is on the similarities between people regardless of race. The novels in the first category can be divided into purely fictional works on the one hand (*Toiings* (1934), *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) and *Swart Pelgrim* (1952)) and novels based on historical facts (*Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978) and *Bidsprinkaan* (2005)) on the other. In the fictional novels in this category, which are also the oldest/earliest of the selected novels, the narrator patronises the black main character, who is seen as naïve and in some cases at the mercy of baser urges. The researcher shows, however, that the intent of the authors was to gain the reader’s empathy for and understanding of the plight of the black character and, by implication, of black people in general. This applies regardless of whether the novel had an explicit political theme (e.g. *Cry, the Beloved Country*) or not (e.g. *Toiings*).

The novels in the second category, i.e. those in which black characters are portrayed as not substantively different from white characters (*Kennis van die Aand* (1973), *Proteus* (2002) and *Lerato* (unpublished, 2011)) also include novels in which the main theme is a political one (*Kennis van die Aand*) and those in which political issues are not central to the plot (*Proteus*) or in which there is hardly any reference to political issues at all (*Lerato*).

The outcomes of the study show that the intention of the authors of the studied novels in the pre-apartheid era was to promote understanding and reconciliation and not to strengthen divisive stereotypes. While this cannot be measured in empirical terms, anecdotal evidence suggests that literature does contribute to social change, albeit in an indirect manner. Despite the harsh criticism (particularly from black authors and scholars) of the practice by white authors to make use of black main characters, it can be argued that, within the South African context, such novels have played a role in achieving mutual understanding and reconciliation.

There is a notable shift in the post-apartheid novels. Rather than pleading the case of the black main character with the white audience, Meyer (2002) and Homann (2011) portray their black main characters as equal players in a diverse society. If literature is seen as a reflection of society, this is an encouraging sign that South Africa has substantively moved on from apartheid.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Literary analysis

Literary sociology

Politics

Fiction and reality

Fictional representation

Characterisation

Racism

Prejudice / bias

Stereotype

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Research questions

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the study topic and problem statement or research question(s). The rationale for and relevance of the study, the study approach and methodology (comparative socio-political literary analysis that comprises both an empirical survey of the selected text elements³ and a qualitative interpretation of the findings that is in part read against the work of other scholars in the field) will be described. The rationale for choosing specific texts as primary study texts for the study will be explained. This chapter will also provide the reader with a framework for the dissertation.

1.1 Primary research question

The primary question that the research project seeks to answer is: How and why do white South African novelists use black main characters in their texts?

1.1.1 Secondary research questions

Secondary research questions include the following:

³ A list of the text elements that will be analysed appears on page 17 in the introduction to Chapter 2.

- Can the representation of black main characters by white South African authors be categorised into different 'types'?
- What does the use of black main characters by white South African authors achieve?
- What is the role of the writer in a transforming society?
- What is the relationship between fiction and the socio-political reality of the day?
- What is the role of stereotype in texts by white South African authors in which the main characters are black?

1.1.2 Study aims

In an attempt to answer the research questions, the researcher aims to provide a critical comparative analysis of the selected texts that will seek to illuminate differences and similarities between them, possibly confirming the intuitive assumption that white South African authors represent black main characters in distinctly different ways. This emerging truth will lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of white authors who use black main characters and will also provide insight into different responses to the South African socio-political reality and how said responses precipitate in the literature genre under study.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The study theme emerged from the candidate's own novel, *Lerato* (2011, unpublished), in which the main character is a young black woman. The

dynamic of a white author attempting to write a narrative with a black protagonist and the questions that arise with regard to the character's (and, by implication, the author's) interaction with the socio-political reality in South Africa, provided the stimulus for pursuing this theme. As the author of one of the selected texts, the researcher enjoys an advantageous "closeness to the subject" (Flyvbjerg, 2001:63), which will add depth and insight to the study.

The researcher hopes that the project will contribute to the vast body of socio-political literary analyses of fictional texts in South Africa, including works such as those by Mphahlele (1962), February (1981), Coetzee (1988) and Attridge and Jolly (1998).

As far as could be ascertained, no previous study has been undertaken specifically on the representation of black main characters in texts by white South African authors. This study will therefore attempt to make a new contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this subject through a close comparative reading of the selected texts.

Apart from adding to the existing body of knowledge of socio-literary analysis through the phenomenon under study by discerning similarities and patterns (or the lack thereof) in the selected texts, it is hoped that the study will shed some light on the underlying perceptions and dynamic forces at work in shaping South Africa's socio-political reality. Hopefully, the insight thus gained will lead to greater awareness and increased mutual understanding between members of a very diverse citizenry.

The study will not only enrich the discourse on literary analysis, specifically in the South African context, but will also be of benefit to other study fields, including Sociology and Political Science.

1.3 Research methods

The study will consist of a phenomenological identification, analysis and comparison of different elements of the selected texts on the one hand and a qualitative interpretation of the findings on the other.

The phenomenological approach to research has its roots in the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), particularly his work *Logical Investigations* (translated by D Carr in 1970). The point of departure of a phenomenological study is intensive information gathering, for instance by way of interviewing, focus meetings, participant observation and (as is the case with this study) the close analysis of texts. The intense information gathering and description that characterises a phenomenological study makes it a suitable approach for small sample sizes. Husserl (1970) advocated embarking on a study without hypotheses or preconceptions, but more recent scholars (such as Plummer, 1983 and Stanley & Wise, 1993) argue that it is not possible for a researcher to take a wholly unbiased position. They view the researcher as an interested and subjective participant rather than an impartial observer. Husserl (1970) saw the objective of pure phenomenological research as describing rather than explaining phenomena. It is the nature of a phenomenological study to make detailed comments about specific situations, rather than to reach conclusions that can be generalised. However, adding an

interpretive dimension to the research enables it to inform theory and enrich practice.

The following research methods were used:

1.3.1 Literature survey

The core of the study is a close reading and comparative analysis of eight selected texts which will form the basis of the study. These texts are:

- *Toiings (Ragamuffin)* by Mikro, 1943
- *Cry, the beloved Country* by Alan Paton, 1948
- *Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim)* by FA Venter, 1952
- *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena)* by Elsa Joubert, 1978
- *Kennis van die Aand (Looking on Darkness)* by André P Brink, 1973
- *Proteus (Heart of the Hunter)* by Deon Meyer, 2002
- *Bidsprinkaan (Praying Mantis)* by André P Brink, 2005
- *Lerato* by Desirée Homann (unpublished), 2011

The selection of the above texts was done largely in an intuitive manner on the basis of the candidate's experience of the texts, an initial literature survey and discussions with other scholars on the matter. For ease of comparison, texts were limited to one genre, i.e. the novel. In order to include seminal works in this category in the study, it was decided not to limit the sample of study texts to a certain period in history. The date of publication of the texts

range from the 1930's to 2005. This ensures a sizeable study sample as well as the opportunity to draw distinctions or comparisons between older and more recent texts. Furthermore, text selection was not limited by gender (i.e. the texts were selected regardless of whether either the black main character or the author was male or female). (It was noted, though, that in the novels by male authors in the sample, the black main character was also male and in those by female authors, female.)

As this study is primarily an exercise in socio-political literary analysis, it was decided to confine the texts to works by South African authors. In the light of the phenomenon under study, only texts by white South African authors have been included. The said phenomenon is, of course, by no means limited to South Africa. For example, works in which white American authors make use of black main characteristics abound. One of the oldest and best known of these is certainly *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which was published in 1852.

In order to facilitate the comparison of elements in the different texts that were studied, it was decided to limit the texts to a specific genre. The novel was chosen on the basis of the author's own text being a novel. There are, as is to be expected, numerous texts in other genres by white South African writers in which black main characters also appear. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in dramas. Examples include *Boesman and Lena* by Athol Fugard, *Poppie* by Elsa Joubert, *Toiings op die langpad* by André P Brink and *Aku Vang 'n Ster* by Nico Luwes. (There are also examples in short stories, for example "Vir Siphon" by PJ Haasbroek and also in poems, as in "Mabalel" by

Eugène Marais (1925)) While most of the elements that have been focussed on in this study could also be discerned in the dramas mentioned above and these texts could therefore arguably have formed part of the present study, it was decided to limit the number of selected texts studied in the light of the nature and scope of this study. Limiting the number of texts for this study is also appropriate in the light of the required high level of detailed analysis (closeness of reading) of each of the texts in question. Expanding the study to include South African dramas could be the subject of another study.

As the study aims to enrich the existing discourse on socio-political and socio-linguistic readings of literature in South Africa, it was decided to focus on works by well-known authors (most of the texts received recognition in the form of awards and/or prizes⁴) and to add to the comparison the unpublished work, *Lerato* by the present author. The study furthermore focuses only on books aimed at an adult market and will therefore exclude children's literature and youth literature such as *Malisel en die tweeling* by WA Hickey.

The list of selected novels for this study is by no means exhaustive, since many other novels by white South African authors in which the main character is black do exist. One example is *Booia* by JRL van Bruggen (1931) which is regarded as a forerunner to *Toiings*. Another is *Moeder Poulin* by GH Franz (1946) in which the main character is a black woman. *Toiings*, the main character in Mikro's *Toiings*, is also the main protagonist in the other two

⁴ Mikro received the Hertzog Prize for *Toiings* in 1936 and Venter for *Swart Pelgrim* in 1961. Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was awarded the Anisfield-Wolf Saturday Review Award (1948), the Newspaper Guild of New York Page One Award (1949) and the London Sunday Times Special Award for Literature (1949). Joubert's *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* was awarded the CNA Prize in 1978, and the WA Hofmeyr and Louis Luyt Prizes in 1979. Brink's *Bidsprinkaan* was awarded the UJ Prize for Creative Work in 2006 and Meyer's *Proteus* was awarded the ATKV Prose Prize in 2003 and the Deutsche Krimi Preis in 2006.

novels that form part of the *Toiings* trilogy namely *Pelgrims* (1935) and *Vreemdelinge* (1944). In many of the novels by PJ Schoeman (1904-1988), such as *Sonogies, die die Swazie-prinsessie* (Sun-eyes, the Swazi princess) (youth novel) (1938), *Nobiyane, die Zoeloeminnaar* (Nobiyane, the Zulu lover) (1963), and *Pampata die beminde van koning Shaka* (Phampatha, the beloved of King Shaka) (1978), the main characters are black.

The selected texts will be read against analyses and critiques by various authors, sociological and political commentaries (e.g. February (1981), Schalkwyk (1986), Rampersad (1994), Van der Merwe (1994) and Mphahlele (2002)). A variety of texts on literary analysis and criticism was consulted as background reading, including the following categories:

- Scholarly books
- Journal articles
- Papers read at seminars and conferences
- Media reports
- Articles and commentary published on the internet.

1.3.2 Structured interviews / questionnaires

Interviews were conducted with Deon Meyer (in person) and Elsa Joubert (telephonically). This was supplemented by and compared with the self-reflexive input of the author on her own unpublished text, *Lerato*. André P Brink was regrettably not available for an interview. His memoir, *'n Vurk in die*

Pad (2009) provided valuable information, particularly in respect of *Kennis van die Aand* (1973).

As the purpose of this part of the research was to gather qualitative rather than empirical information, mostly open-ended questions were used, some of which related specifically to the text(s) by the author in question. Nonetheless, for purposes of comparing inputs made by different authors and discerning similarities or patterns, a number of standard questions were included in the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 2

CLOSE READING OF THE STUDY TEXTS

2. Format of the close reading of the study texts

In this chapter, the eight primary texts will each be discussed under the following headings:

- Background, plot and setting
- Black and white
- Characterisation
- Stereotype
- Narration and focalisation

In the discussion each text will be read against the other primary texts as well as against analyses and critiques by various scholars.

Although, as indicated in the title of this dissertation, the Afrikaans texts included in the comparative reading have all been translated into English, the original texts are used as a reference. This approach, also followed by other scholars (e.g. February, 1981), does not detract from the academic undertaking, nor does it impede the accessibility of the study to the English speaking reader, as all Afrikaans quotes are also presented in translated form. The translations are the researcher's own.

2.1 Close reading of the study texts

2.1.1 *Toiings (Ragamuffin)* by Mikro (CH Kühn), 1934⁵

2.1.1.1 Background, plot and setting

Mikro's *Toiings* (1934) is the earliest of the novels included in the comparative reading. Set in the Karoo, *Toiings* tells the story of a black (by all indications a Cape Coloured) farm worker named "Toiings" (literally, Tatters), who was abandoned by his parents as a young boy. Central to the plot is Toiings's search for love. After his first wife and true love, Siena, dies, he marries Griet, whom he believes is chosen for him by Siena from beyond the grave. This union proves to be disastrous and soon he chases Griet and her lover away. Pining for love, Toiings leaves the farm and becomes infatuated with a very popular woman from Upington, Drieka Wee. After unsuccessfully pursuing Drieka he finally finds happiness with Jannetjie and returns to the farm. The story spans several years of Toiings's adult life.

Apart from the farm, Kareeplaas, where Toiings works as a shepherd, parts of the story are also set in the locations (townships) of Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp. The contrast between life on the farm and life in the location is used to emphasize Toiings's characterisation as an outsider among his own people (p133): "*Dis 'n nag vir liefhê, as die Karoo-lug so stil om jou is, hy so klein voel hier in die onmeetlike afstande.*" (It is a night for love, when the Karoo air lies so quietly around one, with him feeling so small here in the immeasurable

⁵ All page references refer to the third edition of the novel (1979 print) that was published by Van Schaik in 1968.

space.) While the location (township for non-whites) is portrayed as a den of iniquity, the farm, in the words of February (1981:49), represents “peace, order and purity”. (Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp, where Toiings goes to spend his leave, are black townships or 'locations'.)

2.1.1.2 Black and white

In *Toiings* white and black are depicted as worlds apart. From the outset, it is clear that Toiings (whose real name is Frikkie Seland) is the underling and Fanie Naudé, his employer, the master (“*baas*”) and his wife the mistress (“*nôl*”).

On the first page of the novel the reader is told of the inhumane treatment that Toiings was subjected to under “*baas*” Pieter, on whose farm he lived before deserting and coming to Fanie Naudé’s farm, Kareeplaas. Although Toiings is only a child when he arrives at Kareeplaas, his body is covered in bruises. His reason for leaving “*baas*” Pieter is that he had not been able to stand the many whippings he received from him.

On the first morning after Toiings’s arrival on Kareeplaas, Naudé says to his wife (p7) that he has decided to 'keep' him: “*Miemie, ek dink gaan die klonkie maar hou....*’ ” (‘Miemie, I think I am going to keep the little mite/piccanin after all....’) The way in which Toiings is viewed as a possession, almost like a pet (as is also the case with Josef Malan and Kupido Kakkerlak in the two selected novels by André P Brink, 1973 and 2005) reflects the “benevolent

paternalism" (February, 1981) that characterised the Afrikaner's view of coloured people at the time.

In the same vein, Fanie Naudé is seen (p7) as a "*goeie, liewe baas*" (dear, good master) because he gives Toiings wine and eight days holiday over Christmas. The reader is told that the neighbours do not understand Naudé's extreme charity towards Toiings, which they take as an indication that Naudé loves Toiings (p7): "*n Mens moet iemand werklik lief hê as hy hom wyn en so baie vakansie gee.*" (One has to really love someone if you give him wine and such a lot of leave.)

When Toiings communicates with his master, he addresses him as "*baas*", which is interjected almost after every word (e.g. on p9): "*'Ja, Baas.... Baas Fanie?'*" "*Ja, Baas.*" "*Dis so, Baas.*" "*Baas, kyk môreaand wou ek graag....'*" ('Yes, Master....' 'Master Fanie?' 'Yes, Master.' 'It is true, Master. Master, well, tomorrow evening I would have liked to...')

On p8, Fanie Naudé views "*Ja, Baas*" (Yes, Master) as "*persoonlike bedanking vir 'n gesonde verhouding tussen baas en kneg*" (personal thanks for a sound relationship between master and servant). The inequality between Toiings and the white farmer and his family is clear from the fact that Toiings addresses the farmer and his children as "*baas*" (master/boss) and "*my kleinbasies*" (my little masters) respectively, while the farmer addresses Toiings by his first name (a nickname) only.

Throughout the novel there are marked differences between how whites and blacks are referred to. On p11, we read that Toiings "*nog steeds staan met sy hoed in die hand alhoewel die ander volkies rond sit en nie juis maak of daar wit mense naby is nie*". (still stands with his hat in his hands although the other workers sit around and do not really act as if there are white people close by). As mentioned before, whites are referred to as 'master' and 'mistress', while the black workers are referred to as "*volkies*" (workers) and "*bruin mense*" (coloureds). Toiings often refers to himself as a "*hotnot*", a "*jong*" or a "*klong*", all of which are today viewed as derogatory terms when used in reference to coloured people. On p24, Toiings wonders whether his son will be a "*meidjie*" or a "*klonkie*" – words commonly used at the time to refer to a black female and male child respectively. After the birth of his son, Dawid, Toiings always refers to him as his "*klonkie*", rather than his "*seuntjie*", which is the word that would have been used to refer to a white child. The black women in the novel are referred to throughout as "*meide*" – the female form of the derogatory term "*kaffers*".

Toiings and his ilk do not live in a house, like white people do, but in a "*stroois*". Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp, where Toiings goes to spend his leave, are black townships or "locations".

2.1.1.3 Characterisation of Toiings

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that Toiings's 'blackness' ('non-whiteness') is apparent from the start. From the outset, the narrator

places him in the position of black servant in relation/contrast to the white master.

Toiings is portrayed as extremely naïve and does not question his 'place in life'. This is clear from his reverence for his mistress, Miemie Naudé, p9: *"Maar nou is Toiings eers skaam, want sy respek vir sy nôï het geen grense nie en is so opreg dat hy skaars in die kombuis wil kom as sy daar is. Bruin mense hoort nie in die baas se huis nie!"* (But now Toiings is even shyer, because his respect for his mistress knows no bounds and is so genuine that he almost does not want to go into the kitchen when she is there. Coloureds do not belong in the master's house!) Toiings even feels (p13): *"Die baas behoort sy volkies meer te slaan, dan deug 'n mens tog"* (The master should give his volkies more hidings, for then one is a better person.)

Toiings is very loyal to his master. On p11, he brags about him to his visitors: *' "Oompie Jan, julle base mag ryk wees en blink motors hê, maar my baas Fanie is die beste baas in hierdie kontrei." '* (Uncle Jan, your masters may well be rich and drive shiny cars, but my master Fanie is the best master in this region.) On p13, Toiings states that he would rather lose Siena than one of his master's sheep. Toiings does not want his wife to work, but gladly/readily(?) accepts that she has to work for mistress Miemie (p17): *"Nee, Siena. 'n Vrou van my sal nie werk nie. Vir nôï Miemie werk is nou 'n ander ding. Daarvoor gee ek nie om nie. '"* (No, Siena. No wife of mine will work. Well, working for mistress Miemie is something else. That does not bother me.) Toiings's aspiration for his son, Dawid, is that he will one day look after the sheep of Naudé's son, Bennie – *"Hulle sou so met Dawid kamta*

eendag spog. Hy moet nog eendag by kleinbaas Bennie skaap-oppas en nou sal Siena dit nooit sien nie" (p35) (They would brag with Dawid one day. He still has to look after little master Bennie's sheep one day and now Siena will never see it.) On p38 Toiings feels proud that Dawid will work for a master one day and will not sit on the store verandas like Jan's son Verus.

Toiings is presented to the reader as a kind of man-child whose experience of life remains at a very basic level. This is clear from Toiings's intermittent obsession with finding himself a "*meid*" and also from his brief obsession with making money. On p19, one reads that "*...van daardie dag af dink Toiings net aan twee dinge – name vir sy kinders en hoe om gou ryk te word....*" (...from that day Toiings thinks of two things only – names for his children and how to get rich quickly....) The patronising view of Toiings that is apparent from the narration as a whole is echoed in the seemingly kind words of his master on page 19: "*Ek sien een van die dae is jy ryker as ek*" (I see that one of these days you will be richer than me) to which Toiings responds "*Ai tog! Baas, hoe kan Baas dan nou so sê!*" (Goodness! Master, how can Master say such a thing!).

The narrator attempts to endear Toiings to the reader through his naivety, and to evoke pity for his suffering/low standing. Yet, the supposition is not that the reader should get to know Toiings as an equal, but rather that the reader would develop an understanding of him as an inferior being.

The humour in the novel derives from presenting Toiings as the clown, the buffoon (see also February, 1981). This is apparent from the following and many suchlike examples from the text:

- The way in which he prays (p13): *"Liewe Oubaas, ek is Toiings. Ek pas skaap op by baas Fanie, en ek het Siena lief. Ja, Baas. Amen"* (Dear Old Master, I am Toiings. I look after the sheep of baas Fanie, and I love Siena. Yes, Master, Amen);
- the borrowed outfits he wears to Dawid's christening (p30);
- his wedding to Griet (p45);
- the way in which he chooses his son's names Dawid Goliat Filistyn, which can be translated as David Goliath Philistine (p32) and
- the description of Toiings playing rugby for the Never Sweats (p97) among other things.

In characterising Toiings, however, the focus is not primarily on the fact that he is a black man in a world dominated by whites, but on the fact that he is an outsider among his own people (this is supported by Van der Merwe, 1994:24). On p43 we read that Toiings is uncomfortable in the presence of his friends: *"Toiings voel daar tussen hulle so uit sy plek uit. 'n Wees-bobbejaantjie kan nooit slegter voel nie, dink hy."* (Toiings feels very much out of place between them. An orphaned baby baboon cannot feel more out of place, he thinks.) Oompie Dissel (another character in the novel) says of Toiings on p57: *"Wat sal hy vir Toiings sê? Die arme man is so gemaak dat hy elkeen vertrou. Sulke mense hoort nie op 'n dorp waar al die euwels sommer helder oor dag rondloop nie."* (What should he tell Toiings? The poor man trusts everyone. Such people should not be in a town where all the evils are to

be found even in daylight.). Toiings hears how he is being laughed at by the other "volgies" after taking Drieka Wee for a walk and being teased by Bakkies Spyker about it (p92).

As is the case with all outsider characters, Toiings suffers as a result of his 'otherness' (p106): *"Ander volgies..... waarom is hy so aanmekeer gesit dat hy nie soos ander volgies is nie. Hy wens hy was soos Dampies of Daat Plakkies of al was dit dan maar soos Bakkies Spyker."* (Other "volgies".... why was he not created to be the same as other "volgies". If only he could be like Dampies or Daat Plakkies or even like Bakkies Spyker.). On p133 the focalisation shifts to Drieka to emphasise the characterisation of Toiings as an outsider: *"Maar Drieka verstaan hierdie hotnot nie. Vir haar is dit net doodsnaks dat oompie Toiings nou juis vir haar lief het. Sy sal dit tog vir die ander volgies vertel. Ander hotnots sê sommer vir jou – het jy 'n bok? Olraait! ek sal nou jou bok wees. Maar oompie Toiings weet nie hoe snaaks hy is nie."* (But Drieka doesn't understand this *hotnot*. For her it is just very funny that uncle Toiings loves her of all people. She will have to tell this to the other "volgies". Other "*hotnots*" will just come to you and say – do you have a "bok"? All right! I'll be your "bok" now. But uncle Toiings doesn't know how funny he is.).

Toiings is portrayed as essentially a child of nature. He feels uneasy in the the location (township). Toiings and Siena return to the farm quickly after their wedding, because (p15) *".... nie een van hulle hou van die lokasielewe nie"* (not one of them likes life in the location). Soon after leaving Kareeplaas for Blikkiesdorp, Toiings misses home (p91): *"Nou hy hier is, kan hy soms so*

verlang na Kareeplaas, die vaal rante en die mofdrop." (Now that he is here, he sometimes really misses Kareeplaas, the vaal ridges and the "mofdrop" (flock of sheep).) On p132 the reader is told that *"die verlange na 'n opregte liefde het van hom weer die kind van die natuur gemaak"* (the longing for sincere love made him the child of nature once again). References to the Karoo-flora, including "gannabos", "ghaap", "kambro" and "asbos", contribute to this characterisation.

The characterisation of Toiings as a child of nature goes further, even to the point where parallels are drawn between Toiings (and in some cases the other coloured people) and different kinds of animals. Toiings misses his pregnant wife when a donkey mare has a foal (p25), he feels like an orphaned baby baboon among his coloured friends (p43) and when Dawid is ill (p128): *"[hou] sy oë [...] weemoed soos die wat 'n mens soms in 'n redelose dier se oë sien."* (his eyes are filled with the sadness one sometimes sees in the eyes of a dumb animal). On page 139 "Oompie Dissel", Toiings's confidante, explains to Toiings that people are like donkeys, and that he, Tant Bet and Jannetjie are donkeys of the same class. Toiings agrees and adds that people are also in some respects like goats. This echoes the way black people are perceived by Beukes and Lategan (1959) that "Just as the wild animal of our country [...] had to give us the animal story, so also the Coloureds and the African intimately connected with Afrikaner life were bound to find their way into Afrikaans fiction" (quote translated by February, 1981).

Toiings has a very poor self-image, which the narrator relates to the fact that he was abandoned by his parents at a very young age. Examples illustrating Toiings's poor image of himself abound:

- On page 16 he calls himself a "*slegte hotnot*" (bad *hotnot*) and is grateful that Siena is willing to have him as her husband;
- he fears that his son will look like him, because then he would be ugly - (p24);
- he describes himself as a "*toiinglap*" (old/tattered rag) on the rubbish heap (p28);
- feels that he rightly deserves the name Toiings (p35)
- he also feels that he doesn't deserve the office of deacon in the church (p80).

2.1.1.4 **Stereotype**

The narrator presents a very stereotypical view of black people in general. They are characterised as a jolly, alcohol swilling bunch of people often at the mercy of their baser, particularly sexual, instincts – although the latter is portrayed in a rather covert manner, mostly through the contest between the Blikkiesdorp men for the affections of Drieka Wee, the "*meid*" from Upington. This description of coloured characters tallies with the earliest observations made by European explorers of Hottentots at the Cape (Coetzee, 1988; February, 1988) and is found in earlier works such as South Africa's oldest surviving play, CE Boniface's *De Temperantisten* (1832) and also the play *Kaatje Kekkelbek* by Andrew Geddes Bain, which was first performed at the Cape in 1838. Although Toiings is depicted as an outsider, he displays the

same vices. Already in the first chapter, Toiings asks his master for an extra bottle of wine for Christmas. His visitor, "Oompie Jan", says to Siena: "*Siena, kan jy nie sien Toiings soek meid nie?*" (Siena, can't you see Toiings is looking for a woman?) (p10).

It is not only the way in which Toiings is characterised that is stereotypical – the same can be said of the portrayal of "Baas Fanie" as the good master. Van der Merwe (1994) remarks that Toiings's deep respect for his master and madam is portrayed as part of his innate 'goodness'. According to Van der Merwe (1994) this subservience was a pre-requisite for positive black stereotypes in early Afrikaans literature. Blacks who refused to be subservient were either branded as barbaric and blood thirsty, or as stupid and lazy.

2.1.1.5 Narration and focalisation

The story is narrated in the third person. As indicated above, the narrator portrays Toiings in a patronising manner. He is viewed almost as a child that has to be in the custody of a white master (see also Gerwel, 1983). Van der Merwe (1994), however, feels that the patronising tone of the narration diminishes as the novel progresses.

The narrator presents the divide between white and black, between master and servant, uncritically. No judgement is passed, for example, on issues such as corporal punishment of farm workers, providing farm workers with liquor as compensation, the living conditions of workers or the existence of 'blacks only' locations. In addition to being openly and unashamedly racist,

the narrator is also sexist, giving no voice whatsoever to the “meide” in the novel, thereby implying that the practice of domestic abuse of women is a mere instance of fact, not worthy of any comment or criticism. On page 140, “oompie Dissel” says to Toiings that, had he married Drieka Wee, he would have had to give her a hiding on the very first night they were married. Toiings agrees.

The sense of place in the novel is enhanced by the narrator’s use of words and turns of phrase specific to the Karoo region, e.g. “kwansel”, “basta”, “norring”, “baster”, “omgesukkel” as well as the characteristic plant names referred to in 2.1.1.3 above.

The focalisation takes place mostly through the thoughts and words of the main character. However, there are a couple of instances where the omniscient narrator also relates the thoughts of other characters, e.g. those of Toiings’s master and mistress. These shifts are often used to display to the reader the affinity that Fanie and Miemie Naudé feel for Toiings, e.g. on p 11: *“Baas Fanie en nôï Miemie het nog so ‘n rukkie vertoef en toe is hulle huis toe. Hulle voel hulle het hul plig teenoor Toiings gedoen”* (Master Fanie and mistress Miemie stayed a little while longer and then went home. They feel that they have done their duty towards Toiings.) and on the same page: *“As nôï Miemie haar weer omdraai kry sy die gedagte dat daar eendag in die hemel seker ook ‘n bruinkoor sal wees”* (When mistress Miemie turns around again, she has a thought that there will one day probably be a coloured choir in heaven). After Toiings and Dawid joins the Naudés for carol singing, the narrator says (p78): *“Die baas en jong verstaan mekaar so goed dat Fanie*

Naudé omdraai en in die huis instap sonder om verder te praat." (Master and servant understand each other so well that Fanie Naudé turns around and walks into the house without saying anything else). On page 84, when Toiings leaves Kareeplaas, "*[haak] Miemie [...] by haar man in soos hulle daar op die stoep staan en in albei se harte voel dit skielik so leeg*" (Miemie takes her husband's arm as they stand there on the porch and both their hearts suddenly feel so empty). On page 86, Fanie hears Toiings's donkey cart as he leaves the farm and thinks: "*Toiings besef nie hoe geheg 'n mens aan hom word nie*" (Toiings doesn't realise how attached one becomes to him).

2.1.2 *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, 1984⁶

2.1.2.1 Background, plot and setting

Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was first published in 1948. Nadine Gordimer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991 in an interview with the Observer called this book "the most influential South African novel ever written". In the author's note to the first edition, Paton explains that, except for two, all the characters in the book are fictional, but adds "In these respects therefore, the story is not true, but considered as a social record, it is the plain and simple truth."

The novel tells the story of Stephen Kumalo, a Zulu parson from Ndotsheni in what is today Kwa-Zulu Natal, who travels to Johannesburg to find out what

⁶ All page references refer to the 2002 London Vintage edition of the novel.

has happened to his only son, Absalom, who had left home to look for work in the city. At the same time he hopes to find out more about his sister Gertrude and his brother John, who have also gone to Johannesburg some time ago, but have stopped writing home. Another resident of Ndotsheni, one Sibeko, asks Kumalo to enquire after his daughter, who has also disappeared in the city. Structured around a plot that is referred to by Lewis Nkosi (quoted in February, 1981:83) as 'Jim comes to Jo'burg', the novel takes the reader on a journey with Stephen Kumalo that fluctuates between hope and despair. After Kumalo has found Gertrude and brought her back to Mrs Lithebe's house near the Mission, he "was light-hearted and gay like a boy, more so than he had been for years. One day in Johannesburg, and already the tribe was being rebuilt, the house and the soul restored." (p31). This leads the reader to hope that Absalom would be found equally easily, which proves not to be the case, since Absalom was arrested for and found guilty of the murder of the son of James Jarvis, who farms at Carisbrooke, not far from Ndotsheni.

James Jarvis comes to Johannesburg to bury his son and to support his daughter in law. Stephen Kumalo meets Jarvis when he visits the house in search of news on Sibeko's daughter. Despite the tragic events that surround their meeting, there is mutual respect between the two.

When Stephen Kumalo returns to Ndotsheni, he is visited by Jarvis' young grandson who subsequently reports to his father that children are dying because there is no milk. Jarvis begins sending cans of milk to the parsonage on a daily basis. He furthermore arranges for a dam to be built at Ndotsheni

and for an agricultural demonstrator to teach the residents sustainable farming methods.

The book ends with Stephen Kumalo going up the mountain to hold a vigil for his son the night before he is to be hanged.

The story is narrated in chronological sequence and is set in the reality of the day at the time the book was written. It spans about two months from the time that Stephen Kumalo sets out for Johannesburg to the day of his son's hanging.

The story unfolds in two very contrasting locations, namely the Umzimkulu Valley in Kwa-Zulu Natal where Carisbrooke and Ndotsheni are located, and the city of Johannesburg. The contrasts between these two settings are vividly described. It is, however, not presented as the idyllic rural environment versus the evil city. Both Johannesburg and the Umzimkulu valley bear the ill effects of the breakdown of native tribal life. The novel opens with a lyrical description of 'the road that runs from Ixopo into the hills' (as does Book II), but soon places the well-tended, fertile high ground in stark contrast to the valley, which is barren because of erosion and over-grazing. On page 8 we read: "The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them anymore", and somewhat later Kumalo's wife says: "When people go to Johannesburg, they do not come back." (p11).

The need to heal and restore the land takes a central place in the novel. The author states in his note to the 1987 edition: "Perkins told me that one of the

most important characters in the book was the land of South Africa itself. He was quite right. The title of the book confirms his judgement.” Stephen Kumalo’s love of the land is apparent from early in the novel, for example when he discusses the brokenness of rural communities with the people he encounters at the mission on p22. On p152 James Jarvis is also called “a man of the soil”.

2.1.2.2 Black and white

The book is, by the author’s own admission, a “social record” (author’s note, first edition). Through the narration of Stephen Kumalo’s journey to Johannesburg, his search for his son and the events that take place after his return to Ndotsheni, a wide variety of aspects of what is referred to as the 'native issue' is addressed.

The difference between black and white is apparent from early on in the novel and it is clear that the intention is to show /reveal/highlight and discuss these differences rather than gloss them over. When the reader first meets him, Stephen Kumalo’s name and the use of the Zulu word “umfundisi” (parson) to address him, signal his race. The child who brings him the letter about Gertrude says (p8): “The white man asked me to bring it to you”.

In this first encounter with the Kumalos there is also another clue that South African race relations are to play a significant role in the story. After having quarrelled with Kumalo about the letter from Msimangu, Kumalo’s wife (p12) “sat down at his table, and put her head on it, and was silent, with the patient

suffering of black women, with the suffering of oxen, with the suffering of any that are mute”. This echoes the animal imagery that is often used when white authors describe black characters, particularly their helplessness in the face of suffering (see discussion of Mikro’s *Toiings* in paragraph 2.1.1 above).

The theme of fear that is introduced on pages 13 and 14 of the novel and which is often juxtaposed by love, runs throughout the novel. It is brought to bear not only on the bewilderment Kumalo experiences in the city of Johannesburg, but also on the over-arching theme of black/white relations in South Africa, or rather, the relationship between 'natives' and 'Europeans' as black and white people were respectively referred to in the language of the day. When Kumalo first meets the other priests at the Mission, he hears how “white Johannesburg is afraid of black crime” (p22). On page 25, Msimangu says: “It is fear that rules this land.” On page 96, Father Vincent says to Kumalo: “My friend, your anxiety turned to fear, and your fear turned to sorrow. But sorrow is better than fear. For fear impoverishes always, while sorrow may enrich.” When he guides Kumalo into prayer a little while later, he says: “Pray for all white people, those who do justice, and those who would do justice if they were not afraid” (p98). The theme of fear is carried through to the closing paragraph of the novel: “But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret” (p236).

On p14 we are told that there are mostly black travellers on the train from Carisbrooke, “for the Europeans of this district all have their cars, and hardly travel by train any more.” Kumalo climbs into the carriage for 'non-Europeans'.

In his bewildering first experience of Johannesburg, Kumalo for the first time comes face to face with the issue of 'black crime' when a young black man offers to go and buy him a bus ticket and cons him out of a pound (p19). The issue of 'native crime' is again touched upon in Kumalo's first discussion with the other priests at the Mission (p22), where it is directly linked with the 'broken house, young men and young girls who went away and forgot their customs, who lived loose and idle lives.' In a private discussion with Kumalo, Msimangu later says (p25): "The white man has broken the tribe [...] That is why children break the law, and old white people are robbed and beaten."

When Msimangu takes Kumalo to meet his (Stephen Kumalo's) brother John, who is a political activist, John speaks of the chief of Ndotsheni who is 'a white man's dog' (p34), a description Stephen Kumalo later uses to refer to himself (p230). He also blames the church for inaction and encouraging people to be "meek and obedient" (p34). John tells Kumalo that the wealth generated by the mines (and therefore by black labour) is used to increase the riches of whites while keeping black South Africans in poverty (p34 and 35).

Through his experience of the bus boycott (p40), Kumalo comes to learn of mass action and poverty, and when Hlabeni directs him and Msimangu to the Orlando Shantytown, he becomes aware of the phenomenon of squatter camps (p46). Kumalo's experience of the Ezenzeleni mission to the blind is presented as a 'best practice example' of white charity towards black people (p80).

The racial prejudice that was prevalent at the time of writing the novel is prevalent throughout the book. Absalom's crime is deemed more serious because it was a white man that he killed. Kumalo exclaims: "But that he should kill a man, a white man!" (p78) and when John Kumalo is told of Absalom's arrest, John thinks "One does not jest about murder. Still less about the murder of a white man." When Kumalo tells his son's fiancé of Absalom's crime, he says: "He is in prison, for the most terrible deed that a man can do..... He has killed a white man" (p99).

Apart from bringing to light a wide variety of the social issues of the day as the plot unfolds, there are many instances where the author uses narrative to provide the reader with more information on the issues at hand. On p37, Msimangu enters into a long soliloquy about 'power' and how black men are often corrupted by power. He ends by stating: "I see only one hope for our country, and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it."

The housing shortage, the corruption of the so-called 'housing committees', the establishment and hardships of the Orlando Shanty Town squatter community (informal settlement) are addressed through the narration of the experiences of characters that have not been introduced to the reader before and who do not play any further role in the novel (one Mrs Seme and her husband in Chapter 9 of Book I).

The issue of 'native crime' is 'debated' in the first part of Chapter 12 of Book I (pages 67 to 72) through a series of different perspectives, i.e. that of white government and community committees, the tennis and golf playing white elite, and also that of the narrator. Through the use of these different voices, the author succeeds in conveying a sense of the complexity of the problem. As is the case throughout the novel, one is left with the realisation that there is no simple answer and that how the issue will be resolved remains a mystery, or a 'secret', which is the word the novelist uses to refer to such mysteries.

The same approach is followed on page 82, when the narrator presents different views (from the government, racist whites and black activists) on Msimangu's ministry. Strong examples of the narrator entering into the 'debate' around the 'native issue' are the papers written by Arthur Jarvis and which are presented to the reader as his father, James Jarvis, reads them after Arthur's murder (pp126, 127, 134, 150 and 151).

There are a number of phrases that are repeated throughout the novel. This repetition gives them special significance, for example, where the theme of fear is developed, the phrase "have no doubt it is fear....." is often used, e.g. on p 46 (of the taxi owner Hlabeni): "Have no doubt too that this man is afraid." Also on p67: "Have no doubt it is fear in the land" and again on p86 (of John Kumalo when he hears that Absalom had been arrested for the murder of Arthur Jarvis): "Have no doubt it is fear in the eyes."

Where examples of segregation and discrimination between white and black are shown, we encounter the phrase "as is the custom", e.g p137: "At the

back of the Court there are seats rising in tiers, those on the right for Europeans, those on the left for non-Europeans, according to the custom'. Where these 'customs' are broken, the phrase 'for such a thing is not lightly done' is often used (e.g. p47, p174 etc.) When James Jarvis's grandson raises his cap and says 'good morning' to him, Stephen Kumalo is astonished that the boy "should not know the custom" (p199).

Other such phrases are those that contain the lamentation 'cry', from which the book derives its title, e.g. on p66: "Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone. Aye, and cry aloud for the man who is dead, for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end." And on p72: "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear."

The novel is at pains to characterize the 'native issue' and the manifestations thereof as a result of socio-economic forces. Readers do not get to know characters such as John, Gertrude or Absalom well enough to understand the personal motivation for their actions. We are not given to understand anything of Absalom Kumalo's personal culpability for the murder of Arthur Jarvis. In Absalom's discussions with his father, he claims not to know why he broke into the Jarvis home. This is in stark contrast with the manner in which Josef Malan is portrayed in Brink's (1973) *Kennis van die Aand*.

2.1.2.3 Characterisation

Stephen Kumalo is portrayed as an educated man of some significance in his community. The child who brings him the letter from Msimangu is in awe of his “great house, a house with tables and chairs, and a clock, and a plant in a pot, and many books, more even than the books at the school” (p8). On p227 we read that Kumalo knew about Napoleon Bonaparte, knowledge that was probably shared by very few of his black peers at that time.

Kumalo is called 'humble' (p15 and again on p16), but he is also aware of the difference between him and "the humbler people of his race" (p14). On the train, he “looked around, hoping there might be someone with whom he could talk, but there was no one who appeared of that class” (p15).

Despite his clerical background, Kumalo is not characterised as a saint, but as a normal, flawed individual. But Kumalo is a spiritually aware man who confesses his “sins” during his vigil on the mountain the night before his son is put to death (p233).

The theme of fear that was earlier referred to is also used in the characterisation of Stephen Kumalo. Kumalo’s fears about the journey to Johannesburg, for instance, are listed on p15 and include: “Deep down the fear of a man who lives in a world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away, dying, being destroyed, beyond any recall.”

Although Stephen Kumalo is regarded in Ndotsheni as a sophisticated man – a man who reads and writes and does arithmetic (he keeps the church accounts) – he is in certain respects extremely naïve. This is apparent from his amazement at the animated billboard advertising “Black&White” whiskey as the train enters Johannesburg and the description of the modern bathroom in the Mission: “It would have frightened you if you had not heard of such things before” (p21). According to Coetzee (1988) Paton uses this exaggerated naivety, which is also reflected in the speech of the fellow Zulu traveller who explains to Kumalo how mining works, to portray the rural Zulu as 'different' and, more specifically, as 'simple'.

Very subtly, the reader is given the impression that Stephen Kumalo’s humility and servile attitude comes at a cost to him. On p93 we read: “Kumalo struggled within himself. For it is thus with a black man, who has learned to be humble and who yet desires to be something that is himself.”

John Kumalo is characterised almost as the opposite of his brother Stephen. John is a lay politician who has turned his back on the church and does not show the humility of Stephen, but has a voice “like the voice of a bull or a lion” (p34). There are hints in the text that John is not very intelligent. He seems to be a well to do business man and has a telephone (p36).

John has become a man of the city who prefers to speak English (p33): “Do you mind if I speak English? I can explain these things better in English.” Yet, he does not know the word “fidelity” (p36). He reproaches Stephen and the people in Ndotsheni for not understanding “the way life is in Johannesburg”

(p33), where they are building a “new society” (p34) to replace the tribal society that is breaking apart.

The rift between the two brothers also manifests in the plot when John betrays Stephen by advising his son to deny that he was with Stephen’s son Absalom on the night of the murder (p92).

2.1.2.4 Stereotype

The narrator attempts to be even-handed in his telling. For instance, while it is stated that “white Johannesburg was afraid of black crime” (p22), one of the priests adds: “And it is not only the Europeans that are afraid. We are also afraid, right here in Sophiatown.”

As indicated above under 2.1.2.2 (Black and white), in the passages where aspects of the 'native issue' are debated, the narrator often presents the viewpoints of different groups or individuals in an attempt to avoid bias and to convey the complexity of the issue. For example, on page 113, we read: “Some people said....” and “Some said....” and also “But there were many sides to such a question....” and “And indeed there was still another argument....”.

While speaking of white men who are responsible for “breaking the tribe” (p25), Msimangu adds: “They are not all so. There are some white men who give their lives to build up what is broken.” Such white men appear in the story in the characters of Father Vincent, Arthur Jarvis and John Harrison.

During the bus boycott, we are told that some white people give blacks lifts (p47).

On the whole, however, the novel fails to move beyond the 'us' and 'them' of 'natives' and 'Europeans'. Furthermore, the overall impression is created that blacks are ignorant, for example on p113: "Something might have been done if these people had only learned how to fight erosion...." and "...the people were ignorant and knew nothing about farming methods" and that, as a result of the destruction of their tribal structures, they are prone to crime and other social evils. The narrator says of the native policemen who stand guard at the rally addressed by John Kumalo on p159: "Who knows what they think of this talk, who knows if they think at all?" And on p162 we read of the black mine workers: "They are simple people, illiterate, tribal people, an easy tool in the hand."

Parker (1978:8) is scathing in his criticism of Paton, Cope and other so-called 'white liberal' authors of the time and refers to a number of "recurring themes": "all Afrikaners are baddies; all blacks are goodies – unless they are politicians, in which case they are corrupt; all priests are goodies, although white priests and Anglican priests in particular, are better goodies than black priests". According to Parker (1978:11), Paton's novels are 'romantic' in that they put forward the view that blacks can still be offered a fair deal if whites have a change of heart (see also Rich, 1984).

2.1.2.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person and the focalisation is that of the main character, Stephen Kumalo.

While generally endeavouring to present a balanced, non-stereotypical view, the narration does seem to carry a hint of sexism. The main players in the book are male. The female characters have conventional female roles and remain, for the most part, without voice. In the reader's first encounter with the Kumalo's, Stephen's wife (who remains nameless through most of the novel) is "silent with the patient suffering of black women" (p12). Later, John Kumalo's common law wife remains nameless and so does Absalom Kumalo's pregnant girlfriend. (There are, however, also male characters who remain nameless, e.g. Gertrude's young son, the white man (and his black assistant) from the reformatory, Kumalo's friends who help carry their bags when they return to Ndotsheni). Absalom Kumalo asks for his child to be called Peter if it is a boy, but has no suggestions for a name if it is a girl (p176).

The language in which the novel is narrated is somewhat stilted and old fashioned, which, according to Coetzee (1988) is a subtle tool used by Paton (and other authors, such as Pauline Smith) to suggest something of a backwardness, a childlike naiveté in the focalisation. The language suggests that Stephen Kumalo comes from an 'old order' that has difficulty adapting to the 'new world' of the 'white man'.

2.1.3 *Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim)* by FA Venter, 1952⁷

2.1.3.1 Background, plot and setting

Swart Pelgrim by FA Venter was first published in 1952, four years after Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*.

There are strong parallels between *Swart Pelgrim* and Paton's novel, particularly as far as the plot is concerned. *Swart Pelgrim* also opens with a description of the land, which was once fruitful, but is now suffering as a result of overgrazing and erosion, which, as in Paton's novel, is exacerbated by the ways of cultivation by the rural community. In the first two chapters the state of the land and the fact that the young people from the community leave for the cities, is introduced as the main theme of the book.

Again echoing Paton's storyline, the black main character, Kolisile, plans to leave his rural community for Johannesburg, firstly to earn money, but also to look for his brother, Mfazwe, who left for Johannesburg years ago and never returned. Like Stephen Kumalo in Paton's novel, Kolisile undertakes the journey to Johannesburg by train.

In the city, Kolisile finds work in a mine. He is told by his fellow mine workers that his brother Mfazwe has turned 'bad'. Kolisile leaves to seek work elsewhere. When he asks a white woman for work as a gardener, she sets her dog on him. He is cared for by a woman, Miriam, and helps to sell the

⁷ All page references refer to the 1961 school edition of the novel.

baskets woven by her old husband, Mafasoe. Kolisile falls in love with Miriam, who is arrested for brewing and selling liquor. He manages to find his brother Mfazwe, who runs a crime syndicate, and becomes involved in crime himself. However, he cannot bring himself to steal from the old white woman whose house he breaks into and decides to go back to work on the mine. He survives a mining accident and decides to return home to his wife and children.

The improbability of the fact that almost everyone Kolisile comes into contact with in Johannesburg knows, or has been in contact with his brother Mfazwe, detracts from the credibility of the plot.

The novel spans about two years “two harvests” (p17) that Kolisile spends in Johannesburg, and is narrated in chronological sequence. The duality between city life and Kolisile’s rural home, which represents an old way of life with the emphasis on the land that needs to be healed, reminds strongly of Paton’s novel.

2.1.3.2 Black and white

Van der Merwe (1994: 39,40) describes *Swart Pelgrim* as one of the first Afrikaans attempts at depicting the black man as a person suffering a measure of injustice in “white” cities and views the work as “a novel of great historical importance”. That this should be so despite the fact that a novel with a very similar theme was published in English a decade before Venter’s novel appeared, is significant. It seems to indicate that the publication of such

a novel *in Afrikaans* was of particular importance. Not only does this point towards the fact that *Cry, the Beloved Country* did not have a large readership among white Afrikaans speaking South Africans, but it could also be taken to indicate that this group lagged behind their English speaking counterparts in terms of the “political awakening”, which in Afrikaans literature reached its peak in the late sixties and early seventies.

Hints as to the main character’s cultural background are given when the reader first encounters him at the beginning of the novel. Not only Kolisile’s name, but also the imagery of tribal warriors used to describe the fields of maize (“*Hulle staan nie meer soos sterk stryders wat die skildvelle voor hulle uit stoot nie*” (They no longer stand like strong warriors pushing the shields out in front of them) (p7) and the land, as well as references to women filling their clay pots at the fountain (“*Net af en toe klim stemme uit die fontein op, waar vroue hul kruike met water vul*” (Only now and again voices sound from the fountain where the women fill their pots with water)) and to a young boy herding cattle (“*Ver teen die hang skreeu ‘n pikkenien op die kalwers.*” (Far up on the slope a piccannin shouts to the calves)) (p8) suggest a tribal culture and rural lifestyle.

On page 8, reference is made to the “words of the white man” (woorde van die witman). ‘The white man’ is presented almost as the antithesis to Kolisile’s father, Mbanjwa, when Mbanjwa says on p13 “*Die witman praat goed waarvan hy nie weet nie. Hy ken sy grond; hy ken nie ons grond nie. Julle glo die witman, maar julle glo nie vir Mbanjwa nie.*” (The white man speaks of

things he does not know of. He knows his soil; he does not know our soil. You believe the white man, but you do not believe Mbanjwa).

The difference between white and black is therefore apparent from the outset. Johannesburg is described as (p15, 20, 22, 29, etc): "die groot plek van die witman"; "die stad van die witman" (the big place/city of the white man). "The white man" is used to refer in a generic sense to white people, but also to specific white people, e.g the conductor who tells Kolisile and his fellow travellers to stay on the train (p22) and the white foremen in the mine (p24). On p46 we read of Miriam's promise to "die witvrou wat na die swartmense omsien" (the white woman who looks after the black people).

When Kolisile refers to his youngest daughter, Tandiwe, he uses the word "*meidjie*" (p19), a derogatory term used exclusively to denote a black girl, rather than the generic "*dogtertjie*". He addresses the little white boy at the house where he asks for work as "*die wit basie*" (the little white boss/master) (p33). He uses "*miesies*" and "*baas*" (mistress and boss) to refer to white homeowners. Miriam's husband, Mafasoe, also addresses the "white woman who looks after the black people" as "*Mies*" (p47). This is the same way in which Mikro's Toiings and the young Josef Malan in Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* addresses whites.

As is the case in Paton's novel, we are introduced to social ills related to the fact that the mining industry is built on the labour of black workers from rural areas. On p15 Mbanjwa cites examples of young men who came back from the mines either injured or sick. Mbanjwa says to his son: "*Waarom kan die*

witman nie help nie. Hy vat ons manne. Waarom kan hy nie help as ons arm word nie, Kolisile?" (Why can't the white man help? Why can't he help when we become poor, Kolisile?) (p16). When the train enters Johannesburg, Kolisile sees the mine dumps and is told by his fellow travellers that they are "*die berge van die witman*" (p21) (the mountains of the white man).

The issue of 'native crime' that enjoys prominence in Paton's novel is also introduced in *Swart Pelgrim* when Kolisile learns in Chapter VI that his brother, Mfazwe, defrauded his fellow mineworkers, gambles, drinks and stabbed a white police officer with a knife (p28). In *Swart Pelgrim*, Venter clearly draws a link between 'native crime' and violence or cruelty towards blacks by whites. This is clear from the manner in which the white woman's memory of how her husband was assaulted by black men (p 34) causes her to set her dog on Kolisile. When Kolisile comes across Maloeti and Mafakoe, Maloeti wants to know whether his wounds were inflicted by "*die polliës*" (the police) or "*die witman*" (the white man). It later emerges that Maloeti and Mafakoe are hiding from 'the white man', a term used by Maloeti as a synonym for 'the police'.

The reader is introduced to the issue of informal settlements in the words of Kaloeti on p40: "*Ons bly by die ander onder die sakke en die blikke, maar die witman soek na ons*" (We live with the others under the sacks and sinks, but the white man is looking for us). The informal settlement, which is referred to as the "*pondokkedorp*" (shanty town) or "*goingdorp*" (sack cloth town), is described on p44. Poverty also emerges as a factor influencing 'native crime' when Kaloeti tells Kolisile that the police are looking for him and his

accomplice because they attacked an Indian man and stole food because they were hungry.

Miriam views having her children educated as a way to protect them against the fate that befell their father, who was badly injured in a mining accident (p47). The issue of prostitution born of financial need is touched upon in Paton's novel through Gertrude. In *Swart Pelgrim* there is a subtle hint (page 53) that Miriam is a prostitute. This is confirmed on p57 when she confesses to Kolisile.

Although not nearly as well developed as in Paton's novel, the issue of white wealth built on black labour is several times referred to in *Swart Pelgrim* (page 54), not only in terms of the mines, but also in terms of the building of roads for the "*motors van die witman*" (cars of the white man). When Kolisile goes to work as a road builder, a fellow worker remarks upon seeing an aeroplane (p59): "*Die witman hy ry in die lug; die swartman werk op die grond*" (The white man rides in the air; the black man works on the ground).

There are also parallels between Paton's novel and *Swart Pelgrim* in terms of the pervasive theme of fear. Throughout the novel, the reader is made aware of Kolisile's fear: "*Kolisile voel leed oor gister en nou; hy voel angs oor môre.*" (Kolisile feels pain about yesterday and about now; he feels fear about tomorrow) (p19); "*Dieselfde vrees kiewel in hom as die dag toe hy die eerste keer saam met die groot mans die jong osse moes tem. Hy is bang dat hy hier sal wegraak soos Mfazwe....*" (The same fear stirs in him as the day when he had to tame the young oxen with the big men for the first time. He is afraid

that he will get lost here like Mfazwe had...) (p20); "*Die angs loop koud deur hom soos die dag toe hy weggespring het voor die smal kop van die spikkelkapel.*" (The cold fear sweeps through him like that day he jumped away from the narrow head of the spotted cobra) (p21); "*Hy gooi werktuiglik met die skopgraaf; maar die vrees styg vinnig in hom sodat hy kortasem word.*" (He throws mechanically with the shovel; but the fear rises in him so quickly that he becomes short of breath) (p24). Again, this echoes the theme of fear that Paton develops in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. On page 57 of *Swart Pelgrim* we read "*Buitendien vrees hy nou vir Mfazwe*" (He now also fears for Mfazwe.) Further references to Kolisile's fear are found on pp68, 70, 89 and 163.

Kolisile lays the blame for the fact that Mfazwe 'became bad' at the feet of 'the city of the white man' (p56): "*Dis hierdie stad van die witman. Dis die mense hier wat sleg is, wat ook vir Mfazwe sleg gemaak het*" (It is this city of the white man. It's the people here who are bad who made Mfazwe bad.)

It becomes clear that, in *Swart Pelgrim*, Venter attempts to address all the aspects of the 'native issue' that are also referred to in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. However, Venter does this only through showing the reader the experiences of his main character, Kolisile, while Paton makes use of large sections of political debate and/or narration to bring across different views. In his article "Die Aktuele Roman" that appears at the back of the 1961 school edition of *Swart Pelgrim*, AP Grové lauds authors such as Venter who build "the world of the novel" through showing the actions of the characters

without the interference of political argument or parts that merely convey information which, he claims, shatters the illusion of the story world.

2.1.3.3 Characterisation

In the first chapter of the novel we are introduced to Kolisile, a black man (here too, as in Paton's novel, the term 'native' is used (*'naturel'* in the Afrikaans text)) who lives in a rural agricultural community. He is presented as a responsible family man with a deep love for the land, not unlike Stephen Kumalo in *Cry the Beloved Country*. While in Johannesburg, Kolisile yearns for his tribal home. Like Stephen Kumalo, he is portrayed as very naïve. He sees electric light for the first time when he enters the mine (p23). However, whereas Stephen Kumalo is characterised as educated and intelligent, Kolisile does not even know how to count money (p78).

Just like Stephen Kumalo, Kolisile is a man of the soil, a farmer at heart. He wants to work for the white woman as a gardener, and he naively dreams of living with Miriam, Mafasoe and their children in the 'native town' and planting a vegetable garden (p105). His yearning for his rural home is a recurring theme e.g. on p. 89: "*Hy verlang na die vryheid van die wye valleie, na die koel seëning van die môrewind, na die glansende stamme van die kafferkoring*" (He yearns for the freedom of the wide valleys, for the cool blessing of the morning breeze, for the shiny stems of the sorghum).

Just like Toings, Kolisile is an outsider, because of his childlike naiveté. Miriam sees Kolisile as "*anders as die ander manne eenvoudig, oreg,*

onskuldig, maar sterk en groot” (different from the other men . . . simple, genuine, innocent, but strong and big) (p55). Her brother, Jackson, dislikes the fact that Kolisile is “simple and childlike” (“...*hoewel hy nie hou van Kolisile se eenvoudige kinderlikheid nie*” (although he does not like Kolisile’s simple childlike nature) (p124)).

Kolisile is characterized as a morally upright and peace loving man. When Kaloeti suggests that he should have killed the white woman who set her dog on him (p41), he is repulsed by the idea. But he is also flawed. He very feebly tries to resist the feelings he develops for Miriam (p54) and shows no shock when he hears that she is a prostitute and that his brother, Mfazwe, was one of the men that she slept with for money.

There are clues in the text that Kolisile has a poor self image. When Mafasoe speaks to him of the “groot Inkosi” (big Inkosi) or (Christian) God, Kolisile fears that God will say “*Kolisile is die sleg kaffer . . . wat nie vir homself kan help nie.*” (Kolisile is the bad kaffir . . . who cannot help himself.) (p94). Toiings, in much the same way, sees himself as a “sleg hotnot” (bad coloured).

As is the case in Mikro’s *Toiings*, animal comparisons with the black main character abound. Kolisile is compared to a well-trained ox (p85 and p104), to an antelope (p94), to a dove (p129) and to a young bull (p155).

Miriam’s brother, Jackson, who is a political activist and public speaker, is in some ways similar to John Kumalo in *Cry the beloved country*. On p73, we

read that “*Jackson praat so groot soos die olifant, maar sy hart is so klein soos die hart van die duif*” (Jackson speaks as big as the elephant, but his heart is as small as the heart of the dove).

The characterisation of Miriam’s brother, Jackson, and her husband, Mafasoe, is not well-developed. The reader gets to know them primarily in terms of their widely divergent views on whites. While Jackson actively rebels against white domination, Mafasoe accepts it unquestioningly, even stating that it is a Biblical dispensation. Kolisile experiences an inner struggle as he is torn between the views expressed by Jackson and his own experiences of the dog attack and township shooting on the one hand and the views of Mafasoe on the other (p160).

2.1.3.4 Stereotype

The stereotype of the “noble savage” that is found in *Toiings* and *Cry, the Beloved Country*, is also apparent in *Swart Pelgrim*. Although the author is at pains to show that there are “good blacks and bad blacks”, just as there are “good whites and bad whites”, there is an inherent bias against blacks as naïve, if not ignorant, and prone to moral corruption.

Although Kolisile is generally not portrayed in the stereotype of the buffoon as is Toiings and the coloured characters in Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (see critique in chapter 2 of February, 1981), he is made ridiculous in the eyes of the reader when he shows off his stolen clothes to Kaloeti and Mafakoe on p164. There are similarly ridiculous descriptions of Jackson (p145-146) and of

Mfazwe (p107). According to Van der Merwe (1994), the character of Jackson as a political instigator is a variation on the 'blood-thirsty black' stereotype. The way in which Jackson is portrayed, is meant to repulse the reader. This is achieved, in part, by divulging that Jackson is being paid to instigate trouble.

If one looks beyond the inherent prejudice that underlies the entire novel (a prejudice towards black people as "simple" people, prone to moral corruption), it is clear that the author attempts to present a balanced view. There are examples of so-called "good" white people, for instance the people who taught Mafasoe to weave baskets (note again the similarity with Paton's novel) and the unknown white man who funds Jackson's campaign. Kolisile does not only suffer at the hands of whites, but is cheated and called a "kaffir" by the Indian shopkeeper he tries to sell Mafasoe's baskets to (p82). Similarly, the black characters in the novel range from criminals (Kaloeti, Mafakoe and Mfazwe) to paragons of virtue (Mafasoe). The blind Mafasoe, like Toiings, is an example of a positive black stereotype (see Van der Merwe, 1994), who remains subservient to whites and accepts their religion unquestioningly.

Kolisile's own character has sufficient light *and* darkness to ring true to the reader. The newspaper reports cited on p154 also show that there is injury and blame on both sides of the racial divide.

2.1.3.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person and, although there are occasional small shifts (e.g to Mbanjwa on page 14 and 16, or to Kaloeti on p41), the focalisation is that of the main character, Kolisile.

There seems to be a measure of racial bias in the narration. Here and there, the manner in which Kolisile is depicted verges on patronising. This is already apparent from the summary that appears at the front of the book, which calls Kolisile *“a simple native from the Transkei”* (’n eenvoudige Transkeise naturel).

When Kolisile meets Kaloeti and Mafakoe after being attacked by the white woman’s dog, they are referred to on page 38 as *“swart manne”* (black men) and *“die swartman”* (the black man). Even after the reader is aware that Kolisile’s new acquaintances are black, Kaloeti is again referred to on p40 as *“die swartman”* (the black man) and a few lines later as *“die vreemde naturel”* (the strange native).

Subtle prejudice is also apparent on p45, when Miriam, the Good Samaritan who nurses Kolisile back to health, is described: *“Sy is groot en sterk; nie uitermatig geset soos die meeste vroue van haar ras nie . . .”* (She is big and strong; not extraordinarily fat like most of the women of her race. . .) (p45).

A modern day reader is uncomfortable with the admiration and exaggerated gratitude that Miriam’s husband Mafasoe feels towards the white foreman who

took him to hospital and the white woman who helped Miriam find the place where the blind are taught to weave baskets (p52). Kolisile also feels discomfort, although we read that “*Sy eenvoudige gemoed kan hierdie gevoel nie begryp nie. Hy weet net dis daar, diep onder in sy wese.*” (His simple mind cannot understand this feeling. He merely knows that it is there, deep down in his being) (p52).

2.1.4 *Kennis van die Aand (Looking On Darkness)* by André P Brink, 1973⁸

2.1.4.1 Background, plot and setting

André P Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand* (1973), translated into English as *Looking on Darkness*, is arguably his best known novel. This is possibly due, apart from the literary strength of the novel, to the controversy that arose when the Publications Board banned it in 1974. The novel thus became the first Afrikaans literary work that was banned, ostensibly for religious, moral and political reasons. It was only released again in 1982, and then only to selected readers.

Fellow sixties author, Jan Rabie, described *Kennis* as “Perhaps the most revolutionary novel to come out of South Africa, written by a white man”. In the foreword to the 2004 edition of the novel, Ampie Coetzee describes the book as “*one of the little chisels of the word that helped break the foundations of apartheid*”.

⁸ All page references refer to the second edition of the novel, published by Human & Rousseau in 1982.

The novel is an example of the so-called “engaged novel”, the main aim of which seems to be to drive home the injustice of racial discrimination, not only during the apartheid era, but from its roots in the slave trade in the Cape about two hundred years earlier.

The plot touches on a wide range of aspects related to the apartheid regime as it existed during the late sixties and early seventies.

The book spans about two hundred years of which the reader is told by way of a main plot – the story of the main character Josef Malan’s life – and various sub plots. The sub plots emerge from the stories of eight generations of Josef’s forebears that he writes down while in jail. Josef has been sentenced to death on a charge of murdering his white girlfriend, Jessica.

The main plot is set in the late sixties and early seventies. The cruelty of the apartheid regime and the restrictions that were imposed on so-called “non-whites” as a result thereof, is the central theme of the novel.

Events in the main plot mostly take place in Cape Town, London and Johannesburg and those in the sub plots mainly in the Western Cape province. An exception is Jakob Malan’s sojourn overseas when he served as Frans Viviers’ “batman” in the war.

The environment in which the plot is set plays a prominent role in the novel, with Josef attaching special significance to certain places, particularly the

balcony of Jessica's flat (page 23), the Paarl Valley where he grew up (page 23) and Bainskloof (e.g page 26). Josef's attachment to certain places is ironic in respect of the pronouncement by the visitor to the "Nooi" of the farm his mother worked on that, if she continues to spoil him, he will later not know his place anymore. (*"Een van die dae ken hy nie meer sy plek nie."* (One of these days he will no longer know his place.)) (p99) and the young Josef's struggle to come to terms with this statement (e.g. p110).

2.1.4.2 Black and white

Josef's "blackness" is made apparent on the very first page of the novel, firstly by the subtle description of his *"bleekbruin maag en bors"* (pale brown belly and chest) (p11) and then by his description of the contrast between his own brown and Jessica's white skin. On p16 Josef notices the very white fingers of his advocate.

The web of racial tensions that is apparent throughout the novel, is introduced when Josef suspects that his advocate, Joubert, *"graag my teenwoordigheid [sou] wou gebruik om homself van sy verligtheid te oortuig"* (would [have liked] to use my presence to convince himself of his own political enlightenment) (p14). On p17 he says to Joubert: *"Ek is 'n bruinman, meneer Joubert. Jy verwag tog nie ek moet in jou God glo nie."* (I am a coloured man, Mister Joubert. Surely you don't expect me to believe in your God.).

As indicated above, the racial turmoil of South Africa at the height of apartheid is the central theme of the novel. The plot includes references to corporal

punishment of farm workers (p107 and 118), harassment of blacks by the Security Police (p286), the activities of the Publications Board (p288), detention without trial (p307) and deaths in detention (p286 and p296), forced removals (p236), the Pass Law, a biased justice system, racial segregation (p104, p232, p271), and, very prominently, the so-called “Immorality Act”. Reference is made to current events related to the struggle against apartheid, such as the Sharpeville uprising (p173).

Josef Malan’s “blackness” is therefore central to the plot. As Josef grows up, the coloured people are not allowed to enter the house of the “baas” (p38) and have to stand at the back of the church while the whites sit in front (p95), they are referred to as the “kinders van Gam” (children of Ham) (p97), and they have to “know their place” (p99). Josef may not even play the role of a black man in the nativity play because he is not white (p102) and he has to buy his ticket for the circus at the “Non-Whites” entrance (p104). His “baas” tells him that: “*Julle bruinmense is ‘n goddelose spul*” (You coloureds are a bunch of heathens) (p117). After deciding to send Josef to school, the “baas” tells him “*Jou hotnotsmaniere moet jy nou afleer*” (You will have to unlearn your coloured ways) (118). Josef is not allowed to enter the hotel at Bainskloof with his white girlfriend (p26).

The novel conveys a sense that the racial tension in South Africa during the apartheid era touched every aspect of life. It is presented as a constant and inescapable dimension of all interaction between people of different races. On p410, Williem Viviers says to Josef: “*Ek praat nie van politiek nie*” (‘I’m not talking of politics’) to which Josef responds: “*Ek sou ook verkies om nie*

daarvan te praat nie. Maar of ons dit wil of nie, is dit politiek die oomblik as ek en jy saam gaan sit. Net omdat jy wit is en ek bruin.” (I would also prefer not to talk of it. But whether we like it or not, it becomes politics the moment you and I sit together. Just because you’re white and I’m coloured.)

Josef is amazed when Jessica says that he is beautiful because he is “so brown” (p 347). Josef reflects that *“Hierdie amper twee jaar sedert my terugkoms het my bruin vir my ‘n brandmerk begin word, ‘n kleur om te wantrou en soms te haat. Nie-wit-nie, nie-blank-nie, ‘n skaduwee, die teëkant van iets, ‘n negatief van al wat saak maak.”* (in these almost two years since my return being brown has begun to feel like being branded, it was a colour to distrust and sometimes to hate. Not white, not European, a shadow, the opposite of something, a negative of all that matters). This stands in stark contrast with Jerry Buys’s words earlier in the novel: *“Wit is maaiers, dis voëlkak, dis etter, dis vrot. En hoe gouer jy dit besef, hoe gouer sal jy leer mens word.”* (white is maggots, it is bird shit, it is pus, it is rot. And the sooner you learn to realize that, the sooner you will learn to become a human being.) (p275).

2.1.4.3 Characterisation

As indicated above, the main character, Josef Malan, is a Cape Coloured who has been sentenced to death for the murder of his white girlfriend.

Josef’s character is decidedly more rounded than the characters in the other primary texts. In the course of the novel, he develops significantly on various

levels. Josef's memories of his childhood years carry strong echoes of Toiings: the farmer is also addressed as "Baas" and his wife as "Nooi" or "Nôï", the farmhouse is off limits to coloureds and corporal punishment of errant farmworkers is commonplace. However, while Toiings remains servile all his life, Josef, mainly through the exposure he gains when he goes to university overseas, progresses to rebellion. The seeds for this are sown early in the novel. While Mikro's Toiings would not have dreamed to enter the house of the "baas", Josef does. While Josef is warned that "One of these days he will not know his place" (p99), Toiings remains very aware of his place in society.

Josef is part of a group of "others". This "otherness" is defined and determined purely on the basis of their skin colour. Josef's refusal to submit to this "otherness" is the main theme of the novel. This theme cannot be separated from Josef's own struggle to come to terms with his life, to own his life rather than live it through the theatre, which he calls "*my eintlike dimensie van bestaan*" (the actual dimension of my existence) (p224). This sub-plot is poignantly developed with the help of a parallel with Calderon's *Life is a Dream* (see page 282-283).

Already in the reader's first encounter with Josef where he awaits trial in jail, this search for his own identity is apparent. He asks himself: "*Waarom het ek anders akteur geword? In die herhaal van aangeleerde woorde en die oorspeel van rolle moet ek die vervlugtige self ontdek: waar anders?*" (What other reason could I have had for becoming an actor? It was in repeating learned words and playing roles that I had to discover the elusive self: where

else?) (p14). When he is with Jessica, Josef feels at peace with who he is. On p395 he says to her: “...tussen al die rolle wat ek al gespeel het en nog gaan speel, is daar net één wat ek werlik wíl, en dit is die een wat ek nooit mag speel nie’ ‘Josef Malan. Net ek. Net mens.’ ‘En jy is die enigste wat dit vir my moontlik maak.” (‘...of all the roles that I have played and will play in future, there is only one that I truly want, and that is the one I may never play’ Josef Malan. Just I. Just human.’ ‘And you are the only one who makes that possible for me.’). Josef’s personal struggle to find his own identity is mirrored in the novel with the struggle against the oppression of blacks. On p411 he says to Willem Viviers: “*Ek veg vir die elementêre reg om erken te word as ‘n mens...*” (‘I’m fighting for the elementary right to be acknowledged as a person...’). The opening sentence of the novel suggests that murdering Jessica was Josef’s ultimate attempt at defining his own identity.

Spiritually, the reader accompanies Josef on a heart wrenching journey from innocence as a child, to resistance in adulthood and finally, through the dehumanising torture he endures in prison, to acceptance of his death. Parallels are drawn in the text between Josef and other martyrs such as St John of the Cross and Saint Simeon Stylites. On page 19 the reference is to Christ and the Last Supper: “... eet my liggaam, drink my bloed. Iets van die mistieke ekstases van ‘n Sint Simon Stiletes het ek soms in daardie hoë hofaal leer verstaan.” (...eat my body, drink my blood. In that esteemed courtroom I sometimes came to understand something of the mystical ecstasies of a St Simon Stilettes). Other references to the Christ parallel are found on page 347 and 352 and in the image of the last supper of wine and bread of which Josef partakes before his execution (p398).

2.1.4.4 Stereotype

The novel is careful to avoid stereotypes. Although some whites in the novel (notably the security police officials who interrogate Josef while he is in jail) are portrayed as hard racists, most of the white characters are, if not non-racist, at least struggling with their own prejudice. This includes Willem Viviers, who supports Josef's group of actors, but does not want to be seen to do so, and Richard Cole, who, although he is outspoken against the policy of apartheid, ends up telling Josef to "keep to his own kind" (Hou jou by jou eie soort.) (p452).

According to Van der Merwe (1994:30), the portrayal of Josef is a radical departure from the "superficial happy-go-lucky" coloured type.

Van der Merwe (1994) also remarks on the way in which Brink portrays the character of Josef's friend, Dilpert Naidoo, without resorting to stereotype. Dilpert's character differs vastly from the sly Indian shopkeeper we encounter in *Swart Pelgrim*.

2.1.4.5 Narration and focalisation

The black main character, Josef Malan, is both narrator and focaliser. This draws the reader very intimately into Josef's life.

2.1.5 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena)* by Elsa Joubert, 1978⁹

2.1.5.1 Background, plot and setting

Published in 1978, the novel tells the life story of Poppie Rachel Nongena (née Matati) from birth to her forties. In the author's note at the beginning of the book, Joubert states that the novel is based on the facts she collected on Poppie's life and is an attempt to describe one family's experience of that period as accurately as possible. According to Joubert, it is therefore not the aim of the novel to provide a comprehensive view of political and social issues that affected the lives of black people in South Africa during that time.

The novel takes the reader on a journey with Poppie from a relatively carefree childhood to an adulthood marked by trials and tribulations. Poppie's suffering begins when she and her husband have to leave Lambertsbaai for Cape Town. Poppie's suffering is caused mainly, but not exclusively, by the pass laws that were applicable to black South Africans at the time and the resultant forced removals and police harassment. The tension reaches a climax after the riots in 1976 when two of her children are apprehended for questioning about the whereabouts of her brother, who shot a police officer.

The novel is set in various towns and locations (black townships) in the Cape Province as well as Mdantsane in the former Transkei and Herschel in the former Ciskei. Poppie's relocation from one place of residence to the next, initially for economic reasons and later as a result of the pass laws, is central

⁹ All page references refer to the 1978 edition of the novel by Tafelberg.

to the plot – particularly in as far as it caused Poppie at times to be separated from her husband and children.

2.1.5.2 Black and white

The novel is not, in the first instance, a novel about black-white relationships in South Africa from 1936 (the year in which Poppie was born) to 1976. Through telling Poppie's story, however, the reader is brought strongly under the impression of the suffering that was caused by apartheid legislation such as the pass laws and the revolt against the apartheid dispensation (particularly in the form of the riots of 1960 and 1976).

But the novel does not tell a simple tale of black versus white. Through the richly textured account of Poppie's life, the reader (which at the time was probably white and Afrikaans speaking) is given an intimate view of Xhosa life. Examples of this include Poppie's wedding to Stone Nongena (p47-52), Bonsile's coming of age ceremony in Herschel (p202-211), and the funeral of tata-ka-Bonsile (Stone) (p173-177).

Throughout the novel, there is reference to the interactions between Xhosas and groups of other cultures. On the first page of the novel, we already read: *“Hulle het leer koring sny by die Boesmans. Die Boesmans was die kortetjies met die kroesies, die Damaras was die swartes en die Basters dié wat amper lyk soos witmense, met lang hare.”* (They learnt from the Bushmen to cut wheat. The Bushmen were the short ones with the frizzy hair, the Damaras were the black ones and the Basters were those who almost looked like white

people with their long hair.) (p3). On p37 we read that *“Die bruin meisies was lief vir die Xhosa-mans, maar die Xhosa-meisies het nooit met ‘n bruinman gegaan nie, dis heeltemal uit ons geloof uit. Maar al my bruin vriendinne het Xhosa-kêrels gehad.”* (The coloured girls liked the Xhosa men, but the Xhosa girls would never go with a coloured man, it is completely outside of our faith. But all my coloured friends had Xhosa boyfriends.) and later on there is a touch of humour when Poppie chooses the typically coloured name of “Koopman” for a Xhosa relative of Stone’s to ensure that he is considered for a job reserved for coloureds (p138).

A recurring theme in Poppie’s life from the time that she met her husband, Stone Nongena, is the cultural differences and mutual prejudice between the “urban blacks” and the “homeland blacks”, as Mosie puts it (p253), or in Jakkie’s words, the “townborners” and the “amagoduka” (p254). Stone, who is from rural Herschel in what is later to be proclaimed part of the Transkei, is referred to by Poppie’s family as a “rou kaffer” (raw Kaffir) (e.g. p52; 116). The tension between the urban and rural Xhosas reach a climax when violence erupts between residents of the location (Langa) and the migrant workers who come from the rural areas to work in the city, who live in the “special quarters” or “bachelor’s quarters”.

2.1.5.3 Characterisation

From the reader’s first encounter with Poppie as a child growing up in the area of Upington in what is today the Northern Cape Province, the particularities of her Xhosa heritage are obvious. On page 6 and 7 we read that, as a baby,

Poppie was carried in a blanket on her grandmother's back. They had a goat in the back yard and her grandmother gave them bread, "magou" (runny sour maize porridge), griddlecakes (roosterkoek) and umphokoqo (crumbly maize porridge) with curd to eat.

Throughout the novel, the fact that Poppie is a Xhosa features prominently. Poppie would often preface her narration of traditional behaviour with "Ons Xhosas ..." (We Xhosas...). Poppie accepts the various duties and responsibilities she has as a Xhosa woman unquestioningly, but she is also a deeply devoted Christian, who gets strength from the church community she belongs to.

In Poppie's view, there is no conflict between her Christian faith and her traditional Xhosa customs and beliefs. When her friend, Mamdungwana, feels that the Xhosa coming to age ritual of "going to the bush" is pagan nonsense, Poppie responds that God is also served through the Xhosa traditions (p198).

Poppie grows up as an Afrikaans-speaking Xhosa and the fact that many words that are particular to Xhosa Afrikaans are included in her narration, contributes to her characterisation.

Much like Stephen Kumalo in Paton's novel and Kolisile in Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*, Poppie comes across as a simple, inherently good natured person. There is no comparison, however, between the level of roundedness that is accorded to the other two characters and that of Poppie in Joubert's novel. This may in part be ascribed to the fact that the reader spends forty years in

Poppie's company and less than a year with the other two characters. The fact that the reader shares in such a big part of Poppie's, life causes one to identify strongly with her, something that José Ortega y Gasset (1925 in Mpahlele, 2002) and Grové (1961) regards as essential for a successful novel.

Much of what the reader learns about Poppie is found in what is not said of her. In spite of her personal suffering, there are no instances in the novel where Poppie acts maliciously or out of hatred for others. In the very few cases where she gets angry, this arises from her strong attachment and protective feelings towards members of her family, particularly her brothers. On page 96, Poppie is so upset by her brother, Plank, being pulled from under the chicken coop by the police, that she shouts at the younger boys who laugh at the spectacle. She is strongly disapproving of Mosie's wife Rhoda, when Rhoda wears trousers the first time she comes to visit them: “*‘n Mens kom nie na jou skoonwerf in ‘n broek nie, Mama.*” (One doesn't come to the house of your in-laws wearing trousers, Mama.) (p. 130). Poppie's protective attitude towards her other brother, Hoedjie, also underlies her outburst towards Hoedjie's wife, Muis, on page 139.

Nowhere in the novel is there mention of Poppie's ambitions or dreams for the future. The reader never sees Poppie longing for a glamorous job, desiring fancy clothes, or a big house. Poppie is happy when her family is together and it is going well with everyone. When she arrives in the Ciskei, Poppie's loneliness becomes almost unbearable: “*Toe gaan ons in en ek voel nou baie hartseer, want die plek is so vreemd en ek ken niemand nie. Toe voel ek*

regtig ek is nou weggegooi...” (Then we went in and I felt very sad, because the place is so strange and I don’t know a soul. I really felt like I had been thrown away) (p151). It is perhaps because she asks very little from life that the reader is so deeply touched by her suffering. For Poppie, the future of her children is her biggest concern and she sacrifices herself to ensure that they get an education.

Having to earn money to support her children and other members of her family takes its toll on Poppie. On page 74, she says *”...ek is een wat vir nege werk. Sy begin huil. Ek is moeg, Mama.”* (...I am one who works for nine. She starts to cry. I am tired, Mama.), and on page 100 when she works long hours and has to visit her husband, Stone, in hospital on Sundays: *“Ek was altyd moeg en geworrie as ek by die huis kom, ek het seker nie altyd reg gemaak met die kinders nie.”* (I was always tired and worried when I got home, I probably didn’t always do right by the children.). As the novel progresses, this exhaustion, a feeling of capitulation, becomes a constant feature of Poppie’s life. After she has decided to give in to the pressure of the pass office and go to the Ciskei, we read: *“Maar bo alles het Poppie gevoel: ek is moeg.”* (But above all, Poppie felt: I am tired.) (p147). Of the uprising of 1976, Poppie says: *“As ek die krag gehad het, sou ek ook iets gedoen het, maar nou het ek nie die krag nie, nou is ek tevrede met die wêreld soos dit nou is.”* (If I had the strength, I would also have done something, but I don’t have the strength, now I am satisfied with the world as it is now.) (p247).

Although, for the most part, Poppie accepts her suffering unquestioningly, with the “silence of the ox” that Paton (p12) refers to, one sees flashes of

bitterness and resentment, even of (a very understated) rebellion against her circumstances. On p242 we read: “*Sy sê bitter: Nóú baklei julle. Hoekom het julle nie vir my baklei toe ek so swaar gekry het nie?*” (Embittered, she says: ‘Now you fight. Why didn’t you fight for me when I was suffering so badly?’)

While Poppie is a little girl, she enjoys going to school and does well. On page 11, her brother Plank shouts: “*Poppie kan ‘n versie opsê, Poppie is die slimste.*” (Poppie can recite a rhyme, Poppie is the cleverest.). However, Poppie’s schooling is interrupted when her mother relocates in search of better employment and ends when she has to look after her younger siblings while her mother is at work. While Poppie seems to accept this uncomplainingly, we later read: “*Poppie is jaloers dat Rhoda en haar ma meer geleerdheid het as wat hulle het, of as wat Mosie het.*” (Poppie is jealous because Rhoda and her mother are better educated than they are, or than Mosie is.) (p. 131).

Although Poppie is not well-educated, she is resourceful and manages to find work with various employers as a domestic worker. When she relocates to Mdantsane, she asks her mother to send her material and makes money by selling the clothes that she makes on her sewing machine.

2.1.5.4 Stereotype

As stated above, the novel does not promote stereotypical views of white or black South Africans. The cruelty of the white regime is apparent from the effects it has on the lives of Poppie and the members of her family. While

white prejudice towards blacks is always implicit in the narration, there are several instances where white people show kindness to Poppie (e.g some of her employers and Mrs Retief who runs the local state Tuberculosis programme).

Poppie's fellow residents in the location hate the black policemen. "*Die gevoel teen die swart poeliesse in uniform was verskriklik. As die mense sien 'n swart poelies wat alleen loop, vermoor hulle hom.*" (The feeling against the black policemen in uniform was terrible..... If people see a black policemen walking alone, they kill him.) (p. 94).

The tension between indigenous religions and Christianity that is the central theme in Brink's *Bidsprinkaan* and which also gets brief mention in *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*, is also touched upon in this novel.

2.1.5.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel starts off with a first person narration by the main character, Poppie Nongena. Throughout the novel, such sections of narration by Poppie are interspersed with passages of third person narration. Where Poppie tells the story, there is usually a marker, for example "*sê Poppie.*" (says Poppie). Here and there, the reader also encounters passages narrated by members of Poppie's family, e.g. buti Mosie (e.g. p264-5), and even short flashes by other characters such as Johnny Slapoog (p272).

Poppie and members of her family narrate in the Xhosa Afrikaans vernacular, which contains many turns of phrase and words not found in standard Afrikaans. These words from time to time also creep into the sections narrated in the third person. There is a subtle difference between the language in Poppie's narration, and that of her brother Mosie's. In Mosie's narration, there are many more English terms, including "cause why" and "like (for example "Maar ek is geworried, like" (But I'm worried, like) (p. 264)) that bring to mind so-called Cape Afrikaans.

Here and there in the novel, the voice of the third person narration also lapses into Poppie's vernacular. According to Van der Merwe (1994) this shows the extent to which the author identifies with her black characters.

The narration shifts naturally between the past tense and sections rendered in the present tense.

The most remarkable characteristic of the narration in Joubert's novel is perhaps that the characters are allowed to speak for themselves with no additional interpretation or implied judgement by the narrator, something that is regarded by Grové (1961) as a prerequisite for a good novel. The inner struggle of the characters, in particular of Poppie as the main character, is left mostly for the reader to deduce. This is very different from Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* where the reader is drawn very directly into the main character's private psychological battles. As stated at the beginning of the novel, Joubert also does not venture into arguments about the political issues of the day. In this respect, there is a vast difference between the understated narration in

Poppie's story and the attempt at comprehensive argumentation around the "native issue" made in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

2.1.6 *Proteus (Heart of the Hunter)* by Deon Meyer, 2002¹⁰

2.1.6.1 Background, plot and setting

Proteus (2002) by Deon Meyer is a suspense novel that tells the story of Tobela (Tiny) Mpayipheli, ex-MK soldier and former sniper for the East German Stasi and the Russian KGB who agrees to take a hard disk with classified information to Lusaka within 72 hours to settle an old debt to one Johnny Kleintjies. He escapes when members of the Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU) try to apprehend him at the airport and decides to make the journey on a BMW 1150 GS motorbike, which he "borrows" from his employer.

In a plot that is underpinned by the mystery about the identity of a notorious double agent, known as "Inkululeko", the reader gets to know Janina Mentz, head of the PIU, Tiger Mazibuko, who leads the Reaction Unit (RU) sent after Tobela, Vincent Radebe, a member of Janina Mentz's team, and the *Cape Times* reporter, Allison Healy, among a large cast of other characters.

Temporally, the novel is situated in the time it was published, with a flashback to one of the assassinations performed by Tobela (also known as "Umzingeli", the warrior) while in the service of the Russians in 1984. The main part of the

¹⁰ All page references refer to the 2002 edition of the novel by Human & Rousseau.

novel spans 72 hours in October. This is encapsulated by short sections that take place in March and November of the same year.

The novel is set for the most part in Southern Africa, as it chronicles Tobela's journey from Cape Town into Botswana. There are flashbacks to Tobela's time abroad in Paris, Amsterdam and Chicago, among other places.

2.1.6.2 Black and white

The novel acknowledges the political realities of the day. Reference is made to the incorporation of the different intelligence services after the first democratic elections in 1994 (p29). In the novel, Johnny Kleintjes is responsible for the integration of data of the different intelligence networks. Reference is made to political figures of the day, e.g. "Mandela en Nzo" (Mandela and Nzo) on p30, to Johnny Kleintjes, Janina Mentz and Tobela Mpayipheli's participation in "the struggle" (p30, p49, p79), to affirmative action (p36), to "*die ANC, MK, PAC of Apla*" (the ANC, MK, PAC or Apla) (p52), to incarceration and torture of black activists by the security police under apartheid (p94 and 95).

The blackness of the main character, Tobela Mpayipheli, is introduced early in the novel. Before the reader knows Tobela's name, clues as to his racial identity are given when, while pursuing his "enemy" in France, he thinks of the Transkei (p7) and recalls the names of his forefathers, Phalo, Rharhabe, Ngqika and Maqoma (p7) we are told that he is an African warrior and speaks Xhosa.

The first direct reference to Tobela's blackness is in the words of his victim, Dorffling, who asks: "*What fucking language is that, nigger?*" (p8). In the main body of the novel, which is situated in South Africa, there are also many references to racial tensions and the after effects of apartheid. Janina Mentz is keenly aware of the limited opportunities that exist "for a white woman in a black administration" (vir 'n wit vrou in 'n swart administrasie). The NIA official, Masethla, tells Janina that "her people" removed some of the films from the NIA database. When Janina asks whether "her people" refers to the Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU), he answers: "Nee. Die wittes." (No. The whites.) The woman Tobela loves, Miriam Nzululwazi, has difficulty speaking with the female attorney, Beneke, when she goes with Tobela to visit his friend Zatopek van Heerden. "*Sy en Miriam het Engels gepraat, maar dit wou nie werk nie. Regsgeleerde en teemaker. Die kloof van velkleur en kultuur en driehonderd jaar se Afrika-geskiedenis het gapend indie ongemaklike stiltes tussen hulle gelê*" (She and Miriam spoke English, but it didn't work. Legal expert and teagirl. The divide of skin colour and culture and three hundred years of the history of Africa lay gaping in the uncomfortable silences between them) (p. 148). Later in the novel, Miriam does not trust Janina Mentz, because Janina is white (p178).

There are a number of instances where offensive statements such as the one referred to earlier by Dorffling are made. On page 109, Masethla from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), says to Janina Mentz "*Fok jou, jou wit teef*" (Fuck you, you white bitch) and on page 266 Tobela asks the helicopter pilot whether he thinks he (Tobela) is a "*dom kaffertjie*" (dumb little kaffir).

In general, however, Meyer treats issues of race in a reconciliatory rather than a divisive manner. He presents a picture of a South African society where racial diversity is the norm, where black and white (and everyone in between) work together in relative harmony. The director for whom Janina Mentz, a white, Afrikaans speaking woman, works, is a Zulu (p20); Janina earns the respect of the formidable Christmas “Tiger” Mazibuko despite the fact that he initially struggled to take her seriously (p31); both Janina (p38) and Tiger’s (p38) teams are racially diverse; the Minister of Intelligence is a Tswana woman and the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry a grey haired white man (p165). A stray Griqua songwriter even manages to find a way into the novel in the form of Koos Kok (p162).

Often in the novel, the reader is not directly informed about the race of the characters. On p30, for example, the mention of Johnny Kleintjes sitting at home reading the “*wittes se koerante*” (white newspapers) leads the reader to believe that he is probably a coloured man. On p38 one deduces from the names of Janina Mentz’s team that they are racially diverse. It only emerges on page 60 that AJM Williams, who interrogates Ismail Mohammed on page 13, is a coloured man. Rudewaan Quinn, a member of Janina Mentz’ team, is first introduced on p38, but it is only on page 276 that reference is made to his race. “*Quinn, die bruin man, is lank en atleties.*” (Quinn, the coloured man, is tall and athletic.). This indirectly conveys the message that the race of the different characters is of lesser importance than their other personal traits and actions.

In spite of the instances of harsh, racist remarks made by/to some of the characters referred to above, the general spirit of racial interaction between Meyer's very diverse cast of characters, is one of good-natured teasing. On p50 Tobela wants to “[*speel*] ’n *potjie skaak* [...] *tussen sy Zoeloe-vriend se selfoonpratende rykdomjagende kliënte deur, terwyl hulle in Xhosa goediglik met die wittes spot*” (play a game of chess in between his Zulu friend's cellphone chatting, wealth chasing clients, while they make good-natured fun of the whites in Xhosa). When Tobela goes to “borrow” the motorbike from his employer, he makes up a story that the “Xhosa again has to clean up the Whitey boss' mess” (p55). After the visit to the “gangster house” in Mitchell's Plain where Mazibuko gave Da Costa orders to shoot one of the suspects, one of the other members of the reaction unit, Zweletini, jokingly accuses Mazibuko of racial discrimination: “*net die koloniste mag skiet, die arme swartes mag net kyk*” (only the colonists are allowed to shoot, the poor blacks can only stand by and watch) (p73). Tobela remembers an incident where his Odessa instructor, Otto Müller, remarked “*I haff never taught a Schwarzer before.*” Tobela answered “*I have never taken orders from ze Whitezer before.*” (p111). On page 186, the notorious druglord Orlando Arendse laughingly says that “*Dit is apartheid se skuld*” (Apartheid is to blame) that he has a criminal career. Another example of this “good-natured teasing” (goedige gespot) is found on p259 when Klein-Joe Moroka and the other members of the party staked out close to the bridge over the Modder River dare each other to sing, a dare that starts with the statement “*Julle Whiteys kan nie...*” (You Whiteys don't know how to...).

Whereas in *Cry, the Beloved Country* there is a pervasive theme of fear, Meyer's novel seems to carry a hint of optimism, of hope for the future. This is best captured in Tobela's thoughts when he hears the singing of "Shosholoza" by the diverse group waiting to ambush him at the Modder River: "*Dit laat sien hom visioene van swart en wit en bruin in groter, perfekte harmonie, die moontlikhede magies.*" (It causes him to see visions of black and white and brown in greater, perfect hamony, the possibilities are magical) (p260).

2.1.6.3 Characterisation

As indicated above, Tobela Mpayipheli is introduced in the first few pages of the novel as a Xhosa "warrior from the plains of Africa" (kryger van die vlaktes van Afrika) (p7), known as Umzingeli. It later emerges that Tobela served as "the ANC's exchange student" (die ANC se uitruilstudent) (p228) to the Russian KGB and the East German Stasi. He is 40 years old when the main plot unfolds. On p189 we learn that Tobela can speak French, which he probably learnt in the two years during which he worked as a baker's assistant in France (p218) after his career as trained assassin ended.

Tobela is presented as a well-rounded character. The reader sees his inner struggle between his persona as Umzingeli, the warrior, and the peace-loving farmer and family man he aspires to be (e.g. p147) after having met Miriam and later her son, Pakamile (p20, p86). The tension that existed between the vastly different personalities of Tobela's father, Lawrence (a religious minister), and his uncle, Senzeni (who recruited him into the Struggle), "*Die duif en die valk. Jakob en Esau*" (The dove and the hawk, Jacob and Esau)

(p92), is apparent in the struggle Tobela experiences between his old and new self. The possibility that Tobela can change his nature (for which Meyer uses the parallel of the shapeshifting Greek god Proteus (p173), but which, according to Zatopek van Heerden's theory of genetic programming, is impossible) is presented not only as the key to Tobela's personal salvation, but also as "hope for Mother Africa" (p195).

Early in the novel, the reader learns about the special relationship between Tobela and Miriam's young son, Pakamile. Tobela goes to a lot of trouble to contribute to Pakamile's education and teaches him how to "farm" in a vegetable garden in Miriam's back yard (p20). The vegetable garden is a temporary substitute for the real thing, as Tobela has bought a farm at the Cala River in the Transkei and plans to build a house there for the three of them and to become a full-time farmer: "*Om die hande wat baklei en gebreek het, te laat bou. Om met sweet en konsentrasie en spiere 'n blyplek te bou, om sy hande in die grond te steek, om die aarde om te dolwe en te plant en te laat groei*" (To let the hands that fought and broke, build. To build a home with sweat and concentration and muscle, to stick his hands in the ground, to turn the soil and plant and grow) (p126).

This escapist ideal does not mean that Tobela is not concerned with the political issues of the day. On page 102 and 103 there is a rather philosophical section (much like the sections in which Zatopek van Heerden argues about genetic programming (e.g. p195)) in which Tobela ponders the plight of Africa as the "Red Continent" (Rooi Kontinent). This train of thought is taken further in the section on page 302 where Tobela considers the reasons

for the differences between Botswana and South Africa. On his way to Petrusville, Tobela sees the colourful landscape and thinks “*Kleur het hierdie land opgefok. Die verskil in kleur.*” (It is colour that has fucked up this country. The difference in colour.) (p195). On p225 we read that Tobela’s conversations with Miriam included discussions on “*Sy kommer oor die geweld en die armoede in die townships. Die wegsyfer van Xhosa-kultuur in die woestynsand van ‘n nabootsing van alles wat Amerikaans is.*” (His concern about the violence and the poverty in the townships. The disappearance of Xhosa culture in the desert sands of an imitation of all things American.).

On p229 Tobela’s friend Zatopek van Heerden, an erstwhile policeman and private investigator turned professor in psychology (p190), describes Tobela as an intelligent, but uncomplicated, action-oriented man.

The reader gets to know Tobela in part through what other characters have to say or find out about him, but mostly through his own thoughts in the sections of the novel where Tobela is the focaliser. Tobela’s thoughts are presented just like those of the other characters who are given turns to focalise. He is presented as mature and complex, very unlike the naïve and one-dimensional characters we encounter in *Toiings* and *Swart Pelgrim*.

And, lest we forget, from that moment on page 217 that Tobela becomes aware of the motorbike as an “extension of his body” (verlenging van sy liggaam) and understands “the addiction that the white clients speak of” (die verslawing [. . .] waarvan die wit kliënte praat), he is a member of the biking

fraternity and, more than that, one of the select few who can call themselves BMW bikers.

2.1.6.4 Stereotype

Whereas earlier writers (for instance Venter in *Swart Pelgrim*) present “the white man” and “the native” as types, Meyer is at pains to present his characters as individuals in their own right. This is strengthened by the shifts in focalisation (see paragraph 2.6.5 below) and the characterisation of the supporting characters (see paragraph 2.6.3).

2.1.6.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person by an omniscient and omnipresent narrator. There are, however, frequent shifts in focalisation through which Meyer presents, in addition to the main character, an unusually large number of the characters in the novel as fairly rounded. As mentioned above, the most prominent of these are Janina Mentz and Christmas “Tiger” Mazibuko, Vincent Radebe and Allison Healy. This “equal treatment” given by the narrator to a diverse group of characters, contributes to the spirit of optimism in the South African diversity that is created by the novel.

2.1.7 *Bidsprinkaan (Praying Mantis)* by André P Brink, 2005

2.1.7.1 Background, plot and setting

The publication of *Bidsprinkaan* coincided with Brink's seventieth birthday. The novel spans a period of about 65 years from 1760 to round about 1825. This is not the first time that Brink writes about the Cape colonial history, this period is also the setting for his novels *Houd-den-Bek* (1982) and *Inteendeel* (1993).

Bidsprinkaan tells the life story of Kupido Kakkerlak, a Khoi-Khoi convert who later becomes a missionary. Kupido is born in an unusual manner to a Khoi-Khoi farm worker (he is "delivered" by an eagle). He later leaves the farm with the travelling salesman, Servaas Ziervogel. After marrying the soap maker Anna Vigilant, a San woman, he meets Reverends van der Kemp and Read of the London Missionary Society. He converts and later becomes a missionary, and is later sent to run a mission station in the remote and harsh Dithakong area. Here he becomes "forgotten" by the church and suffers extreme hunger and deprivation. When Reverend Moffat finally visits the missionary station, Kupido is summarily fired. The novel ends where Kupido rides off into the unknown on a wagon with a freed slave called Arend.

The novel is set in what is today known as the Western and Northern Cape provinces, mostly in the Karoo. In James Read's narration in the second part of the novel, he remembers journeys he had taken to England, Brazil, Portugal and finally to the Cape.

The novel is an example of magical realism and explores the role of the narrative as a guiding element of the main character's life. The plot centres around Cupido's struggle to reconcile the narratives of the Christian religion with the Khoi-Khoi faith his mother taught him.

2.1.7.2 Black and white

The reader is introduced to Cupido's race (he is a Khoi-Khoi, or Hottentot) through his mother, who is described as a "gewone Hottentotvrou" (common Hottentot woman)(p10). Early on in the novel, "eight Bushmen" are listed among the other trophies of the master's hunting expedition. On p11, Bushmen children and a small troop of drifting Hottentot are caught and "booked in" as farm workers.

Particularly in the first part of the novel, there is much evidence of racial prejudice. Among other things, this is apparent from the master's views on his workers (lazy, dirty, etc) while he views himself as a "*regvaardige man*" (a fair man) p11. Cupido's mother is given corporal punishment every time she leaves the farm without permission and, when baby Cupido is believed to have died, the farm workers have to finish the day's work before they may bury him. The author does not present a simple picture of a bad master and good workers as is done to a certain extent in *Houd den Bek* and *Kennis van die aand*. Preparing for baby Cupido's funeral, the workers drink, smoke dagga and steal one of the farmer's sheep.

On p44 we read: *“Maar Kupido hou hom skaars. Hy is kopsku vir vreemdelinge, veral wittes, aan wie hy hom nog nooit mooi kon wen nie.”* (But Kupido keeps a low profile. He is wary of strangers, in particular of whites, whom he could not get quite used to).

When Servaas Ziervogel says to Kupido that he should become a preacher, Kupido answers *“Ek is ‘n Hottentot, Baas.”* (I am a Hottentot, Master.) (p57).

Kupido’s first wife, Anna Vigilant, limps because of an injury she sustained when she attempted to climb into the soap pot, hoping that it would make her white. *“Want vandat sy as klein kind in die Boesmanland gevang is, het sy geweet: bruin is ‘n ding wat jy nie wil wees nie.”* (Because, since she had been caught as a small child in the Bushmanland, she had known this: brown isn’t something you want to be.) (p. 71).

After Kupido commits murder, Anna warns him: *“maar om hier in ‘n witmensedorp moord te pleeg, is anders. Geen seep was jou ooit weer wit nie.”* (but to commit murder here in the white people’s town, is different. No soap will ever wash you white again.) p81.

Kupido, who is a carpenter, and his fellow black craftsmen, earn less than the white residents of the Cape pay for their daughters’ school fees (p. 84). Khoi and white people sit on different sides of the church (p85).

When James Read describes his relationship with Kupido, he says *“Ten eerste was hy natuurlik ‘n Hottentot, ek ‘n blanke man. In ‘n land soos dié is*

dit helaas van belang, dalk selfs deurslaggewend.” (In the first place, he was of course a Hottentot, I a white man. In a land such as this, that is alas of importance, maybe even the determining factor.) (p122).

The main theme of the novel is Kupido’s spiritual coming of age. The novel does not comment directly on racism. But, as Van der Kemp states on page 126 *“In ‘n land soos dié is daar geen verskil tussen ‘n ‘politieke’ en ‘n ‘godsdiensstige’ daad nie.”* (In a country such as ours, there is not difference between a political and a religious deed.). Kupido’s second wife, Katryn, also blames the fact that Kupido is black for the manner in which he is treated by the missionary authorities: *“Ek sê jou, as jy wit was, sou hy [Moffat] lankal hier gewees het. As jy wit was, sou jy lankal jou geld gekry het. As jy wit was, sou hulle vir ons gesorg het, kos en klere en alles.”* (Let me tell you, had you been white, he [Moffat] would have been here long ago. Had you been white, you would have long had your money. Had you been white, they would have looked after us, food and clothes and everything.) (p219).

2.1.7.3 Characterisation

The reader gets to know Kupido mostly through his spirituality. This is portrayed in a believable manner through the use of magical realism. At first, Kupido’s spirituality centres on his close relationship with the Hottentot or Khoikhoi god Heitsi-Eibib, which co-existed in Kupido’s mind with other mythical characters such as the Hei-Noen, the Sobo Khoi and the evil Sarê. Thanks to Heitsi-Eibib, Kupido initially enjoys uncanny success as a hunter, which makes him valuable in the eyes of his master. However, when Kupido

accidentally says the name of Heitsi-Eibib out loud one day (p. 37), the god withdraws from him and he loses his skill.

Humour is used to great effect to lend depth to Cupido's character. Examples of this are his attempt to fly (p.24), his letters to God and the missionaries and the way in which he curses his wagon when it finally breaks down (p223).

The character of Cupido is strongly influenced by relationships with a small number of people. Firstly, there is his mother, who teaches him the Hottentot religion. After his mother's disappearance, Cupido forms a relationship with Servaas Ziervogel, the travelling salesman, music man and preacher. Ziervogel has a profound impact on Cupido's life, firstly by introducing Cupido to a mirror for the first time in his life. Cupido's naïve understanding of what a mirror is, is at the same time humorous and deeply touching. In 1790, when Ziervogel gives Cupido a mirror as parting gift, he describes it as “...*dié vreemdeling wat terselfdertyd sy ander self was*” (that stranger that was at the same time his other self) (p. 60).

Ziervogel also introduces Cupido to Christianity, and, although he initially resists the thought, Cupido gradually warms to the idea of converting. On page 57 we read that “*Al hoe meer het hy begin wonder of dit nie beter sou wees om maar te vergeet van Heitsi-Eibib se wêreld en in te kom in die wêreld van die Boek nie.*” (More and more, he started to wonder whether it would not be better to forget about the world of Heitsi-Eibib and to get into the world of the Book.). Ziervogel also teaches Cupido to read and write.

On the journey with Ziervogel, Kupido develops into a drinker, a fighter and a lecher (p. 59). Yet, unlike the black characters in Mikro's *Toiings*, Kupido is not characterised as a stereotypical coloured buffoon.

After Kupido and Ziervogel part ways, Kupido's next significant relationship is with Anna Vigilant. Kupido has a magical first encounter with Anna, a San woman who is renowned for the soap she makes. Like Kupido's mother, Anna is strongly spiritual. She believes in the San god Tkgagen and has the ability to "dream" things as she wishes them to be.

Although Kupido is happy with Anna, particularly after they move to Graaff-Reinett, he remains restless, he steals, drinks and cannot remain faithful to Anna. He refers to a "hunger", a "coal of fire", that is burning inside of him (p. 82). Things come to a head when he murders the angry husband of one of the women he had an affair with.

The next relationship that plays a significant part in Kupido's characterisation, is that with the missionary Van der Kemp, under whose guidance Kupido is baptised. Anker (2008: 8) speaks of the "hybrid identity" Kupido develops as a result of his struggle to reconcile Christianity and the traditional spirituality of the Khoikhoi. According to Anker (*ibid*), the mirror he receives as gift from Servaas Ziervogel, which allows Kupido to experience the magical *within* reality, becomes a metaphor for this duality in Kupido's character.

Kupido embraces his role as missionary with childlike enthusiasm. Storming and destroying the stone piles built in honour of Heitsi-Eibib, he bears a

resemblance to Don Quixote (Painter, 2005). His naïve perception of the world is shown, for example through his belief that he should eat his Bible so that the words can become part of him and through his letters to God. But although Kupido is often characterised in a humorous way, it is not done in the one-dimensional manner we find in Mikro's *Toiings*. Kupido is funny, but the humour serves only to portray him as a profoundly tragic character. Most notably, as the novel progresses and he finds himself abandoned at Dithakong, Kupido loses his childlike faith in God and his trust in the white missionaries. This comes to a head during the Reverend Moffat's visit eight years after Kupido's arrival at Dithakong. Although he is starving, Kupido refuses the coffee Moffat offers him.

It is towards the end of the novel that Kupido's spirituality expands to make space for the spiritual and the physical, and also for the Christian and Khoikhoi faith. On p183 he says: *"Of course I believe in the spirit. But also in the star. And in the clay pot in which I store my dreams."* (Natuurlik glo ek in die gees. Maar ook in die ster. En in die kleipot waarin ek my drome bêre.) and on p202: *"That maybe it does not matter so much if Tsui-Goab says one thing and Tkaggen another and the Lord God yet another. For all he knows, there are also other gods in other places."* (Dat dit dalk nie soveel saak maak as Tsui-Goab een ding praat en Tkaggen 'n ander ding en die Here-God weer 'n ander nie. Vir al wat hy weet, is daar op ander plekke ook nog ander gode.)

More than that, Kupido progresses to a point where he senses that there may be things that lie "beyond the word", for example on p226: *"Maybe it is those things for which there are no words, in particular, that matter."* (Dalk is dit juis

dié dat daar nie 'n woord voor is nie, wat saak maak.) (see also Anker, 2008 and Painter, 2005.)

Kupido Kakkerlak is not the only well-rounded character in the novel. Through the narration of the second part of the novel, the reader is also given insight into the character of the fallen Reverend James read, who, although extremely prejudiced and also flawed in other respects, comes to respect Kupido and recognise how unjustly he had been treated.

2.1.7.4 Stereotype

Stereotype exists in the novel as a vice of some of the characters, but is not a characteristic of the narration itself. Kupido's mother is "*n gewone Hottentotvrou, en ongetwyfeld in haar Baas se oë so vuil en lui soos al die ander*" (a normal Hottentot woman, and undoubtedly in her master's eyes as dirty and lazy as all the rest) (p10).

A further example of a stereotype is found in the farmer's pronouncement on p11 that "*Die goed teel ook aan nes kakkerlakke. Kom al agter die ruik van kos aan.*" (The creatures multiply like cockroaches. They come after the smell of food.) (p11).

On p28 it is speculated that the master's children probably viewed Kupido much the same as the tame monkey that they had kept in the yard and taught tricks.

When Kupido makes known his desire to learn to read and write, it is not encouraged. “*Wat wil ‘n hotnot maak met lees en skryf, het hy [die baas] vererg gevra, “dan ken hy glad nie meer sy plek nie.”* (‘What does a coloured want with reading and writing,’ he [the master] asked crossly, ‘then he won’t know his place anymore.’) This carries echoes of the issue Josef Malan experiences in *Kennis van die Aand* with regard to “knowing his place”.

James Read’s prejudice against blacks (whom he views as “heathens”, e.g. on p129) is clear from his narration in part two of the novel.

From the author’s note printed at the back of the novel, it is clear that Brink consciously avoided the stereotype of the clown or buffoon, the “jolly hotnot” (jolly coloured). He states that: “*Kupido Kakkerlak could be spontaneous and unaffected, but he was no clown.*” (Kupido Kakkerlak kon spontaan en ongekunsteld wees, maar hy was nie ‘n harlekyn nie.)

2.1.7.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel consists of three parts. The first and third part is narrated in the third person, with the focalisation mainly that of Kupido, but with occasional shifts, for example to Kupido’s mother (Part 1, Chapter 3), Servaas Ziervogel (p49) or Reverend Moffat (p232).

The middle part of the book is narrated in the first person by Reverend James Read, the man who saves Kupido when he nearly drowns being baptised and who works with Rev van der Kemp as a missionary until he leaves the ministry

due to “temptation”. The style of narration in this section of the novel bears a resemblance to typical nineteenth century reporting (see also Painter, 2005). It is interesting to note that Read is not one of the characters that Kupido has a very close relationship with, yet his narration gives important insight into Kupido’s character.

As Anker (2008) points out, the narrator in *Bidsprinkaan* is not entirely trustworthy. Every now and again, the veracity of events that we are told of, is questioned, e.g. on page 34 “*Hoe sou mens ooit vir seker kon sê?*” (How would one ever be able to say for sure?) and later “*Het hy of het hy nie?*” (Did he or did he not?). This destabilises the narrative perspective, a perspective that is already impossible to determine exactly in a magical realistic novel (Faris, 2004:43) as referred to by Anker (2008).

It is appropriate that, in the third part of the novel, the focalisation is mostly that of Kupido. The central theme of this part is Kupido’s spiritual growth. He rejects the notion that one has to choose a specific religion and reject all others and embraces the notion that “*dat dit dalk nie soveel saak maak as Tsui-Goab een ding praat en Tkaggen ‘n ander ding en die Here-God weer ‘n ander nie*” (it possibly doesn’t matter all that much whether Tsui-Goab says one thing and Tkaggen another and the Lord God yet another) (p202). This is reinforced by Kupido’s reference to God and Tsui-Goab as interchangeable on p225 and finally when Kupido asks Arend on p245 to help him rebuild the stone pile in honour of Heitsi-Eibib.

2.1.8 *Lerato*, by Desirée Homann (unpublished), 2011

2.1.8.1 Background, plot and setting

Desirée Homann's unpublished novel, *Lerato* (2010), tells the story of Lerato Mokwena who, as a young girl, moves from the Lesotho highlands to the city with her mother and brother after her father, a subsistence cattle farmer, becomes ill and dies. In the squatter community of Marabastad in Pretoria, Lerato is at first protected by her uncle Caiphus, who has taken over the role of family patriarch. After Lerato's mother passes away from tuberculosis, however, Lerato increasingly finds herself under threat from her drunken uncle. One night as she struggles with him, the settlement catches fire and Lerato flees to the nearby municipal clinic where she has befriended the nursing sister, Seipathi, with nothing more than the clothes on her back. With Seipathi's assistance, Lerato finds a job as shop assistant at Metco, a large fabric store owned by the Omarjee family. The physical attraction between Lerato and Subesh, one of the Omarjee sons who manage the Metco store, soon erupts and the young Lerato is subjected to a range of wild emotions as she discovers her own sexuality. However, one evening Lerato and Subesh have an argument and in the heat of the moment Lerato mentions a job offer she received from Marcus Starke, a fashion designer that she got to know while working at Metco. The following day, Lerato is informed that her employment with Metco has been terminated. Lerato is deeply depressed and has given up on the offer made by Marcus when he arrives at Metco one Friday morning. Having seen the conditions Lerato lives in in the dilapidated old pre-fab school building across the street from Metco, Marcus insists that

Lerato come to live with him when she accepts the offer to be appointed as his assistant. She is thrown in at the deep end as Marcus is preparing to participate in an international fashion show. However, during the show, Lerato finds out that she is pregnant and soon afterwards she learns that Marcus is sick and dying. He plans for her to take over the business after his death. Lerato has to come to terms with being handed the life of her dreams, but having to deal with unexpected losses and fears along the way.

The story is set in the inner city and old eastern suburbs of Pretoria, with dreams of and a visit to the mountains where Lerato lived as a child. It spans about ten years of Lerato's life.

2.1.8.2 Black and white

To the South African reader, Lerato's blackness is immediately apparent from her name and other names in the opening passage, as well as the reference to the traditional Sotho lifestyle (blankets, hut, ponies etc). Her experience of life in the informal settlement in Marabastad is also, in the South African context, a "black experience".

When Lerato finds work at the textile retailer, Metco, she notices that the black workers are treated as inferior by the Indian ones. While the Metco workers are all black, the clients are mostly white.

When Lerato is asked by Marcus Starke to come and work for him as his assistant, he jokingly says that he needs a black face in his business. At

Marcus Starke Fine Designs the workers are all black, while the owner (Marcus) is white.

Marcus's mother, Mercia, shows her own prejudice when she uses the term "these people" (of blacks) when she cautions Marcus's not to allow his black housekeeper, Martha, to slack off.

In spite of the above, the novel does not explore black/white tensions or political issues at all. The focus is entirely on the story of a young girl who searches for love and self-actualisation. Lerato's dreams come true despite the odds she faces and the reader joins her as she struggles to come to terms with her "luck".

2.1.8.3 Characterisation

Lerato is characterised as a naïve, but intelligent girl. Her character develops from a girl who is a victim and a spectator, to a young woman who takes charge of and "owns" her life. In this respect, Lerato bears similarities to Brink's Josef Malan in *Kennis van die Aand*.

Just like the other black main characters discussed in the study, Lerato is an outsider. She does not feel at home in the city and yearns for the mountains where she grew up (reminding the reader of Toiings' feelings of displacement when he is away from the farm). Although she lives in poverty, Lerato dreams of another world, a world that is personified by the pictures she sees in

fashion magazines. However, when she gets the opportunity to become part of this world, it causes a violent inner conflict and feelings of self doubt.

The search for love is a central theme in the characterisation of Lerato (her name means “Love”). She loses her father at a young age and is left at the mercy of a disinterested mother and a predatory uncle. Lerato becomes infatuated with her manager at Metco, Subesh, and has a brief sexual relationship with him. She then meets the gay fashion designer, Marcus, whom she comes to love. Finally, she experiences the love of a mother for her child.

2.1.8.4 Stereotype

The novel deliberately breaks down commonly held stereotypes of black people. Lerato’s naivety is linked to her age, not to her race. She does not become a “type” that represents “blacks” or “black women” as a category. Her struggle towards individuation is not that of a black woman trying to fit into a white world, but rather that of any woman grappling with her own fear and success.

As indicated in paragraph 2.1.8.2 above, there are a few examples of racial prejudice in the text. This reflects the reality of the South African context in which the novel is located. As is the case in Meyer’s *Proteus* and Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand*, racial bias and stereotypes are reported in the narration, while the narration and focalisation per se remain unbiased. This is different

from the biased (to varying extents) narration of Mikro's *Toiings*, Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*.

2.1.8.5 Narration and focalisation

The story is narrated in the third person by a reliable narrator. The focalisation is mainly that of the main character, Lerato, drawing the reader into her life and experience of events and into her dreams. Now and again, however, the focalisation shifts to an undefined perspective that "sees" Lerato from the outside.

2.2 SUMMARY

The close reading and analysis of the selected texts in this chapter provides a thorough phenomenological description of the identified text elements (for example, characterisation, focalisation, etc). This description provides the basis on which the comparison and interpretation that follows in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation will be done.

CHAPTER 3

COMPARISON OF THE STUDY TEXTS

3. Introduction

Each of the novels discussed in this study is unique in many respects. It is therefore not possible to make an absolute comparison between them on the basis of certain text elements (e.g. characterisation, setting, plot).

From the close reading and analysis of the primary study texts that is provided in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, similarities emerge between novels that, on the face of it, have nothing in common. The narration of Josef Malan's childhood years on the farm carries strong echoes of the world in which Toiings finds himself; Josef places the farmer's daughter, Hermien, on a pedestal, just as Toiings does with his employer's wife, Miemie. In both novels, there is mention of the farmhouse that is off limits to the workers and Josef addresses the farmer with the same "Baas, ja, Baas" that Toiings uses.

Poppie Nongena spends her childhood in Blikkiesdorp, the location Toiings goes to visit. Lerato has difficulty "owning" her life rather than viewing it as a spectator, much like Josef Malan, who lives life by proxy through the theatre. The class difference between more educated blacks and rural tribesmen is referred to in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (p14) and also in *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*, where Poppie's brother, Plank, is outraged by the fact that

she is to marry a “rou kaffer” (raw kaffir) (p 52). In both *Swart Pelgrim* and *Proteus*, the black main character falls in love with a woman called Miriam.

The above examples are weak, almost accidental similarities. It seems, however, that stronger similarities exist between *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*; between *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan*; and between *Proteus* and *Lerato. Toiings* and *Kennis van die Aand* do not have the same level of similarity with any of the other study texts. (It should be noted, however, that the literature study indicates that there are strong parallels between *Toiings* and, for example, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. It can also be assumed that *Kennis van die Aand* will have much in common with other examples of struggle literature, e.g *Life and Times of Michael K* by JM Coetzee.)

The identified similarities provide clues to the research question posed in Chapter 1, namely: How and why do white South African authors make use of black main characters in their novels?

3.1 The How

3.1.1 *Toiings* – the endearing antics of the simple-minded black

The black main character in Mikro's novel remains one-dimensional – there is little evidence of development. Beyond *Toiings*'s desire to be rich and his longing for a wife, the reader knows very little of him. *Toiings*'s childlike understanding of the world, the way he dresses and his attempts at

impressing the women he likes, is presented in a comical, sometimes even ridiculous manner. Most of the other members of the Blikkiesdorp community are depicted as fun-loving drunkards.

Toiings does not question the social dispensation of the day – black farm workers who are treated as chattel by white farmers, cruel corporal punishment, and the general view of blacks as errant children rather than equal human beings, characterise the novel.

3.1.2 *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim* – the rural native in the city of the white man

The similarities between *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim* are immediately apparent. Both novels chronicle a visit by a rural “native” to the “city of the white man”, both lament the destruction of the “land” as the result of white greed on the one hand and black ignorance on the other.

In both novels, the black main character is essentially a “good man”, a man of the soil committed to this family and his community. In both novels, however, the main character is flawed to a lesser or greater extent. Stephen Khumalo’s transgressions amount to no more than telling small untruths and making hurtful remarks. Kolisile, on the other hand, commits adultery and becomes involved in crime. The stereotype of “the good kaffir” (Paton, 1948:42) is stronger in *Swart Pelgrim*, where Kolisile is portrayed in accordance with the nineteenth century notion of the “noble savage” as referred to by Mphahlele (2002:370). Van der Merwe (1994), remarks, however, that Kolisile is a

complex character that exhibits characteristics of both the good and bad black stereotype and struggles to reconcile the two.

The main contrast between Paton's novel and that of Venter is that, in addition to the narrative, Paton's novel also includes long tracts of political argumentation, lending it more credibility as an honest attempt at creating a "social record" (as stated by Paton at the beginning of the book), than Venter's novel.

3.1.3 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan* – true stories

Although Poppie Nongena and Kupido Kakkerlak are vastly different characters, the novels have a similar feel. In both novels, the truth is expertly turned into a story that allows the reader to intimately share the life's journey of the main character, a character who is tossed about by external forces over which he or she has no control. The main characters in both novels move from relative carelessness to a state of utter dejection. Poppie moves from a carefree childhood to a life that is increasingly encumbered by apartheid legislation and racial harassment. Kupido's spiritual conviction and delusions of grandeur end in utter dejection and finally, in starvation.

The element of magical realism imbues Brink's novel with an added element of "literariness". While Poppie's struggle remains largely one against external forces, Kupido also experiences an intense inner struggle between his

allegiance to his childhood deity, Heitsi-Eibib, and western Christian religion, at the hand of which he experiences unspeakable neglect.

3.1.4 *Proteus* and *Lerato* – main characters who happen to be black

In the novels by Meyer and Homann the “blackness” of the main characters, although acknowledged, is not central to the plot. In Meyer’s novel, Tabela Mpayipheli’s Xhosa background is given significance in the reference to “Umzingeli” (“warrior” in isiXhosa), while in Homann’s novel *Lerato* Mokoena’s Sotho roots feature in dreams of the mountains where she grew up.

True to the genre of the suspense novel, the plot in *Proteus* centres around a conspiracy to protect the identity of a double agent in the so-called “Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU)”. As the theme of the novel is espionage, the political reality of the day features in, but is not the main focus of, the novel. In *Lerato*, the central theme is the main character’s journey towards self-actualisation, a variation on the theme of the “small town girl made good”.

In both novels, the character set is racially diverse. In Meyer’s novel, in particular, characters of different races (e.g Janina Mentz, Tiger Mazibuko), are presented with the same degree of roundedness. This is supported by the shifts in focalisation. In *Lerato* characters of different races also interact with each other closely, but there is an unspoken resistance against a black woman being “the boss” – overcoming this barrier, also in her own mind, becomes central to *Lerato*’s story.

3.1.5 *Kennis van die Aand* – a novel about apartheid

Brink's novel bears similarities to *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan* (a later work by Brink) in that it tells the life story of someone who is crushed by the machinery of the state (or, in the case of *Bidsprinkaan's* Kupido Kakkerlak, of the church). The main difference, however, is that *Kennis* (as the novel is referred to in the author's memoirs) is a fictional work. Some critics may view this distinction as inconsequential, seeing that in both Poppie and *Bidsprinkaan* the facts as researched by the author are intensively fleshed out by details that have their origin in the imagination (however well-informed) of the author.

One could argue, however, that the fact that *Kennis* is a work of fiction, allowed Brink the freedom to build the 'story's own truth' (Grové, 1961:204) unfettered by historical facts. But this is only partly true – in *Kennis* Brink takes no liberties with the portrayal of the social realities of South Africa in the heyday of the apartheid dispensation. Documented cases exist of all the aspects of apartheid that cause Josef Malan's suffering and death. In a work of fiction, one generally expects to get to know more of the "inner reality" of the characters, their intimate thoughts and neuroses, their spirituality. And this is indeed the case in *Kennis*, particularly through Josef Malan's identification with historical Christian martyrs and the subtext of Calderon's *Life is a Dream*. In *Bidsprinkaan*, however, the reader is also given the details of Kupido Kakkerlak's inner journey, and in particular of his spirituality, although one would normally not expect this in a novel based on facts.

Although *Kennis van die Aand* is placed in a separate category here, it therefore should be noted that there is an argument for grouping it with *Poppie* and *Bidsprinkaan*. The discussion under “The Why” below will, however, provide further argument for viewing it as different from the “true” stories.

3.2 The Why

3.2.1 The novel and society

The sociology of literature, or literary sociology, is a field of study generally agreed to have been pioneered by Robert Escarpit, in his book *Sociologie de la Littérature* (1958). Escarpit advocated the sociology or a sociological perspective as a useful tool for explaining how literature functions as a social institution. Escarpit viewed the product and practice of literature a social “faits” (i.e. made by society).

The field of literary sociology has since expanded significantly to include reception aesthetics, publishing, book trade and the commodity aspect of literature, the relationship between literature and group identities, the role of authorship and the intention of the author, as well as the role of ethics and morality in literature. There are strong interfaces between literary sociology and the study of politics in literature, as the sociology of literature takes an interest in the power relations between different groups in society.

From the analysis of the selected novels it is clear that Mphahlele is correct when he says that *“The artist rejects certain features of the world, but also*

accepts others and gives them a high status” (Mphahlele, 2002: 394). He adds that *“The author’s intention or purpose helps him to be selective in what he explores or declaims, so that he may move his or her audience”* (ibid: 409). Grové (1961: 203) agrees when he says that in a novel the author creates a ‘separate self-sustaining’ (aparte, selfonderhoudende) world, *“n wêreld wat soms ingrypend, soms in geringer mate verskil van die alledaagse wêreld wat ons ken, maar wat in prinsipe nooit kongruent daaraan kan wees nie. Die wette wat in ons wêreld geld, geld selde of ooit presies in die wêreld van die boek.”* (a world that sometimes differs radically and sometimes only slightly from the day-to-day world we know, but which, in principle, can never be congruent with it. The laws that apply in our world, seldom, if ever, apply in exactly the same way in the world of the book). The question to aspiring authors therefore, in the words of the writer in Etienne van Heerden’s novel (2007: 261), is: *“Op watter manier wil julle lieg?”* (How do you choose to lie?).

This selective rendition of reality in texts is part of what makes the world of the novel strange and new, something that, according to the Russian Formalists, is a prerequisite for good art. Mphahlele (2002) argues that in this selective portrayal of reality (or the “violation of the ordinary” (die alledaagse geweld aan te doen) as Van Heerden (2007: 167) puts it), “what an artist produces is consciously or unconsciously shaped by his or her social relationships and role in society”.

According to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1925), a work is “good” if it succeeds in involving the reader in the lives of the characters, i.e if

the reader is moved by the fate, the joys and sorrows of the characters. If this is true – and there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that it is – part of the purpose of the “violation of the ordinary” referred to above, is probably to move the reader by making him or her care about the characters. How such a thing is at all possible, remains a mystery, but there is possibly some truth in the following statement by Deon Meyer (2008):

“I don’t think a person’s mind can distinguish between fictional people and real people. You hear what they say. You know what they feel, more than you know about the emotions of real people. The identification is therefore very strong.” (Author’s translation).

The question then, is whether the white South African authors of the primary study texts discussed in this paper succeed in involving their readers in the lives of their black main characters. Perhaps the question is broader than that: Is it possible for a white author to portray a black main character in a convincing and authentic manner? And, stepping into even murkier waters: Is it acceptable (in other words morally and ethically defensible) to do so?

Herman Charles Bosman answers no to both questions when he says (2003) *“. . . how can a white man get into a black man’s skin – and vice versa? That sort of thing is a presumption, and can produce only falseness in art. No, they must write their own literature. We must write ours.”*

Mphahlele seems to agree with Bosman (ibid) when he states that *“The indigenous humanity of Africa will always be a mystery to the white writer”*

(2002:370) and *“Whites will continue to be shadowy figures or ready-made portraits in my fiction. I have ceased to care how whites appear in my writings.”* (ibid: 374). Mphahlele quotes a number of black authors who share this sentiment:

- *“I am black because I am black; everything I write, poems and stories, will be black without any artificial strain.”* Charles F Gordon
- *“Black words do not exist in this country apart from the minds and voices of black people.”* Quentin Hill
- *“It is better that black people write it [the black experience] ourselves rather than have it written for us exploitatively.”* Julia Fields
- *“We do not want a black Santa Claus or a black Peter Pan. We want Change, not a white society painted black.”* Elton Hill-Abu Ishak

When Krog (2009:268), is asked *“But how will you live together in your country (or in mine) if you don’t begin to imagine one another?”*, she responds that *“in a country where we have come from different civilizations, then lived apart in unequal and distorted relationships that formed generations of us, our imagination is simply not capable of imagining a reality as – or with – the other.”* She explains this incapability in the following way: *“I simply do not know enough about blackness, or birdness, or mountainness, or even Englishness, for that matter, to imagine it in terms other than my exact self or the exotic opposite of myself.”*

William Styron, author of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, writes (2008: 101) that his presumption as a white author to write a novel about a slave revolutionary was met with outrage by black academics. He writes that he

“began to learn with great discomfort the consequences of my audacity in acquiring the persona of a black man.” Yet it is Styron’s (ibid: 98) view that, *“in the creation of novels and stories the writer should be free to demolish the barrier of color, to cross the forbidden line and write from the point of view of someone with a different skin.”*

Rampersad (1994:7) agrees, but on certain conditions: *“I would say then that, yes, certainly, a white scholar can write a penetrating [...] biography of a black man or woman – provided that the scholar is steeped in the knowledge of the particular set of broad cultural circumstances out of which the subject came, and provided that the scholar has a degree of sympathy for that culture and the individual concerned.”*

What is it, then, that a white writer hopes to achieve when choosing a black main character? According to Mphahlele, early Afrikaans writers (he mentions Totius, Celliers, Leipoldt and Visser) *“set their audience at ease, flattering their pioneering sentiments and self-love.”* (2002: 369). (Note that Allport (1954) found that a love-prejudice towards the self is often accompanied by a hate-prejudice towards the ‘other’.)

There are two sides to the relationship between fiction and reality. On the one hand, there is the author whose reality precipitates in his or her writing to a lesser or greater extent. On the other, there are questions as to the impact that literary works can have on society. Mphahlele (2002:320) states that *“... there is no easy one-to-one relationship between literature and life.”* He asks whether the *“demolition of a social order in a poem, a novel, a play and so on*

[will] eventually erode or subvert that order in real life” (ibid: 375). He expresses the suspicion that literature not only records and comments on life, but is also “*a transcendental force capable of shaping the human spirit in ways we can never articulate or define in precise terms*” (ibid: 378). But, Mphahlele warns, art cannot incite into action, “*the essence of art lies in its indirectness of impact, in its cumulative force*” (ibid: 397). According to Mphahlele, writing can only affect the community indirectly through the education of the individual. As to what exactly the nature of this “education” is, he states: “*Our instincts are pressed in art against the changed shape of reality [achieved by the artist]. We thus reorganize our emotions stirred up by the artist, so that we acquire a new attitude*” (ibid: 397). It would seem that the writer Sebastiaan Graaff in Van Heerden’s novel (2007: 145) is therefore unnecessarily pessimistic (as is Krog, quoted above) when he thinks: “*Watse hoop het sy verbeelding teen die werklikheid? Tog niks!*” (What hope does his imagination have against reality? None!).

It is important to note that, in his seminal study on prejudice, Allport (1954) found that, although stereotypes resist change, they do change. According to Allport (1954) this change can be achieved through education and the media. Seeing that the medium used by both education and the media is the written and spoken word, it follows that literature also has the potential of changing stereotypes.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is today the object of fierce criticism for the stereotypical view it portrays of black people and its exaggerated sentimentality – the same criticism that is levelled against novels

such as Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. One should keep in mind, however, that Stowe's novel had as its aim to promote the abolitionist cause. History would have that it succeeded: the novel is believed to have contributed to the American Civil War in the 1860's. So, too, are Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* and Joubert's *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* credited with being instrumental in bringing about a change in attitude that ultimately led to the the fall of apartheid.

In some respects, the white authors whose works are discussed in this study, do what black authors have already done: Already in 1915, Sol Plaatje published his documentary work *Native Life in South Africa*. HIE Dhlomo's epic poem *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* bemoans the destruction of tribal life at the hands of the white man's greed. In Peter Abrahams' novel *Path of Thunder*, a coloured man falls in love with a white woman. As these stories were, however, for the most part not read by white readers, their potential for changing the perceptions of whites remained largely untapped.

Gordimer (1993) puts her finger on the spot when she argues that, as a white South African writer of her time, the question was not only 'For whom do you write?', but also 'For whom *can* you write?'. Gordimer (1993) laments the limitation she experiences as a writer who 'writes from within a certain camp'. Fletcher (1993) adds another dimension to the limitation imposed on writers by South Africa's particular history. She says (Fletcher, 1993:11) that "*it is the fate of South African writers that the world expects them to deal with political issues.*" She adds that apartheid, while providing writers with a morally urgent and powerful subject, also denied them certain choices if they wanted to be

taken seriously. Brink (1998:15) agrees that apartheid made it very difficult for writers to write about ordinary human situations without being open for accusations of *“fiddling while Rome burns”*. This was all the more so because of the fact that literature could for some time continue to “report” on apartheid South Africa after other media had been silenced.

Mphahlele (ibid) is of the opinion that Brink, Leroux, Breytenbach and Joubert, by contrast to the early Afrikaans writers *“have come to jolt their audience out of their sense of political triumph, upset their self-satisfaction and lofty notions of their God-ordained mission; to ridicule their rituals.”*

In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to unearth something of the ‘why’ that lies behind the use of a black main character in each of the selected texts.

3.2.2 *Toiings*

It would be easy for a modern day reader to assume that Venter’s aim with *Toiings* was also to *“set [his] audience at ease, flattering their pioneering sentiments and self-love”* as Mphahlele (2002: 369) says of the early Afrikaans writers. Mikro is indeed guilty of portraying his black characters, including the main character, in a strongly stereotypical manner that is bound to offend.

February (1981), however, notes that Mikro’s novels and stories, in which “the coloured” was treated at least with empathy, were a radical departure from

how coloured people had been treated in Afrikaans fiction up to that point. Van der Merwe (1994) remarks that, by placing a non-white character at the centre of the novel, Mikro makes a radical departure from the Afrikaans prose of the time (before 1948), which generally had as its aim to propagate Afrikaner nationalism. According to Beukes and Lategan (1959: 256), the *Toiings*-trilogy speaks of Mikro's "*sincere, earnest love for the Coloured whose life and mentality he knows so intimately.*" (author's translation). In spite of the patronising odour this pronouncement has, it is supported by the author himself in Nienaber (1947), as quoted by Beukes and Lategan (*ibid*), when he says that:

"I had a message and had to deliver it [. . .]. I didn't want you to laugh at Toiings . . . Yes, they [the Coloureds] also suffer, strive, hope, laugh, live, mourn. And they are at our gates. We may not be frivolous about their future. Toiings approached you as a beggar, his hands outstretched for a bit of compassion and understanding. In my mind's eye I saw the Coloureds, all the Coloureds, standing like that, begging from you . . . I then saw them as pilgrims travelling with us to the same place." (author's translation).

It is clear, therefore, that Mikro, while to a large extent writing from within the Afrikaner ideologies of his time, had as his aim to generate empathy and understanding for coloured people.

As is the case in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mikro seems to give a central place to "*die wondermag van die allesbegrypende liefde*" (the wonderful power of love that understands all) (Beukes and Lategan, 1959:255). Whereas Paton and

Venter present the complexity of the 'native question', Mikro seems to suggest a simple solution, captured in the old adage "love conquers all".

3.2.3 *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*

As indicated in Chapter 2, Paton views his novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* as a "social record". The intention of the author is clear from the structure of the novel, which is characterised by what Callan (1982) refers to as "*the dramatic choral chapters that seem to break the sequence of the story for social commentary*".

As furthermore indicated in the analysis of the novels, there are many similarities between Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. Venter also tries to convey to his (Afrikaans) readers something of the dilemma faced by a rural black person in the "city of the White Man". However, Venter goes about the project in a different way, building a story world around his main character, Kolisile, without the long sections of social commentary found in Paton's novel. As hinted at by Grové (1961), however, in terms of social impact, both authors seem to have the same aim.

Van der Merwe (1994:40) views *Swart Pelgrim* as "*a novel of great historical importance*" in that it was "*one of the first attempts in Afrikaans literature to depict the black man as a person*" (ibid: 39).

3.2.4 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan*

Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena was Elsa Joubert's most successful novel. In Chapter 2, reference is made to the author's note at the beginning of the book in which Joubert states that she tried to describe one family's experience of that period as accurately as possible. She makes it clear that it is not the aim of the book to comprehensively address the social or political issues of the time. In an interview with Melt Myburg (December 2009), Joubert states that she had been driven by the will to bring the facts to 'her people', something that she viewed almost as a calling.

In an interview with the author, Joubert (2010) said that she had hoped with *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (which she abbreviates as *Poppie*) to address the ignorance of white readers in respect of the lives of black South Africans. At the time, several books written by black writers had been banned by the government and, although they lived close by, white people had no idea of how black people lived or thought. In preparation for a local travel guide, Joubert had already been studying black culture in South Africa for about ten years when the opportunity arose to write the novel (the life story of her domestic worker, Eunice Ntsatha). Joubert therefore had both the knowledge and sympathy that is, according to Rampersad (1994) required in order for a white person to write a black person's story well. Joubert (2010) adds that the fact that Ntsatha spoke Afrikaans, was one of the key factors that made it possible for her (Joubert) to enter the world of the story.

Joubert (2010) says that she hoped with her novel to touch the hearts and minds of her readers. It was for this reason that she took great care to ensure that, although the novel is fiction, all the events referred to in it, are factually correct. Although the material that she used for the novel was of a political nature, she opted to write a human story and not a political treatise. The success of this approach is apparent from the continued success enjoyed by the novel (*Poppie* the drama has recently again been prescribed to high school learners). Joubert believes that an author has a social responsibility to hold a mirror to society, and with *Poppie*, she believes that she had managed to do that. The novel was a talking point, from university professors to the residents of the Cape Flats, who waited for the *Rapport* each Sunday to read the latest excerpt from the novel. The feedback she personally received was overwhelming. Although there was criticism here and there, the general response was that *Poppie* had opened people's eyes to the plight of black people.

It is apparent that Brink has the same objective. In an interview with Gerrit Brand (*Die Burger*, Junie 2005), he states that "*Writing history is no longer about 'great men', but about normal people. Personal memories and subjective interpretations therefore become important again, as well as the mythical dimension*" (author's translation) (Geskietskrywing gaan nie meer oor 'groot manne' nie, maar oor gewone mense. Persoonlike herinnerings en subjektiewe interpretasies word dus weer belangrik, ook die mitiese.).

It is therefore not surprising that Brink does not assign the same importance to 'the truth' as Joubert does. By venturing into the realm of the magical, Brink

affords his reader a wider perspective on his main character, Kupido Kakkerlak. Rampersad (1994:2&3), in his study on writing or telling black lives, puts a pre-occupation with ‘truth’ in perspective when he states that: “*The greatest biography [...] remains an approximation, surely*” and “*what a biographer hopes to recapture is impossible to recapture altogether – that is, the spirit and the truth of his or her subject’s life*”.

3.2.5 *Proteus* and *Lerato*

As is clear from the quote referred to earlier in this chapter, Meyer (2008) believes that it is not possible for the reader to distinguish between real and fictional characters, which causes readers to identify very strongly with the characters in novels. When Meyer therefore presents his reader with a cast of equally rounded, racially diverse characters, he portrays a South Africa where, in spite of a number of problems, diversity “works”. During an interview with the researcher, Meyer (2010) indicated that this portrayal is not aspirational, but stems from his personal optimism about South African society.

With *Lerato*, the audacious white author attempts to present a young black girl as someone with the same dreams and aspirations, and the same fears, as any other girl would have. Although, unlike in *Proteus*, the focalisation in this novel is only through the main character, Lerato, the author attempts through the plot to trivialise to a certain extent the racial differences between her characters and to give more prominence to their individual human experiences. It is hoped that the reader (the imagined readership is a female one) will identify with Lerato regardless of her colour.

3.2.6 *Kennis van die Aand*

In his memoirs, Brink (2009: 245) states that *Kennis van die Aand* was the first novel in which he wrote openly against the apartheid government. It is therefore an example (in an even stronger sense than the novels by Paton and Venter referred to above) of *littérature engagée*. Brink states that the novel was written in the “rage and pain” Baldwin (1955) refers to. He was amazed at the reaction elicited by *Kennis* (as he refers to the novel), as love across the colour bar had already appeared in English novels, such as *An Occasion for Loving* by Nadine Gordimer. This probably explains the stir caused by Venter’s *Swart Pelgrim* in spite of the fact that an English novel with very much the same theme (Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country*) had already been published a few years before.

When Ernst Lindenberg, a friend of Brink’s, criticised *Kennis* because the coloured Josef Malan behaved and reacted exactly like a white person, Brink responded that that was exactly what he had hoped to achieve (Brink, 2009: 246).

Brink (ibid: 250) is of the opinion that the success enjoyed by *Kennis* internationally caused growing international interest in South African literature and in the manner in which local authors fought against censure.

3.3 SUMMARY

The primary research question was how and why white South African novelists use black main characters. This chapter shows that the black main characters in the selected texts are presented in different ways. Similarities could be identified in the way in which the black main character is portrayed in some of the texts. It is clear that, in all cases, the intention of the author was to gain the reader's sympathy for the black main character.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4. Good intentions manifest in different ways

From the analysis and comparison of the primary study texts in Chapters 2 and 3, it is clear that, in all eight selected novels, it was the intention of the author to elicit sympathy for, or enable (varying degrees of) identification with, the black main character and in so doing to challenge existing perceptions. The authors go about this in two distinct ways.

4.1 Different, but human

The first of two categories that could be identified are novels in which the author introduces the black main character as someone who comes from a different cultural world into that of the white characters in the novel and, by implication, of the white reader. By sharing the joys and sorrows of the main character, the reader comes to an understanding of his/her humanity and can therefore no longer sustain stereotypical views of black people as a homogenous, faceless entity – views often characterised by pronouncements such as “You blacks . . .” “Your black man always . . .” “You people . . .”.

In these novels the story creates an opportunity for the reader to engage with someone he or she would probably never have had a relationship with in real life.

A further study could investigate the response of black readers to the selected novels in more detail by way of a reception aesthetics approach.

4.1.1 Fictional historiography – when truth is on the side of the author

The author can achieve this through a form of fictional historiography, through which the life of a historical character is chronicled, e.g. Joubert's *Poppie Nongena* and Brink's *Kupido Kakkerlak*. It is possible that the mere indication that the story is "based on facts" (as in the case of *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*) or "a true story" (e.g. *Bidsprinkaan*) makes it more likely that the reader will believe what happens in the story – a prerequisite for success if he aim is getting the reader's sympathy for the black main character.

4.1.2 Imaginary friends

Creating understanding for the black main character as "different but human" can also be achieved through a purely fictional work, as is the case in Mikro's *Toiings*, or Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. It should be noted that all three these novels are set in the current reality of their time. While the characters and plot are fictional, the setting very often is not. While the novels by Paton and Venter engage directly with the socio-political issues of the day, and are clearly focused on the plight of the black South African in a white-dominated, urbanising society, Mikro seems to condone the political dispensation of the time, including the cruel abuse by white farmers of

their black workers. However unpalatable this, as well as the patronising tone of Mikro's novel, is for a reader from the (new) South Africa of almost 85 years later, one has to accept that the author's intention was that of achieving an enhanced understanding, even compassion, for Toiings and, by association, for coloured people. The same good intention was the driving force behind the novels by Paton and Venter, although these, too, have been subject to harsh criticism for their patronising tone, romantic notions and thinly veiled bias.

4.2 We are the same

In presenting their black main characters Brink (with *Kennis van die Aand*), Meyer and Homann go to great lengths to portray them as "just the same as any other person". These authors focus on the similarities between (white and black) people. The intention to depict Josef Malan as in essence the same as any white man, was clearly stated by Brink (2009:246). Meyer (2010) also indicated that he could only make progress with the character of Tobela Mpayipheli once he had started to focus on the similarities between himself and the character rather than the differences. This is true of all three novels, in spite of the fact that they had different objectives. For instance, in Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* the insanity of apartheid is driven home very effectively by portraying its victim, Josef Malan, as a person who, apart from his skin colour, is just like the white reader. The other two novels, Meyer's *Proteus* and Homann's *Lerato*, do not have a political objective. These novels, to different degrees, present a picture of South African society in which diversity is not problematised. It is not surprising that these works are fictional. The racial

harmony they portray can be criticised for being too selective a view of reality (see Mphahlele, 2002: 409).

4.3 Conclusion

From the above, it would appear that white South African authors who use black main characters fall mainly into two different categories. Among the authors of the selected texts, some (Mikro, 1934; Paton, 1948; Venter, 1952; Joubert, 1978 and Brink, 2005) choose to portray black people as different from whites, but worthy of love. In this category, some authors base their novels on historic facts, while others write fictional stories set in the social reality of the day. A further distinction is that some of the novels have political issues as a central theme, while others address these issues askance, if at all. While in some of these novels the narration is biased (notably less so in the novels based on facts), they intentionally avoid the simple dichotomy of a “love prejudice” for the self accompanied by a “hate prejudice” for the other as described by Allport (1954).

In the second category of novels are those in which the black main character is presented as no different from the white reader (the novels by Brink, 1973; Meyer, 2002 and Homann, 2011). Again, these novels differ from each other as to the degree in which political issues are central to the plot. At the heart of these novels is a desire to answer in the affirmative the prejudicial question so aptly formulated by Styron (2008: 97): “*could a Negro really own a mind as subtle, as richly informed, as broadly inquiring and embracing as that of a white man?*”

However, whether they fall into the first or second category, in all of the selected texts one can clearly discern *“the longing to break down false barriers to reconcile the self and the other, and create a world of harmony and understanding”* (Van der Merwe, 1994: 120).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5. Conclusion

Joubert (2010), says that a writer chooses to write. The study suggests that writers choose to write for different reasons. Some write out of rage and pain (e.g Brink with *Kennis van die Aand*), others to address ignorance (e.g. Mikro with *Toiings* and Elsa Joubert with *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*), some to rewrite history while commemorating a birthday (Brink with *Bidsprinkaan*) and yet others mainly to entertain (e.g Deon Meyer with *Proteus*). Whatever the reason, a writer chooses to write and writing is therefore intentional. Van der Merwe (1994) argues that there is not only intent in choosing to write, but also in choosing what to write and how to write it. A writer, says Van der Merwe (1994) is never neutral, but chooses a point of view and tries to influence the reader to accept the point of view of the book. Therefore, when a white author chooses to use a black main character, it is not by accident.

It is clear from the analysis of the study texts that the political reality of the day had a strong influence on the choice and presentation of the black main character in each of the texts. This relates to Joubert's (2010) statement that the writer has to hold a mirror to society. It is therefore no surprise that the moral urgency with which authors like Brink (1973) and Joubert (1978) presented their main characters during the apartheid era is not found in the novels published before or after that period. By the same token, it is unlikely

that novels showing black characters as ‘different but human’ will be produced in a post apartheid society.

It is fitting to expand Joubert’s view on writing in the words of Van der Merwe (1994:120) “*Literature is partly a mirror, partly a crystal ball.*” In 1993, Visser considered the “politics of future projection in South African fiction”. Studying Schoeman’s *Promised Land* (1978), Gordimer’s *July’s People* (1981) and Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), he found that projections of a post-apartheid South Africa were apocalyptic, with only *July’s People* conveying some optimism about the future.

That South Africa has weathered the storm of political transition far better than anticipated by the authors studied by Visser, is not only clear from the way in which Tobela Mpayipheli and Lerato Mokoena are portrayed in the respective novels, but also from the fact that there was no pressing societal need for Meyer or Homann to make a political statement through their black main characters. Instead, these characters were chosen because the authors found them interesting (Meyer 2010).

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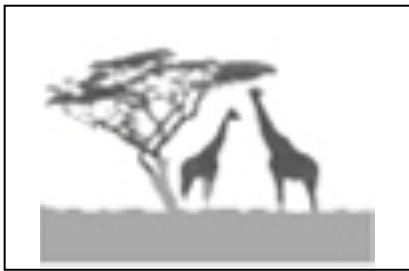
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The mast head of Deon Meyer's website, where I searched for initial clues on how he came to choose a black man as the main character in his acclaimed novel *Proteus* (Heart of the Hunter) (2002), boasts a small picture of two giraffes under an acacia tree. At the bottom of the text on the inside of the back cover of Etienne van Heerden's *Asbesmiddag* (2007), which I read searching for clues about the relationship between fiction and reality, there is a small picture of the same two giraffes (it must be the same two), their necks twisted like a koeksister. Notwithstanding the claim by the cynical Irish redhead in Van Heerden's novel that this act of neck-knotting is a physical impossibility, as I progressed through the study, I spotted the giraffes (whom I nicknamed Fact and Fiction) performing their amazing tricks in each of the eight selected texts. Can you spot the knot?



“All ‘truths’ are only ‘our’ truths, because we bring to the ‘facts’ our feelings, our experiences, our wishes. Thus, storytelling – from wherever it comes – forms a layer in the foundation of the world; and glinting in it we see the trace elements of every tribe on earth.”

Frank Delaney in the author’s note to his novel *Ireland* (2004)

“Ek het dit vrywillig aanvaar soos dit aan my oorgelewer is, en ‘n mitiese moontlikheid kan waarder wees as feite”

Josef Malan in André P Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand* (*Looking on Darkness*) (1973)

“In these respects therefore, the story is not true, but considered as a social record, it is the plain and simple truth.”

Alan Paton in the author’s note to the first edition of his novel *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948)

ABSTRACT

The study takes an in-depth look at eight novels by white South African authors in which the main characters are black. The novels that were studied fell into two main categories, those that highlight (although not always to the same extent) the differences between white and black people and those in which the author takes care to depict the black main character as ‘a person just like any other’, or in which the emphasis is on the similarities between people regardless of race. The novels in the first category can be divided into purely fictional works on the one hand (*Toiings* (1934), *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) and *Swart Pelgrim* (1952)) and novels based on historical facts (*Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978) and *Bidsprinkaan* (2005)) on the other. In the fictional novels in this category, which are also the oldest/earliest of the selected novels, the narrator patronises the black main character, who is seen as naïve and in some cases at the mercy of baser urges. The researcher shows, however, that the intent of the authors was to gain the reader’s empathy for and understanding of the plight of the black character and, by implication, of black people in general. This applies regardless of whether the novel had an explicit political theme (e.g. *Cry, the Beloved Country*) or not (e.g. *Toiings*).

The novels in the second category, i.e. those in which black characters are portrayed as not substantively different from white characters (*Kennis van die Aand* (1973), *Proteus* (2002) and *Lerato* (unpublished, 2011)) also include novels in which the main theme is a political one (*Kennis van die Aand*) and those in which political issues are not central to the plot (*Proteus*) or in which there is hardly any reference to political issues at all (*Lerato*).

The outcomes of the study show that the intention of the authors of the studied novels in the pre-apartheid era was to promote understanding and reconciliation and not to strengthen divisive stereotypes. While this cannot be measured in empirical terms, anecdotal evidence suggests that literature does contribute to social change, albeit in an indirect manner. Despite the harsh criticism (particularly from black authors and scholars) of the practice by white authors to make use of black main characters, it can be argued that, within the South African context, such novels have played a role in achieving mutual understanding and reconciliation.

There is a notable shift in the post-apartheid novels. Rather than pleading the case of the black main character with the white audience, Meyer (2002) and Homann (2011) portray their black main characters as equal players in a diverse society. If literature is seen as a reflection of society, this is an encouraging sign that South Africa has substantively moved on from apartheid.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Literary analysis

Literary sociology

Politics

Fiction and reality

Fictional representation

Characterisation

Racism

Prejudice / bias

Stereotype

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Research questions

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the study topic and problem statement or research question(s). The rationale for and relevance of the study, the study approach and methodology (comparative socio-political literary analysis that comprises both an empirical survey of the selected text elements³ and a qualitative interpretation of the findings that is in part read against the work of other scholars in the field) will be described. The rationale for choosing specific texts as primary study texts for the study will be explained. This chapter will also provide the reader with a framework for the dissertation.

1.1 Primary research question

The primary question that the research project seeks to answer is: How and why do white South African novelists use black main characters in their texts?

1.1.1 Secondary research questions

Secondary research questions include the following:

³ A list of the text elements that will be analysed appears on page 17 in the introduction to Chapter 2.

- Can the representation of black main characters by white South African authors be categorised into different 'types'?
- What does the use of black main characters by white South African authors achieve?
- What is the role of the writer in a transforming society?
- What is the relationship between fiction and the socio-political reality of the day?
- What is the role of stereotype in texts by white South African authors in which the main characters are black?

1.1.2 Study aims

In an attempt to answer the research questions, the researcher aims to provide a critical comparative analysis of the selected texts that will seek to illuminate differences and similarities between them, possibly confirming the intuitive assumption that white South African authors represent black main characters in distinctly different ways. This emerging truth will lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of white authors who use black main characters and will also provide insight into different responses to the South African socio-political reality and how said responses precipitate in the literature genre under study.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The study theme emerged from the candidate's own novel, *Lerato* (2011, unpublished), in which the main character is a young black woman. The

dynamic of a white author attempting to write a narrative with a black protagonist and the questions that arise with regard to the character's (and, by implication, the author's) interaction with the socio-political reality in South Africa, provided the stimulus for pursuing this theme. As the author of one of the selected texts, the researcher enjoys an advantageous "closeness to the subject" (Flyvbjerg, 2001:63), which will add depth and insight to the study.

The researcher hopes that the project will contribute to the vast body of socio-political literary analyses of fictional texts in South Africa, including works such as those by Mphahlele (1962), February (1981), Coetzee (1988) and Attridge and Jolly (1998).

As far as could be ascertained, no previous study has been undertaken specifically on the representation of black main characters in texts by white South African authors. This study will therefore attempt to make a new contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this subject through a close comparative reading of the selected texts.

Apart from adding to the existing body of knowledge of socio-literary analysis through the phenomenon under study by discerning similarities and patterns (or the lack thereof) in the selected texts, it is hoped that the study will shed some light on the underlying perceptions and dynamic forces at work in shaping South Africa's socio-political reality. Hopefully, the insight thus gained will lead to greater awareness and increased mutual understanding between members of a very diverse citizenry.

The study will not only enrich the discourse on literary analysis, specifically in the South African context, but will also be of benefit to other study fields, including Sociology and Political Science.

1.3 Research methods

The study will consist of a phenomenological identification, analysis and comparison of different elements of the selected texts on the one hand and a qualitative interpretation of the findings on the other.

The phenomenological approach to research has its roots in the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), particularly his work *Logical Investigations* (translated by D Carr in 1970). The point of departure of a phenomenological study is intensive information gathering, for instance by way of interviewing, focus meetings, participant observation and (as is the case with this study) the close analysis of texts. The intense information gathering and description that characterises a phenomenological study makes it a suitable approach for small sample sizes. Husserl (1970) advocated embarking on a study without hypotheses or preconceptions, but more recent scholars (such as Plummer, 1983 and Stanley & Wise, 1993) argue that it is not possible for a researcher to take a wholly unbiased position. They view the researcher as an interested and subjective participant rather than an impartial observer. Husserl (1970) saw the objective of pure phenomenological research as describing rather than explaining phenomena. It is the nature of a phenomenological study to make detailed comments about specific situations, rather than to reach conclusions that can be generalised. However, adding an

interpretive dimension to the research enables it to inform theory and enrich practice.

The following research methods were used:

1.3.1 Literature survey

The core of the study is a close reading and comparative analysis of eight selected texts which will form the basis of the study. These texts are:

- *Toiings (Ragamuffin)* by Mikro, 1943
- *Cry, the beloved Country* by Alan Paton, 1948
- *Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim)* by FA Venter, 1952
- *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena)* by Elsa Joubert, 1978
- *Kennis van die Aand (Looking on Darkness)* by André P Brink, 1973
- *Proteus (Heart of the Hunter)* by Deon Meyer, 2002
- *Bidsprinkaan (Praying Mantis)* by André P Brink, 2005
- *Lerato* by Desirée Homann (unpublished), 2011

The selection of the above texts was done largely in an intuitive manner on the basis of the candidate's experience of the texts, an initial literature survey and discussions with other scholars on the matter. For ease of comparison, texts were limited to one genre, i.e. the novel. In order to include seminal works in this category in the study, it was decided not to limit the sample of study texts to a certain period in history. The date of publication of the texts

range from the 1930's to 2005. This ensures a sizeable study sample as well as the opportunity to draw distinctions or comparisons between older and more recent texts. Furthermore, text selection was not limited by gender (i.e. the texts were selected regardless of whether either the black main character or the author was male or female). (It was noted, though, that in the novels by male authors in the sample, the black main character was also male and in those by female authors, female.)

As this study is primarily an exercise in socio-political literary analysis, it was decided to confine the texts to works by South African authors. In the light of the phenomenon under study, only texts by white South African authors have been included. The said phenomenon is, of course, by no means limited to South Africa. For example, works in which white American authors make use of black main characteristics abound. One of the oldest and best known of these is certainly *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which was published in 1852.

In order to facilitate the comparison of elements in the different texts that were studied, it was decided to limit the texts to a specific genre. The novel was chosen on the basis of the author's own text being a novel. There are, as is to be expected, numerous texts in other genres by white South African writers in which black main characters also appear. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in dramas. Examples include *Boesman and Lena* by Athol Fugard, *Poppie* by Elsa Joubert, *Toiings op die langpad* by André P Brink and *Aku Vang 'n Ster* by Nico Luwes. (There are also examples in short stories, for example "Vir Siphon" by PJ Haasbroek and also in poems, as in "Mabalel" by

Eugène Marais (1925)) While most of the elements that have been focussed on in this study could also be discerned in the dramas mentioned above and these texts could therefore arguably have formed part of the present study, it was decided to limit the number of selected texts studied in the light of the nature and scope of this study. Limiting the number of texts for this study is also appropriate in the light of the required high level of detailed analysis (closeness of reading) of each of the texts in question. Expanding the study to include South African dramas could be the subject of another study.

As the study aims to enrich the existing discourse on socio-political and socio-linguistic readings of literature in South Africa, it was decided to focus on works by well-known authors (most of the texts received recognition in the form of awards and/or prizes⁴) and to add to the comparison the unpublished work, *Lerato* by the present author. The study furthermore focuses only on books aimed at an adult market and will therefore exclude children's literature and youth literature such as *Malisel en die tweeling* by WA Hickey.

The list of selected novels for this study is by no means exhaustive, since many other novels by white South African authors in which the main character is black do exist. One example is *Booia* by JRL van Bruggen (1931) which is regarded as a forerunner to *Toiings*. Another is *Moeder Poulin* by GH Franz (1946) in which the main character is a black woman. *Toiings*, the main character in Mikro's *Toiings*, is also the main protagonist in the other two

⁴ Mikro received the Hertzog Prize for *Toiings* in 1936 and Venter for *Swart Pelgrim* in 1961. Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was awarded the Anisfield-Wolf Saturday Review Award (1948), the Newspaper Guild of New York Page One Award (1949) and the London Sunday Times Special Award for Literature (1949). Joubert's *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* was awarded the CNA Prize in 1978, and the WA Hofmeyr and Louis Luyt Prizes in 1979. Brink's *Bidsprinkaan* was awarded the UJ Prize for Creative Work in 2006 and Meyer's *Proteus* was awarded the ATKV Prose Prize in 2003 and the Deutsche Krimi Preis in 2006.

novels that form part of the *Toiings* trilogy namely *Pelgrims* (1935) and *Vreemdelinge* (1944). In many of the novels by PJ Schoeman (1904-1988), such as *Sonogies, die die Swazie-prinsessie* (Sun-eyes, the Swazi princess) (youth novel) (1938), *Nobiyane, die Zoeloeminnaar* (Nobiyane, the Zulu lover) (1963), and *Pampata die beminde van koning Shaka* (Phampatha, the beloved of King Shaka) (1978), the main characters are black.

The selected texts will be read against analyses and critiques by various authors, sociological and political commentaries (e.g. February (1981), Schalkwyk (1986), Rampersad (1994), Van der Merwe (1994) and Mphahlele (2002)). A variety of texts on literary analysis and criticism was consulted as background reading, including the following categories:

- Scholarly books
- Journal articles
- Papers read at seminars and conferences
- Media reports
- Articles and commentary published on the internet.

1.3.2 Structured interviews / questionnaires

Interviews were conducted with Deon Meyer (in person) and Elsa Joubert (telephonically). This was supplemented by and compared with the self-reflexive input of the author on her own unpublished text, *Lerato*. André P Brink was regrettably not available for an interview. His memoir, *'n Vurk in die*

Pad (2009) provided valuable information, particularly in respect of *Kennis van die Aand* (1973).

As the purpose of this part of the research was to gather qualitative rather than empirical information, mostly open-ended questions were used, some of which related specifically to the text(s) by the author in question. Nonetheless, for purposes of comparing inputs made by different authors and discerning similarities or patterns, a number of standard questions were included in the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 2

CLOSE READING OF THE STUDY TEXTS

2. Format of the close reading of the study texts

In this chapter, the eight primary texts will each be discussed under the following headings:

- Background, plot and setting
- Black and white
- Characterisation
- Stereotype
- Narration and focalisation

In the discussion each text will be read against the other primary texts as well as against analyses and critiques by various scholars.

Although, as indicated in the title of this dissertation, the Afrikaans texts included in the comparative reading have all been translated into English, the original texts are used as a reference. This approach, also followed by other scholars (e.g. February, 1981), does not detract from the academic undertaking, nor does it impede the accessibility of the study to the English speaking reader, as all Afrikaans quotes are also presented in translated form. The translations are the researcher's own.

2.1 Close reading of the study texts

2.1.1 *Toiings (Ragamuffin)* by Mikro (CH Kühn), 1934⁵

2.1.1.1 Background, plot and setting

Mikro's *Toiings* (1934) is the earliest of the novels included in the comparative reading. Set in the Karoo, *Toiings* tells the story of a black (by all indications a Cape Coloured) farm worker named "Toiings" (literally, Tatters), who was abandoned by his parents as a young boy. Central to the plot is Toiings's search for love. After his first wife and true love, Siena, dies, he marries Griet, whom he believes is chosen for him by Siena from beyond the grave. This union proves to be disastrous and soon he chases Griet and her lover away. Pining for love, Toiings leaves the farm and becomes infatuated with a very popular woman from Uppington, Drieka Wee. After unsuccessfully pursuing Drieka he finally finds happiness with Jannetjie and returns to the farm. The story spans several years of Toiings's adult life.

Apart from the farm, Kareeplaas, where Toiings works as a shepherd, parts of the story are also set in the locations (townships) of Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp. The contrast between life on the farm and life in the location is used to emphasize Toiings's characterisation as an outsider among his own people (p133): "*Dis 'n nag vir liefhê, as die Karoo-lug so stil om jou is, hy so klein voel hier in die onmeetlike afstande.*" (It is a night for love, when the Karoo air lies so quietly around one, with him feeling so small here in the immeasurable

⁵ All page references refer to the third edition of the novel (1979 print) that was published by Van Schaik in 1968.

space.) While the location (township for non-whites) is portrayed as a den of iniquity, the farm, in the words of February (1981:49), represents “peace, order and purity”. (Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp, where Toiings goes to spend his leave, are black townships or 'locations'.)

2.1.1.2 Black and white

In *Toiings* white and black are depicted as worlds apart. From the outset, it is clear that Toiings (whose real name is Frikkie Seland) is the underling and Fanie Naudé, his employer, the master (“*baas*”) and his wife the mistress (“*nôl*”).

On the first page of the novel the reader is told of the inhumane treatment that Toiings was subjected to under “*baas*” Pieter, on whose farm he lived before deserting and coming to Fanie Naudé’s farm, Kareeplaas. Although Toiings is only a child when he arrives at Kareeplaas, his body is covered in bruises. His reason for leaving “*baas*” Pieter is that he had not been able to stand the many whippings he received from him.

On the first morning after Toiings’s arrival on Kareeplaas, Naudé says to his wife (p7) that he has decided to 'keep' him: “*Miemie, ek dink gaan die klonkie maar hou....’*” (‘Miemie, I think I am going to keep the little mite/piccanin after all....’) The way in which Toiings is viewed as a possession, almost like a pet (as is also the case with Josef Malan and Kupido Kakkerlak in the two selected novels by André P Brink, 1973 and 2005) reflects the “benevolent

paternalism" (February, 1981) that characterised the Afrikaner's view of coloured people at the time.

In the same vein, Fanie Naudé is seen (p7) as a "*goeie, liewe baas*" (dear, good master) because he gives Toiings wine and eight days holiday over Christmas. The reader is told that the neighbours do not understand Naudé's extreme charity towards Toiings, which they take as an indication that Naudé loves Toiings (p7): "*n Mens moet iemand werklik lief hê as hy hom wyn en so baie vakansie gee.*" (One has to really love someone if you give him wine and such a lot of leave.)

When Toiings communicates with his master, he addresses him as "*baas*", which is interjected almost after every word (e.g. on p9): "*'Ja, Baas.... Baas Fanie?'*" "*Ja, Baas.*" "*Dis so, Baas.*" "*Baas, kyk môreaand wou ek graag....'*" ('Yes, Master....' 'Master Fanie? 'Yes, Master.' 'It is true, Master. Master, well, tomorrow evening I would have liked to...')

On p8, Fanie Naudé views "*Ja, Baas*" (Yes, Master) as "*persoonlike bedanking vir 'n gesonde verhouding tussen baas en kneg*" (personal thanks for a sound relationship between master and servant). The inequality between Toiings and the white farmer and his family is clear from the fact that Toiings addresses the farmer and his children as "*baas*" (master/boss) and "*my kleinbasies*" (my little masters) respectively, while the farmer addresses Toiings by his first name (a nickname) only.

Throughout the novel there are marked differences between how whites and blacks are referred to. On p11, we read that Toiings "*nog steeds staan met sy hoed in die hand alhoewel die ander volkies rond sit en nie juis maak of daar wit mense naby is nie*". (still stands with his hat in his hands although the other workers sit around and do not really act as if there are white people close by). As mentioned before, whites are referred to as 'master' and 'mistress', while the black workers are referred to as "*volkies*" (workers) and "*bruin mense*" (coloureds). Toiings often refers to himself as a "*hotnot*", a "*jong*" or a "*klong*", all of which are today viewed as derogatory terms when used in reference to coloured people. On p24, Toiings wonders whether his son will be a "*meidjie*" or a "*klonkie*" – words commonly used at the time to refer to a black female and male child respectively. After the birth of his son, Dawid, Toiings always refers to him as his "*klonkie*", rather than his "*seuntjie*", which is the word that would have been used to refer to a white child. The black women in the novel are referred to throughout as "*meide*" – the female form of the derogatory term "*kaffers*".

Toiings and his ilk do not live in a house, like white people do, but in a "*stroois*". Rooiwal and Blikkiesdorp, where Toiings goes to spend his leave, are black townships or "locations".

2.1.1.3 Characterisation of Toiings

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that Toiings's 'blackness' ('non-whiteness') is apparent from the start. From the outset, the narrator

places him in the position of black servant in relation/contrast to the white master.

Toiings is portrayed as extremely naïve and does not question his 'place in life'. This is clear from his reverence for his mistress, Miemie Naudé, p9: *"Maar nou is Toiings eers skaam, want sy respek vir sy nôï het geen grense nie en is so opreg dat hy skaars in die kombuis wil kom as sy daar is. Bruin mense hoort nie in die baas se huis nie!"* (But now Toiings is even shyer, because his respect for his mistress knows no bounds and is so genuine that he almost does not want to go into the kitchen when she is there. Coloureds do not belong in the master's house!) Toiings even feels (p13): *"Die baas behoort sy volkies meer te slaan, dan deug 'n mens tog"* (The master should give his volkies more hidings, for then one is a better person.)

Toiings is very loyal to his master. On p11, he brags about him to his visitors: *' "Oompie Jan, julle base mag ryk wees en blink motors hê, maar my baas Fanie is die beste baas in hierdie kontrei." '* (Uncle Jan, your masters may well be rich and drive shiny cars, but my master Fanie is the best master in this region.) On p13, Toiings states that he would rather lose Siena than one of his master's sheep. Toiings does not want his wife to work, but gladly/readily(?) accepts that she has to work for mistress Miemie (p17): *"Nee, Siena. 'n Vrou van my sal nie werk nie. Vir nôï Miemie werk is nou 'n ander ding. Daarvoor gee ek nie om nie. '"* (No, Siena. No wife of mine will work. Well, working for mistress Miemie is something else. That does not bother me.) Toiings's aspiration for his son, Dawid, is that he will one day look after the sheep of Naudé's son, Bennie – *"Hulle sou so met Dawid kamta*

eendag spog. Hy moet nog eendag by kleinbaas Bennie skaap-oppas en nou sal Siena dit nooit sien nie" (p35) (They would brag with Dawid one day. He still has to look after little master Bennie's sheep one day and now Siena will never see it.) On p38 Toiings feels proud that Dawid will work for a master one day and will not sit on the store verandas like Jan's son Verus.

Toiings is presented to the reader as a kind of man-child whose experience of life remains at a very basic level. This is clear from Toiings's intermittent obsession with finding himself a "*meid*" and also from his brief obsession with making money. On p19, one reads that "*...van daardie dag af dink Toiings net aan twee dinge – name vir sy kinders en hoe om gou ryk te word....*" (...from that day Toiings thinks of two things only – names for his children and how to get rich quickly....) The patronising view of Toiings that is apparent from the narration as a whole is echoed in the seemingly kind words of his master on page 19: "*Ek sien een van die dae is jy ryker as ek*" (I see that one of these days you will be richer than me) to which Toiings responds "*Ai tog! Baas, hoe kan Baas dan nou so sê!*" (Goodness! Master, how can Master say such a thing!).

The narrator attempts to endear Toiings to the reader through his naivety, and to evoke pity for his suffering/low standing. Yet, the supposition is not that the reader should get to know Toiings as an equal, but rather that the reader would develop an understanding of him as an inferior being.

The humour in the novel derives from presenting Toiings as the clown, the buffoon (see also February, 1981). This is apparent from the following and many suchlike examples from the text:

- The way in which he prays (p13): *"Liewe Oubaas, ek is Toiings. Ek pas skaap op by baas Fanie, en ek het Siena lief. Ja, Baas. Amen"* (Dear Old Master, I am Toiings. I look after the sheep of baas Fanie, and I love Siena. Yes, Master, Amen);
- the borrowed outfits he wears to Dawid's christening (p30);
- his wedding to Griet (p45);
- the way in which he chooses his son's names Dawid Goliat Filistyn, which can be translated as David Goliath Philistine (p32) and
- the description of Toiings playing rugby for the Never Sweats (p97) among other things.

In characterising Toiings, however, the focus is not primarily on the fact that he is a black man in a world dominated by whites, but on the fact that he is an outsider among his own people (this is supported by Van der Merwe, 1994:24). On p43 we read that Toiings is uncomfortable in the presence of his friends: *"Toiings voel daar tussen hulle so uit sy plek uit. 'n Wees-bobbejaantjie kan nooit slegter voel nie, dink hy."* (Toiings feels very much out of place between them. An orphaned baby baboon cannot feel more out of place, he thinks.) Oompie Dissel (another character in the novel) says of Toiings on p57: *"Wat sal hy vir Toiings sê? Die arme man is so gemaak dat hy elkeen vertrou. Sulke mense hoort nie op 'n dorp waar al die euwels sommer helder oor dag rondloop nie."* (What should he tell Toiings? The poor man trusts everyone. Such people should not be in a town where all the evils are to

be found even in daylight.). Toiings hears how he is being laughed at by the other "volgies" after taking Drieka Wee for a walk and being teased by Bakkies Spyker about it (p92).

As is the case with all outsider characters, Toiings suffers as a result of his 'otherness' (p106): *"Ander volgies..... waarom is hy so aanmekeer gesit dat hy nie soos ander volgies is nie. Hy wens hy was soos Dampies of Daat Plakkies of al was dit dan maar soos Bakkies Spyker."* (Other "volgies".... why was he not created to be the same as other "volgies". If only he could be like Dampies or Daat Plakkies or even like Bakkies Spyker.). On p133 the focalisation shifts to Drieka to emphasise the characterisation of Toiings as an outsider: *"Maar Drieka verstaan hierdie hotnot nie. Vir haar is dit net doodsnaks dat oompie Toiings nou juis vir haar lief het. Sy sal dit tog vir die ander volgies vertel. Ander hotnots sê sommer vir jou – het jy 'n bok? Olraait! ek sal nou jou bok wees. Maar oompie Toiings weet nie hoe snaaks hy is nie."* (But Drieka doesn't understand this *hotnot*. For her it is just very funny that uncle Toiings loves her of all people. She will have to tell this to the other "volgies". Other "*hotnots*" will just come to you and say – do you have a "bok"? All right! I'll be your "bok" now. But uncle Toiings doesn't know how funny he is.).

Toiings is portrayed as essentially a child of nature. He feels uneasy in the the location (township). Toiings and Siena return to the farm quickly after their wedding, because (p15) *".... nie een van hulle hou van die lokasielewe nie"* (not one of them likes life in the location). Soon after leaving Kareeplaas for Blikkiesdorp, Toiings misses home (p91): *"Nou hy hier is, kan hy soms so*

verlang na Kareeplaas, die vaal rante en die mofdrop." (Now that he is here, he sometimes really misses Kareeplaas, the vaal ridges and the "mofdrop" (flock of sheep).) On p132 the reader is told that *"die verlange na 'n opregte liefde het van hom weer die kind van die natuur gemaak"* (the longing for sincere love made him the child of nature once again). References to the Karoo-flora, including "gannabos", "ghaap", "kambro" and "asbos", contribute to this characterisation.

The characterisation of Toiings as a child of nature goes further, even to the point where parallels are drawn between Toiings (and in some cases the other coloured people) and different kinds of animals. Toiings misses his pregnant wife when a donkey mare has a foal (p25), he feels like an orphaned baby baboon among his coloured friends (p43) and when Dawid is ill (p128): *"[hou] sy oë [...] weemoed soos die wat 'n mens soms in 'n redelose dier se oë sien."* (his eyes are filled with the sadness one sometimes sees in the eyes of a dumb animal). On page 139 "Oompie Dissel", Toiings's confidante, explains to Toiings that people are like donkeys, and that he, Tant Bet and Jannetjie are donkeys of the same class. Toiings agrees and adds that people are also in some respects like goats. This echoes the way black people are perceived by Beukes and Lategan (1959) that "Just as the wild animal of our country [...] had to give us the animal story, so also the Coloureds and the African intimately connected with Afrikaner life were bound to find their way into Afrikaans fiction" (quote translated by February, 1981).

Toiings has a very poor self-image, which the narrator relates to the fact that he was abandoned by his parents at a very young age. Examples illustrating Toiings's poor image of himself abound:

- On page 16 he calls himself a "*slegte hotnot*" (bad *hotnot*) and is grateful that Siena is willing to have him as her husband;
- he fears that his son will look like him, because then he would be ugly - (p24);
- he describes himself as a "*toiinglap*" (old/tattered rag) on the rubbish heap (p28);
- feels that he rightly deserves the name Toiings (p35)
- he also feels that he doesn't deserve the office of deacon in the church (p80).

2.1.1.4 **Stereotype**

The narrator presents a very stereotypical view of black people in general. They are characterised as a jolly, alcohol swilling bunch of people often at the mercy of their baser, particularly sexual, instincts – although the latter is portrayed in a rather covert manner, mostly through the contest between the Blikkiesdorp men for the affections of Drieka Wee, the "*meid*" from Upington. This description of coloured characters tallies with the earliest observations made by European explorers of Hottentots at the Cape (Coetzee, 1988; February, 1988) and is found in earlier works such as South Africa's oldest surviving play, CE Boniface's *De Temperantisten* (1832) and also the play *Kaatje Kekkelbek* by Andrew Geddes Bain, which was first performed at the Cape in 1838. Although Toiings is depicted as an outsider, he displays the

same vices. Already in the first chapter, Toiings asks his master for an extra bottle of wine for Christmas. His visitor, “Oompie Jan”, says to Siena: “*Siena, kan jy nie sien Toiings soek meid nie?*” (Siena, can’t you see Toiings is looking for a woman?) (p10).

It is not only the way in which Toiings is characterised that is stereotypical – the same can be said of the portrayal of “Baas Fanie” as the good master. Van der Merwe (1994) remarks that Toiings’s deep respect for his master and madam is portrayed as part of his innate ‘goodness’. According to Van der Merwe (1994) this subservience was a pre-requisite for positive black stereotypes in early Afrikaans literature. Blacks who refused to be subservient were either branded as barbaric and blood thirsty, or as stupid and lazy.

2.1.1.5 Narration and focalisation

The story is narrated in the third person. As indicated above, the narrator portrays Toiings in a patronising manner. He is viewed almost as a child that has to be in the custody of a white master (see also Gerwel, 1983). Van der Merwe (1994), however, feels that the patronising tone of the narration diminishes as the novel progresses.

The narrator presents the divide between white and black, between master and servant, uncritically. No judgement is passed, for example, on issues such as corporal punishment of farm workers, providing farm workers with liquor as compensation, the living conditions of workers or the existence of ‘blacks only’ locations. In addition to being openly and unashamedly racist,

the narrator is also sexist, giving no voice whatsoever to the “meide” in the novel, thereby implying that the practice of domestic abuse of women is a mere instance of fact, not worthy of any comment or criticism. On page 140, “oompie Dissel” says to Toiings that, had he married Drieka Wee, he would have had to give her a hiding on the very first night they were married. Toiings agrees.

The sense of place in the novel is enhanced by the narrator’s use of words and turns of phrase specific to the Karoo region, e.g. “kwansel”, “basta”, “norring”, “baster”, “omgesukkel” as well as the characteristic plant names referred to in 2.1.1.3 above.

The focalisation takes place mostly through the thoughts and words of the main character. However, there are a couple of instances where the omniscient narrator also relates the thoughts of other characters, e.g. those of Toiings’s master and mistress. These shifts are often used to display to the reader the affinity that Fanie and Miemie Naudé feel for Toiings, e.g. on p 11: *“Baas Fanie en nôi Miemie het nog so ‘n rukkie vertoef en toe is hulle huis toe. Hulle voel hulle het hul plig teenoor Toiings gedoen”* (Master Fanie and mistress Miemie stayed a little while longer and then went home. They feel that they have done their duty towards Toiings.) and on the same page: *“As nôi Miemie haar weer omdraai kry sy die gedagte dat daar eendag in die hemel seker ook ‘n bruinkoor sal wees”* (When mistress Miemie turns around again, she has a thought that there will one day probably be a coloured choir in heaven). After Toiings and Dawid joins the Naudés for carol singing, the narrator says (p78): *“Die baas en jong verstaan mekaar so goed dat Fanie*

Naudé omdraai en in die huis instap sonder om verder te praat." (Master and servant understand each other so well that Fanie Naudé turns around and walks into the house without saying anything else). On page 84, when Toiings leaves Kareeplaas, " *[haak] Miemie [...] by haar man in soos hulle daar op die stoep staan en in albei se harte voel dit skielik so leeg*" (Miemie takes her husband's arm as they stand there on the porch and both their hearts suddenly feel so empty). On page 86, Fanie hears Toiings's donkey cart as he leaves the farm and thinks: "*Toiings besef nie hoe geheg 'n mens aan hom word nie*" (Toiings doesn't realise how attached one becomes to him).

2.1.2 *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, 1984⁶

2.1.2.1 Background, plot and setting

Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was first published in 1948. Nadine Gordimer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991 in an interview with the Observer called this book "the most influential South African novel ever written". In the author's note to the first edition, Paton explains that, except for two, all the characters in the book are fictional, but adds "In these respects therefore, the story is not true, but considered as a social record, it is the plain and simple truth."

The novel tells the story of Stephen Kumalo, a Zulu parson from Ndotsheni in what is today Kwa-Zulu Natal, who travels to Johannesburg to find out what

⁶ All page references refer to the 2002 London Vintage edition of the novel.

has happened to his only son, Absalom, who had left home to look for work in the city. At the same time he hopes to find out more about his sister Gertrude and his brother John, who have also gone to Johannesburg some time ago, but have stopped writing home. Another resident of Ndotsheni, one Sibeko, asks Kumalo to enquire after his daughter, who has also disappeared in the city. Structured around a plot that is referred to by Lewis Nkosi (quoted in February, 1981:83) as 'Jim comes to Jo'burg', the novel takes the reader on a journey with Stephen Kumalo that fluctuates between hope and despair. After Kumalo has found Gertrude and brought her back to Mrs Lithebe's house near the Mission, he "was light-hearted and gay like a boy, more so than he had been for years. One day in Johannesburg, and already the tribe was being rebuilt, the house and the soul restored." (p31). This leads the reader to hope that Absalom would be found equally easily, which proves not to be the case, since Absalom was arrested for and found guilty of the murder of the son of James Jarvis, who farms at Carisbrooke, not far from Ndotsheni.

James Jarvis comes to Johannesburg to bury his son and to support his daughter in law. Stephen Kumalo meets Jarvis when he visits the house in search of news on Sibeko's daughter. Despite the tragic events that surround their meeting, there is mutual respect between the two.

When Stephen Kumalo returns to Ndotsheni, he is visited by Jarvis' young grandson who subsequently reports to his father that children are dying because there is no milk. Jarvis begins sending cans of milk to the parsonage on a daily basis. He furthermore arranges for a dam to be built at Ndotsheni

and for an agricultural demonstrator to teach the residents sustainable farming methods.

The book ends with Stephen Kumalo going up the mountain to hold a vigil for his son the night before he is to be hanged.

The story is narrated in chronological sequence and is set in the reality of the day at the time the book was written. It spans about two months from the time that Stephen Kumalo sets out for Johannesburg to the day of his son's hanging.

The story unfolds in two very contrasting locations, namely the Umzimkulu Valley in Kwa-Zulu Natal where Carisbrooke and Ndotsheni are located, and the city of Johannesburg. The contrasts between these two settings are vividly described. It is, however, not presented as the idyllic rural environment versus the evil city. Both Johannesburg and the Umzimkulu valley bear the ill effects of the breakdown of native tribal life. The novel opens with a lyrical description of 'the road that runs from Ixopo into the hills' (as does Book II), but soon places the well-tended, fertile high ground in stark contrast to the valley, which is barren because of erosion and over-grazing. On page 8 we read: "The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them anymore", and somewhat later Kumalo's wife says: "When people go to Johannesburg, they do not come back." (p11).

The need to heal and restore the land takes a central place in the novel. The author states in his note to the 1987 edition: "Perkins told me that one of the

most important characters in the book was the land of South Africa itself. He was quite right. The title of the book confirms his judgement.” Stephen Kumalo’s love of the land is apparent from early in the novel, for example when he discusses the brokenness of rural communities with the people he encounters at the mission on p22. On p152 James Jarvis is also called “a man of the soil”.

2.1.2.2 Black and white

The book is, by the author’s own admission, a “social record” (author’s note, first edition). Through the narration of Stephen Kumalo’s journey to Johannesburg, his search for his son and the events that take place after his return to Ndotsheni, a wide variety of aspects of what is referred to as the 'native issue' is addressed.

The difference between black and white is apparent from early on in the novel and it is clear that the intention is to show /reveal/highlight and discuss these differences rather than gloss them over. When the reader first meets him, Stephen Kumalo’s name and the use of the Zulu word “umfundisi” (parson) to address him, signal his race. The child who brings him the letter about Gertrude says (p8): “The white man asked me to bring it to you”.

In this first encounter with the Kumalos there is also another clue that South African race relations are to play a significant role in the story. After having quarrelled with Kumalo about the letter from Msimangu, Kumalo’s wife (p12) “sat down at his table, and put her head on it, and was silent, with the patient

suffering of black women, with the suffering of oxen, with the suffering of any that are mute”. This echoes the animal imagery that is often used when white authors describe black characters, particularly their helplessness in the face of suffering (see discussion of Mikro’s *Toiings* in paragraph 2.1.1 above).

The theme of fear that is introduced on pages 13 and 14 of the novel and which is often juxtaposed by love, runs throughout the novel. It is brought to bear not only on the bewilderment Kumalo experiences in the city of Johannesburg, but also on the over-arching theme of black/white relations in South Africa, or rather, the relationship between 'natives' and 'Europeans' as black and white people were respectively referred to in the language of the day. When Kumalo first meets the other priests at the Mission, he hears how “white Johannesburg is afraid of black crime” (p22). On page 25, Msimangu says: “It is fear that rules this land.” On page 96, Father Vincent says to Kumalo: “My friend, your anxiety turned to fear, and your fear turned to sorrow. But sorrow is better than fear. For fear impoverishes always, while sorrow may enrich.” When he guides Kumalo into prayer a little while later, he says: “Pray for all white people, those who do justice, and those who would do justice if they were not afraid” (p98). The theme of fear is carried through to the closing paragraph of the novel: “But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret” (p236).

On p14 we are told that there are mostly black travellers on the train from Carisbrooke, “for the Europeans of this district all have their cars, and hardly travel by train any more.” Kumalo climbs into the carriage for 'non-Europeans'.

In his bewildering first experience of Johannesburg, Kumalo for the first time comes face to face with the issue of 'black crime' when a young black man offers to go and buy him a bus ticket and cons him out of a pound (p19). The issue of 'native crime' is again touched upon in Kumalo's first discussion with the other priests at the Mission (p22), where it is directly linked with the 'broken house, young men and young girls who went away and forgot their customs, who lived loose and idle lives.' In a private discussion with Kumalo, Msimangu later says (p25): "The white man has broken the tribe [...] That is why children break the law, and old white people are robbed and beaten."

When Msimangu takes Kumalo to meet his (Stephen Kumalo's) brother John, who is a political activist, John speaks of the chief of Ndotsheni who is 'a white man's dog' (p34), a description Stephen Kumalo later uses to refer to himself (p230). He also blames the church for inaction and encouraging people to be "meek and obedient" (p34). John tells Kumalo that the wealth generated by the mines (and therefore by black labour) is used to increase the riches of whites while keeping black South Africans in poverty (p34 and 35).

Through his experience of the bus boycott (p40), Kumalo comes to learn of mass action and poverty, and when Hlabeni directs him and Msimangu to the Orlando Shantytown, he becomes aware of the phenomenon of squatter camps (p46). Kumalo's experience of the Ezenzeleni mission to the blind is presented as a 'best practice example' of white charity towards black people (p80).

The racial prejudice that was prevalent at the time of writing the novel is prevalent throughout the book. Absalom's crime is deemed more serious because it was a white man that he killed. Kumalo exclaims: "But that he should kill a man, a white man!" (p78) and when John Kumalo is told of Absalom's arrest, John thinks "One does not jest about murder. Still less about the murder of a white man." When Kumalo tells his son's fiancé of Absalom's crime, he says: "He is in prison, for the most terrible deed that a man can do..... He has killed a white man" (p99).

Apart from bringing to light a wide variety of the social issues of the day as the plot unfolds, there are many instances where the author uses narrative to provide the reader with more information on the issues at hand. On p37, Msimangu enters into a long soliloquy about 'power' and how black men are often corrupted by power. He ends by stating: "I see only one hope for our country, and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it."

The housing shortage, the corruption of the so-called 'housing committees', the establishment and hardships of the Orlando Shanty Town squatter community (informal settlement) are addressed through the narration of the experiences of characters that have not been introduced to the reader before and who do not play any further role in the novel (one Mrs Seme and her husband in Chapter 9 of Book I).

The issue of 'native crime' is 'debated' in the first part of Chapter 12 of Book I (pages 67 to 72) through a series of different perspectives, i.e. that of white government and community committees, the tennis and golf playing white elite, and also that of the narrator. Through the use of these different voices, the author succeeds in conveying a sense of the complexity of the problem. As is the case throughout the novel, one is left with the realisation that there is no simple answer and that how the issue will be resolved remains a mystery, or a 'secret', which is the word the novelist uses to refer to such mysteries.

The same approach is followed on page 82, when the narrator presents different views (from the government, racist whites and black activists) on Msimangu's ministry. Strong examples of the narrator entering into the 'debate' around the 'native issue' are the papers written by Arthur Jarvis and which are presented to the reader as his father, James Jarvis, reads them after Arthur's murder (pp126, 127, 134, 150 and 151).

There are a number of phrases that are repeated throughout the novel. This repetition gives them special significance, for example, where the theme of fear is developed, the phrase "have no doubt it is fear....." is often used, e.g. on p 46 (of the taxi owner Hlabeni): "Have no doubt too that this man is afraid." Also on p67: "Have no doubt it is fear in the land" and again on p86 (of John Kumalo when he hears that Absalom had been arrested for the murder of Arthur Jarvis): "Have no doubt it is fear in the eyes."

Where examples of segregation and discrimination between white and black are shown, we encounter the phrase "as is the custom", e.g p137: "At the

back of the Court there are seats rising in tiers, those on the right for Europeans, those on the left for non-Europeans, according to the custom'. Where these 'customs' are broken, the phrase 'for such a thing is not lightly done' is often used (e.g. p47, p174 etc.) When James Jarvis's grandson raises his cap and says 'good morning' to him, Stephen Kumalo is astonished that the boy "should not know the custom" (p199).

Other such phrases are those that contain the lamentation 'cry', from which the book derives its title, e.g. on p66: "Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone. Aye, and cry aloud for the man who is dead, for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end." And on p72: "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear."

The novel is at pains to characterize the 'native issue' and the manifestations thereof as a result of socio-economic forces. Readers do not get to know characters such as John, Gertrude or Absalom well enough to understand the personal motivation for their actions. We are not given to understand anything of Absalom Kumalo's personal culpability for the murder of Arthur Jarvis. In Absalom's discussions with his father, he claims not to know why he broke into the Jarvis home. This is in stark contrast with the manner in which Josef Malan is portrayed in Brink's (1973) *Kennis van die Aand*.

2.1.2.3 Characterisation

Stephen Kumalo is portrayed as an educated man of some significance in his community. The child who brings him the letter from Msimangu is in awe of his “great house, a house with tables and chairs, and a clock, and a plant in a pot, and many books, more even than the books at the school” (p8). On p227 we read that Kumalo knew about Napoleon Bonaparte, knowledge that was probably shared by very few of his black peers at that time.

Kumalo is called 'humble' (p15 and again on p16), but he is also aware of the difference between him and "the humbler people of his race" (p14). On the train, he “looked around, hoping there might be someone with whom he could talk, but there was no one who appeared of that class” (p15).

Despite his clerical background, Kumalo is not characterised as a saint, but as a normal, flawed individual. But Kumalo is a spiritually aware man who confesses his “sins” during his vigil on the mountain the night before his son is put to death (p233).

The theme of fear that was earlier referred to is also used in the characterisation of Stephen Kumalo. Kumalo’s fears about the journey to Johannesburg, for instance, are listed on p15 and include: “Deep down the fear of a man who lives in a world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away, dying, being destroyed, beyond any recall.”

Although Stephen Kumalo is regarded in Ndotsheni as a sophisticated man – a man who reads and writes and does arithmetic (he keeps the church accounts) – he is in certain respects extremely naïve. This is apparent from his amazement at the animated billboard advertising “Black&White” whiskey as the train enters Johannesburg and the description of the modern bathroom in the Mission: “It would have frightened you if you had not heard of such things before” (p21). According to Coetzee (1988) Paton uses this exaggerated naivety, which is also reflected in the speech of the fellow Zulu traveller who explains to Kumalo how mining works, to portray the rural Zulu as 'different' and, more specifically, as 'simple'.

Very subtly, the reader is given the impression that Stephen Kumalo’s humility and servile attitude comes at a cost to him. On p93 we read: “Kumalo struggled within himself. For it is thus with a black man, who has learned to be humble and who yet desires to be something that is himself.”

John Kumalo is characterised almost as the opposite of his brother Stephen. John is a lay politician who has turned his back on the church and does not show the humility of Stephen, but has a voice “like the voice of a bull or a lion” (p34). There are hints in the text that John is not very intelligent. He seems to be a well to do business man and has a telephone (p36).

John has become a man of the city who prefers to speak English (p33): “Do you mind if I speak English? I can explain these things better in English.” Yet, he does not know the word “fidelity” (p36). He reproaches Stephen and the people in Ndotsheni for not understanding “the way life is in Johannesburg”

(p33), where they are building a “new society” (p34) to replace the tribal society that is breaking apart.

The rift between the two brothers also manifests in the plot when John betrays Stephen by advising his son to deny that he was with Stephen’s son Absalom on the night of the murder (p92).

2.1.2.4 Stereotype

The narrator attempts to be even-handed in his telling. For instance, while it is stated that “white Johannesburg was afraid of black crime” (p22), one of the priests adds: “And it is not only the Europeans that are afraid. We are also afraid, right here in Sophiatown.”

As indicated above under 2.1.2.2 (Black and white), in the passages where aspects of the 'native issue' are debated, the narrator often presents the viewpoints of different groups or individuals in an attempt to avoid bias and to convey the complexity of the issue. For example, on page 113, we read: “Some people said....” and “Some said....” and also “But there were many sides to such a question....” and “And indeed there was still another argument....”.

While speaking of white men who are responsible for “breaking the tribe” (p25), Msimangu adds: “They are not all so. There are some white men who give their lives to build up what is broken.” Such white men appear in the story in the characters of Father Vincent, Arthur Jarvis and John Harrison.

During the bus boycott, we are told that some white people give blacks lifts (p47).

On the whole, however, the novel fails to move beyond the 'us' and 'them' of 'natives' and 'Europeans'. Furthermore, the overall impression is created that blacks are ignorant, for example on p113: “Something might have been done if these people had only learned how to fight erosion....” and “....the people were ignorant and knew nothing about farming methods” and that, as a result of the destruction of their tribal structures, they are prone to crime and other social evils. The narrator says of the native policemen who stand guard at the rally addressed by John Kumalo on p159: “Who knows what they think of this talk, who knows if they think at all?” And on p162 we read of the black mine workers: “They are simple people, illiterate, tribal people, an easy tool in the hand.”

Parker (1978:8) is scathing in his criticism of Paton, Cope and other so-called ‘white liberal’ authors of the time and refers to a number of “recurring themes”: “all Afrikaners are baddies; all blacks are goodies – unless they are politicians, in which case they are corrupt; all priests are goodies, although white priests and Anglican priests in particular, are better goodies than black priests”. According to Parker (1978:11), Paton’s novels are ‘romantic’ in that they put forward the view that blacks can still be offered a fair deal if whites have a change of heart (see also Rich, 1984).

2.1.2.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person and the focalisation is that of the main character, Stephen Kumalo.

While generally endeavouring to present a balanced, non-stereotypical view, the narration does seem to carry a hint of sexism. The main players in the book are male. The female characters have conventional female roles and remain, for the most part, without voice. In the reader's first encounter with the Kumalo's, Stephen's wife (who remains nameless through most of the novel) is "silent with the patient suffering of black women" (p12). Later, John Kumalo's common law wife remains nameless and so does Absalom Kumalo's pregnant girlfriend. (There are, however, also male characters who remain nameless, e.g. Gertrude's young son, the white man (and his black assistant) from the reformatory, Kumalo's friends who help carry their bags when they return to Ndotsheni). Absalom Kumalo asks for his child to be called Peter if it is a boy, but has no suggestions for a name if it is a girl (p176).

The language in which the novel is narrated is somewhat stilted and old fashioned, which, according to Coetzee (1988) is a subtle tool used by Paton (and other authors, such as Pauline Smith) to suggest something of a backwardness, a childlike naiveté in the focalisation. The language suggests that Stephen Kumalo comes from an 'old order' that has difficulty adapting to the 'new world' of the 'white man'.

2.1.3 *Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim)* by FA Venter, 1952⁷

2.1.3.1 Background, plot and setting

Swart Pelgrim by FA Venter was first published in 1952, four years after Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*.

There are strong parallels between *Swart Pelgrim* and Paton's novel, particularly as far as the plot is concerned. *Swart Pelgrim* also opens with a description of the land, which was once fruitful, but is now suffering as a result of overgrazing and erosion, which, as in Paton's novel, is exacerbated by the ways of cultivation by the rural community. In the first two chapters the state of the land and the fact that the young people from the community leave for the cities, is introduced as the main theme of the book.

Again echoing Paton's storyline, the black main character, Kolisile, plans to leave his rural community for Johannesburg, firstly to earn money, but also to look for his brother, Mfazwe, who left for Johannesburg years ago and never returned. Like Stephen Kumalo in Paton's novel, Kolisile undertakes the journey to Johannesburg by train.

In the city, Kolisile finds work in a mine. He is told by his fellow mine workers that his brother Mfazwe has turned 'bad'. Kolisile leaves to seek work elsewhere. When he asks a white woman for work as a gardener, she sets her dog on him. He is cared for by a woman, Miriam, and helps to sell the

⁷ All page references refer to the 1961 school edition of the novel.

baskets woven by her old husband, Mafasoe. Kolisile falls in love with Miriam, who is arrested for brewing and selling liquor. He manages to find his brother Mfazwe, who runs a crime syndicate, and becomes involved in crime himself. However, he cannot bring himself to steal from the old white woman whose house he breaks into and decides to go back to work on the mine. He survives a mining accident and decides to return home to his wife and children.

The improbability of the fact that almost everyone Kolisile comes into contact with in Johannesburg knows, or has been in contact with his brother Mfazwe, detracts from the credibility of the plot.

The novel spans about two years “two harvests” (p17) that Kolisile spends in Johannesburg, and is narrated in chronological sequence. The duality between city life and Kolisile’s rural home, which represents an old way of life with the emphasis on the land that needs to be healed, reminds strongly of Paton’s novel.

2.1.3.2 Black and white

Van der Merwe (1994: 39,40) describes *Swart Pelgrim* as one of the first Afrikaans attempts at depicting the black man as a person suffering a measure of injustice in “white” cities and views the work as “a novel of great historical importance”. That this should be so despite the fact that a novel with a very similar theme was published in English a decade before Venter’s novel appeared, is significant. It seems to indicate that the publication of such

a novel *in Afrikaans* was of particular importance. Not only does this point towards the fact that *Cry, the Beloved Country* did not have a large readership among white Afrikaans speaking South Africans, but it could also be taken to indicate that this group lagged behind their English speaking counterparts in terms of the “political awakening”, which in Afrikaans literature reached its peak in the late sixties and early seventies.

Hints as to the main character’s cultural background are given when the reader first encounters him at the beginning of the novel. Not only Kolisile’s name, but also the imagery of tribal warriors used to describe the fields of maize (“*Hulle staan nie meer soos sterk stryders wat die skildvulle voor hulle uit stoot nie*” (They no longer stand like strong warriors pushing the shields out in front of them) (p7) and the land, as well as references to women filling their clay pots at the fountain (“*Net af en toe klim stemme uit die fontein op, waar vroue hul kruike met water vul*” (Only now and again voices sound from the fountain where the women fill their pots with water)) and to a young boy herding cattle (“*Ver teen die hang skreeu ‘n pikkenien op die kalwers.*” (Far up on the slope a piccannin shouts to the calves)) (p8) suggest a tribal culture and rural lifestyle.

On page 8, reference is made to the “words of the white man” (woorde van die witman). ‘The white man’ is presented almost as the antithesis to Kolisile’s father, Mbanjwa, when Mbanjwa says on p13 “*Die witman praat goed waarvan hy nie weet nie. Hy ken sy grond; hy ken nie ons grond nie. Julle glo die witman, maar julle glo nie vir Mbanjwa nie.*” (The white man speaks of

things he does not know of. He knows his soil; he does not know our soil. You believe the white man, but you do not believe Mbanjwa).

The difference between white and black is therefore apparent from the outset. Johannesburg is described as (p15, 20, 22, 29, etc): "die groot plek van die witman"; "die stad van die witman" (the big place/city of the white man). "The white man" is used to refer in a generic sense to white people, but also to specific white people, e.g the conductor who tells Kolisile and his fellow travellers to stay on the train (p22) and the white foremen in the mine (p24). On p46 we read of Miriam's promise to "die witvrou wat na die swartmense omsien" (the white woman who looks after the black people).

When Kolisile refers to his youngest daughter, Tandiwe, he uses the word "*meidjie*" (p19), a derogatory term used exclusively to denote a black girl, rather than the generic "*dogtertjie*". He addresses the little white boy at the house where he asks for work as "*die wit basie*" (the little white boss/master) (p33). He uses "*miesies*" and "*baas*" (mistress and boss) to refer to white homeowners. Miriam's husband, Mafasoe, also addresses the "white woman who looks after the black people" as "*Mies*" (p47). This is the same way in which Mikro's Toiings and the young Josef Malan in Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* addresses whites.

As is the case in Paton's novel, we are introduced to social ills related to the fact that the mining industry is built on the labour of black workers from rural areas. On p15 Mbanjwa cites examples of young men who came back from the mines either injured or sick. Mbanjwa says to his son: "*Waarom kan die*

witman nie help nie. Hy vat ons manne. Waarom kan hy nie help as ons arm word nie, Kolisile?" (Why can't the white man help? Why can't he help when we become poor, Kolisile?) (p16). When the train enters Johannesburg, Kolisile sees the mine dumps and is told by his fellow travellers that they are "*die berge van die witman*" (p21) (the mountains of the white man).

The issue of 'native crime' that enjoys prominence in Paton's novel is also introduced in *Swart Pelgrim* when Kolisile learns in Chapter VI that his brother, Mfazwe, defrauded his fellow mineworkers, gambles, drinks and stabbed a white police officer with a knife (p28). In *Swart Pelgrim*, Venter clearly draws a link between 'native crime' and violence or cruelty towards blacks by whites. This is clear from the manner in which the white woman's memory of how her husband was assaulted by black men (p 34) causes her to set her dog on Kolisile. When Kolisile comes across Maloeti and Mafakoe, Maloeti wants to know whether his wounds were inflicted by "*die polliës*" (the police) or "*die witman*" (the white man). It later emerges that Maloeti and Mafakoe are hiding from 'the white man', a term used by Maloeti as a synonym for 'the police'.

The reader is introduced to the issue of informal settlements in the words of Kaloeti on p40: "*Ons bly by die ander onder die sakke en die blikke, maar die witman soek na ons*" (We live with the others under the sacks and sinks, but the white man is looking for us). The informal settlement, which is referred to as the "*pondokkedorp*" (shanty town) or "*goingdorp*" (sack cloth town), is described on p44. Poverty also emerges as a factor influencing 'native crime' when Kaloeti tells Kolisile that the police are looking for him and his

accomplice because they attacked an Indian man and stole food because they were hungry.

Miriam views having her children educated as a way to protect them against the fate that befell their father, who was badly injured in a mining accident (p47). The issue of prostitution born of financial need is touched upon in Paton's novel through Gertrude. In *Swart Pelgrim* there is a subtle hint (page 53) that Miriam is a prostitute. This is confirmed on p57 when she confesses to Kolisile.

Although not nearly as well developed as in Paton's novel, the issue of white wealth built on black labour is several times referred to in *Swart Pelgrim* (page 54), not only in terms of the mines, but also in terms of the building of roads for the "*motors van die witman*" (cars of the white man). When Kolisile goes to work as a road builder, a fellow worker remarks upon seeing an aeroplane (p59): "*Die witman hy ry in die lug; die swartman werk op die grond*" (The white man rides in the air; the black man works on the ground).

There are also parallels between Paton's novel and *Swart Pelgrim* in terms of the pervasive theme of fear. Throughout the novel, the reader is made aware of Kolisile's fear: "*Kolisile voel leed oor gister en nou; hy voel angs oor môre.*" (Kolisile feels pain about yesterday and about now; he feels fear about tomorrow) (p19); "*Dieselfde vrees kiewel in hom as die dag toe hy die eerste keer saam met die groot mans die jong osse moes tem. Hy is bang dat hy hier sal wegraak soos Mfazwe....*" (The same fear stirs in him as the day when he had to tame the young oxen with the big men for the first time. He is afraid

that he will get lost here like Mfazwe had...) (p20); “*Die angs loop koud deur hom soos die dag toe hy weggespring het voor die smal kop van die spikkelkapel.*” (The cold fear sweeps through him like that day he jumped away from the narrow head of the spotted cobra) (p21); “*Hy gooi werktuiglik met die skopgraaf; maar die vrees styg vinnig in hom sodat hy kortasem word.*” (He throws mechanically with the shovel; but the fear rises in him so quickly that he becomes short of breath) (p24). Again, this echoes the theme of fear that Paton develops in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. On page 57 of *Swart Pelgrim* we read “*Buitendien vrees hy nou vir Mfazwe*” (He now also fears for Mfazwe.) Further references to Kolisile's fear are found on pp68, 70, 89 and 163.

Kolisile lays the blame for the fact that Mfazwe 'became bad' at the feet of 'the city of the white man' (p56): “*Dis hierdie stad van die witman. Dis die mense hier wat sleg is, wat ook vir Mfazwe sleg gemaak het*” (It is this city of the white man. It's the people here who are bad who made Mfazwe bad.)

It becomes clear that, in *Swart Pelgrim*, Venter attempts to address all the aspects of the 'native issue' that are also referred to in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. However, Venter does this only through showing the reader the experiences of his main character, Kolisile, while Paton makes use of large sections of political debate and/or narration to bring across different views. In his article “Die Aktuele Roman” that appears at the back of the 1961 school edition of *Swart Pelgrim*, AP Grové lauds authors such as Venter who build “the world of the novel” through showing the actions of the characters

without the interference of political argument or parts that merely convey information which, he claims, shatters the illusion of the story world.

2.1.3.3 Characterisation

In the first chapter of the novel we are introduced to Kolisile, a black man (here too, as in Paton's novel, the term 'native' is used (*'naturel'* in the Afrikaans text)) who lives in a rural agricultural community. He is presented as a responsible family man with a deep love for the land, not unlike Stephen Kumalo in *Cry the Beloved Country*. While in Johannesburg, Kolisile yearns for his tribal home. Like Stephen Kumalo, he is portrayed as very naïve. He sees electric light for the first time when he enters the mine (p23). However, whereas Stephen Kumalo is characterised as educated and intelligent, Kolisile does not even know how to count money (p78).

Just like Stephen Kumalo, Kolisile is a man of the soil, a farmer at heart. He wants to work for the white woman as a gardener, and he naively dreams of living with Miriam, Mafasoe and their children in the 'native town' and planting a vegetable garden (p105). His yearning for his rural home is a recurring theme e.g. on p. 89: "*Hy verlang na die vryheid van die wye valleie, na die koel seëning van die môrewind, na die glansende stamme van die kafferkoring*" (He yearns for the freedom of the wide valleys, for the cool blessing of the morning breeze, for the shiny stems of the sorghum).

Just like Toings, Kolisile is an outsider, because of his childlike naiveté. Miriam sees Kolisile as "*anders as die ander manne eenvoudig, oreg,*

onskuldig, maar sterk en groot” (different from the other men . . . simple, genuine, innocent, but strong and big) (p55). Her brother, Jackson, dislikes the fact that Kolisile is “simple and childlike” (“...*hoewel hy nie hou van Kolisile se eenvoudige kinderlikheid nie*” (although he does not like Kolisile’s simple childlike nature) (p124)).

Kolisile is characterized as a morally upright and peace loving man. When Kaloeti suggests that he should have killed the white woman who set her dog on him (p41), he is repulsed by the idea. But he is also flawed. He very feebly tries to resist the feelings he develops for Miriam (p54) and shows no shock when he hears that she is a prostitute and that his brother, Mfazwe, was one of the men that she slept with for money.

There are clues in the text that Kolisile has a poor self image. When Mafasoe speaks to him of the “groot Inkosi” (big Inkosi) or (Christian) God, Kolisile fears that God will say “*Kolisile is die sleg kaffer . . . wat nie vir homself kan help nie.*” (Kolisile is the bad kaffir . . . who cannot help himself.) (p94). Toiings, in much the same way, sees himself as a “sleg hotnot” (bad coloured).

As is the case in Mikro’s *Toiings*, animal comparisons with the black main character abound. Kolisile is compared to a well-trained ox (p85 and p104), to an antelope (p94), to a dove (p129) and to a young bull (p155).

Miriam’s brother, Jackson, who is a political activist and public speaker, is in some ways similar to John Kumalo in *Cry the beloved country*. On p73, we

read that “*Jackson praat so groot soos die olifant, maar sy hart is so klein soos die hart van die duif*” (Jackson speaks as big as the elephant, but his heart is as small as the heart of the dove).

The characterisation of Miriam’s brother, Jackson, and her husband, Mafasoe, is not well-developed. The reader gets to know them primarily in terms of their widely divergent views on whites. While Jackson actively rebels against white domination, Mafasoe accepts it unquestioningly, even stating that it is a Biblical dispensation. Kolisile experiences an inner struggle as he is torn between the views expressed by Jackson and his own experiences of the dog attack and township shooting on the one hand and the views of Mafasoe on the other (p160).

2.1.3.4 Stereotype

The stereotype of the “noble savage” that is found in *Toiings* and *Cry, the Beloved Country*, is also apparent in *Swart Pelgrim*. Although the author is at pains to show that there are “good blacks and bad blacks”, just as there are “good whites and bad whites”, there is an inherent bias against blacks as naïve, if not ignorant, and prone to moral corruption.

Although Kolisile is generally not portrayed in the stereotype of the buffoon as is Toiings and the coloured characters in Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (see critique in chapter 2 of February, 1981), he is made ridiculous in the eyes of the reader when he shows off his stolen clothes to Kaloeti and Mafakoe on p164. There are similarly ridiculous descriptions of Jackson (p145-146) and of

Mfazwe (p107). According to Van der Merwe (1994), the character of Jackson as a political instigator is a variation on the 'blood-thirsty black' stereotype. The way in which Jackson is portrayed, is meant to repulse the reader. This is achieved, in part, by divulging that Jackson is being paid to instigate trouble.

If one looks beyond the inherent prejudice that underlies the entire novel (a prejudice towards black people as "simple" people, prone to moral corruption), it is clear that the author attempts to present a balanced view. There are examples of so-called "good" white people, for instance the people who taught Mafasoe to weave baskets (note again the similarity with Paton's novel) and the unknown white man who funds Jackson's campaign. Kolisile does not only suffer at the hands of whites, but is cheated and called a "kaffir" by the Indian shopkeeper he tries to sell Mafasoe's baskets to (p82). Similarly, the black characters in the novel range from criminals (Kaloeti, Mafakoe and Mfazwe) to paragons of virtue (Mafasoe). The blind Mafasoe, like Toiings, is an example of a positive black stereotype (see Van der Merwe, 1994), who remains subservient to whites and accepts their religion unquestioningly.

Kolisile's own character has sufficient light *and* darkness to ring true to the reader. The newspaper reports cited on p154 also show that there is injury and blame on both sides of the racial divide.

2.1.3.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person and, although there are occasional small shifts (e.g to Mbanjwa on page 14 and 16, or to Kaloeti on p41), the focalisation is that of the main character, Kolisile.

There seems to be a measure of racial bias in the narration. Here and there, the manner in which Kolisile is depicted verges on patronising. This is already apparent from the summary that appears at the front of the book, which calls Kolisile *“a simple native from the Transkei”* (’n eenvoudige Transkeise naturel).

When Kolisile meets Kaloeti and Mafakoe after being attacked by the white woman’s dog, they are referred to on page 38 as *“swart manne”* (black men) and *“die swartman”* (the black man). Even after the reader is aware that Kolisile’s new acquaintances are black, Kaloeti is again referred to on p40 as *“die swartman”* (the black man) and a few lines later as *“die vreemde naturel”* (the strange native).

Subtle prejudice is also apparent on p45, when Miriam, the Good Samaritan who nurses Kolisile back to health, is described: *“Sy is groot en sterk; nie uitermatig geset soos die meeste vroue van haar ras nie . . .”* (She is big and strong; not extraordinarily fat like most of the women of her race. . .) (p45).

A modern day reader is uncomfortable with the admiration and exaggerated gratitude that Miriam’s husband Mafasoe feels towards the white foreman who

took him to hospital and the white woman who helped Miriam find the place where the blind are taught to weave baskets (p52). Kolisile also feels discomfort, although we read that “*Sy eenvoudige gemoed kan hierdie gevoel nie begryp nie. Hy weet net dis daar, diep onder in sy wese.*” (His simple mind cannot understand this feeling. He merely knows that it is there, deep down in his being) (p52).

2.1.4 *Kennis van die Aand (Looking On Darkness)* by André P Brink, 1973⁸

2.1.4.1 Background, plot and setting

André P Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand* (1973), translated into English as *Looking on Darkness*, is arguably his best known novel. This is possibly due, apart from the literary strength of the novel, to the controversy that arose when the Publications Board banned it in 1974. The novel thus became the first Afrikaans literary work that was banned, ostensibly for religious, moral and political reasons. It was only released again in 1982, and then only to selected readers.

Fellow sixties author, Jan Rabie, described *Kennis* as “Perhaps the most revolutionary novel to come out of South Africa, written by a white man”. In the foreword to the 2004 edition of the novel, Ampie Coetzee describes the book as “*one of the little chisels of the word that helped break the foundations of apartheid*”.

⁸ All page references refer to the second edition of the novel, published by Human & Rousseau in 1982.

The novel is an example of the so-called “engaged novel”, the main aim of which seems to be to drive home the injustice of racial discrimination, not only during the apartheid era, but from its roots in the slave trade in the Cape about two hundred years earlier.

The plot touches on a wide range of aspects related to the apartheid regime as it existed during the late sixties and early seventies.

The book spans about two hundred years of which the reader is told by way of a main plot – the story of the main character Josef Malan’s life – and various sub plots. The sub plots emerge from the stories of eight generations of Josef’s forebears that he writes down while in jail. Josef has been sentenced to death on a charge of murdering his white girlfriend, Jessica.

The main plot is set in the late sixties and early seventies. The cruelty of the apartheid regime and the restrictions that were imposed on so-called “non-whites” as a result thereof, is the central theme of the novel.

Events in the main plot mostly take place in Cape Town, London and Johannesburg and those in the sub plots mainly in the Western Cape province. An exception is Jakob Malan’s sojourn overseas when he served as Frans Viviers’ “batman” in the war.

The environment in which the plot is set plays a prominent role in the novel, with Josef attaching special significance to certain places, particularly the

balcony of Jessica's flat (page 23), the Paarl Valley where he grew up (page 23) and Bainskloof (e.g page 26). Josef's attachment to certain places is ironic in respect of the pronouncement by the visitor to the "Nooi" of the farm his mother worked on that, if she continues to spoil him, he will later not know his place anymore. (*"Een van die dae ken hy nie meer sy plek nie."* (One of these days he will no longer know his place.)) (p99) and the young Josef's struggle to come to terms with this statement (e.g. p110).

2.1.4.2 Black and white

Josef's "blackness" is made apparent on the very first page of the novel, firstly by the subtle description of his *"bleekbruin maag en bors"* (pale brown belly and chest) (p11) and then by his description of the contrast between his own brown and Jessica's white skin. On p16 Josef notices the very white fingers of his advocate.

The web of racial tensions that is apparent throughout the novel, is introduced when Josef suspects that his advocate, Joubert, *"graag my teenwoordigheid [sou] wou gebruik om homself van sy verligtheid te oortuig"* (would [have liked] to use my presence to convince himself of his own political enlightenment) (p14). On p17 he says to Joubert: *"Ek is 'n bruinman, meneer Joubert. Jy verwag tog nie ek moet in jou God glo nie."* (I am a coloured man, Mister Joubert. Surely you don't expect me to believe in your God.).

As indicated above, the racial turmoil of South Africa at the height of apartheid is the central theme of the novel. The plot includes references to corporal

punishment of farm workers (p107 and 118), harassment of blacks by the Security Police (p286), the activities of the Publications Board (p288), detention without trial (p307) and deaths in detention (p286 and p296), forced removals (p236), the Pass Law, a biased justice system, racial segregation (p104, p232, p271), and, very prominently, the so-called “Immorality Act”. Reference is made to current events related to the struggle against apartheid, such as the Sharpeville uprising (p173).

Josef Malan’s “blackness” is therefore central to the plot. As Josef grows up, the coloured people are not allowed to enter the house of the “baas” (p38) and have to stand at the back of the church while the whites sit in front (p95), they are referred to as the “kinders van Gam” (children of Ham) (p97), and they have to “know their place” (p99). Josef may not even play the role of a black man in the nativity play because he is not white (p102) and he has to buy his ticket for the circus at the “Non-Whites” entrance (p104). His “baas” tells him that: “*Julle bruinmense is ‘n goddelose spul*” (You coloureds are a bunch of heathens) (p117). After deciding to send Josef to school, the “baas” tells him “*Jou hotnotsmaniere moet jy nou afleer*” (You will have to unlearn your coloured ways) (118). Josef is not allowed to enter the hotel at Bainskloof with his white girlfriend (p26).

The novel conveys a sense that the racial tension in South Africa during the apartheid era touched every aspect of life. It is presented as a constant and inescapable dimension of all interaction between people of different races. On p410, Williem Viviers says to Josef: “*Ek praat nie van politiek nie*” (‘I’m not talking of politics’) to which Josef responds: “*Ek sou ook verkies om nie*

daarvan te praat nie. Maar of ons dit wil of nie, is dit politiek die oomblik as ek en jy saam gaan sit. Net omdat jy wit is en ek bruin.” (I would also prefer not to talk of it. But whether we like it or not, it becomes politics the moment you and I sit together. Just because you’re white and I’m coloured.)

Josef is amazed when Jessica says that he is beautiful because he is “so brown” (p 347). Josef reflects that *“Hierdie amper twee jaar sedert my terugkoms het my bruin vir my ‘n brandmerk begin word, ‘n kleur om te wantrou en soms te haat. Nie-wit-nie, nie-blank-nie, ‘n skaduwee, die teëkant van iets, ‘n negatief van al wat saak maak.”* (in these almost two years since my return being brown has begun to feel like being branded, it was a colour to distrust and sometimes to hate. Not white, not European, a shadow, the opposite of something, a negative of all that matters). This stands in stark contrast with Jerry Buys’s words earlier in the novel: *“Wit is maaiers, dis voëlkak, dis etter, dis vrot. En hoe gouer jy dit besef, hoe gouer sal jy leer mens word.”* (white is maggots, it is bird shit, it is pus, it is rot. And the sooner you learn to realize that, the sooner you will learn to become a human being.) (p275).

2.1.4.3 Characterisation

As indicated above, the main character, Josef Malan, is a Cape Coloured who has been sentenced to death for the murder of his white girlfriend.

Josef’s character is decidedly more rounded than the characters in the other primary texts. In the course of the novel, he develops significantly on various

levels. Josef's memories of his childhood years carry strong echoes of Toiings: the farmer is also addressed as "Baas" and his wife as "Nooi" or "Nôï", the farmhouse is off limits to coloureds and corporal punishment of errant farmworkers is commonplace. However, while Toiings remains servile all his life, Josef, mainly through the exposure he gains when he goes to university overseas, progresses to rebellion. The seeds for this are sown early in the novel. While Mikro's Toiings would not have dreamed to enter the house of the "baas", Josef does. While Josef is warned that "One of these days he will not know his place" (p99), Toiings remains very aware of his place in society.

Josef is part of a group of "others". This "otherness" is defined and determined purely on the basis of their skin colour. Josef's refusal to submit to this "otherness" is the main theme of the novel. This theme cannot be separated from Josef's own struggle to come to terms with his life, to own his life rather than live it through the theatre, which he calls "*my eintlike dimensie van bestaan*" (the actual dimension of my existence) (p224). This sub-plot is poignantly developed with the help of a parallel with Calderon's *Life is a Dream* (see page 282-283).

Already in the reader's first encounter with Josef where he awaits trial in jail, this search for his own identity is apparent. He asks himself: "*Waarom het ek anders akteur geword? In die herhaal van aangeleerde woorde en die oorspeel van rolle moet ek die vervlugtige self ontdek: waar anders?*" (What other reason could I have had for becoming an actor? It was in repeating learned words and playing roles that I had to discover the elusive self: where

else?) (p14). When he is with Jessica, Josef feels at peace with who he is. On p395 he says to her: “...tussen al die rolle wat ek al gespeel het en nog gaan speel, is daar net één wat ek werlik wíl, en dit is die een wat ek nooit mag speel nie’ ‘Josef Malan. Net ek. Net mens.’ ‘En jy is die enigste wat dit vir my moontlik maak.” (‘...of all the roles that I have played and will play in future, there is only one that I truly want, and that is the one I may never play’ Josef Malan. Just I. Just human.’ ‘And you are the only one who makes that possible for me.’). Josef’s personal struggle to find his own identity is mirrored in the novel with the struggle against the oppression of blacks. On p411 he says to Willem Viviers: “*Ek veg vir die elementêre reg om erken te word as ‘n mens...*” (‘I’m fighting for the elementary right to be acknowledged as a person...’). The opening sentence of the novel suggests that murdering Jessica was Josef’s ultimate attempt at defining his own identity.

Spiritually, the reader accompanies Josef on a heart wrenching journey from innocence as a child, to resistance in adulthood and finally, through the dehumanising torture he endures in prison, to acceptance of his death. Parallels are drawn in the text between Josef and other martyrs such as St John of the Cross and Saint Simeon Stylites. On page 19 the reference is to Christ and the Last Supper: “... eet my liggaam, drink my bloed. Iets van die mistieke ekstases van ‘n Sint Simon Stiletes het ek soms in daardie hoë hoftaal leer verstaan.” (...eat my body, drink my blood. In that esteemed courtroom I sometimes came to understand something of the mystical ecstasies of a St Simon Stiletes). Other references to the Christ parallel are found on page 347 and 352 and in the image of the last supper of wine and bread of which Josef partakes before his execution (p398).

2.1.4.4 Stereotype

The novel is careful to avoid stereotypes. Although some whites in the novel (notably the security police officials who interrogate Josef while he is in jail) are portrayed as hard racists, most of the white characters are, if not non-racist, at least struggling with their own prejudice. This includes Willem Viviers, who supports Josef's group of actors, but does not want to be seen to do so, and Richard Cole, who, although he is outspoken against the policy of apartheid, ends up telling Josef to "keep to his own kind" (Hou jou by jou eie soort.) (p452).

According to Van der Merwe (1994:30), the portrayal of Josef is a radical departure from the "superficial happy-go-lucky" coloured type.

Van der Merwe (1994) also remarks on the way in which Brink portrays the character of Josef's friend, Dilpert Naidoo, without resorting to stereotype. Dilpert's character differs vastly from the sly Indian shopkeeper we encounter in *Swart Pelgrim*.

2.1.4.5 Narration and focalisation

The black main character, Josef Malan, is both narrator and focaliser. This draws the reader very intimately into Josef's life.

2.1.5 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena)* by Elsa Joubert, 1978⁹

2.1.5.1 Background, plot and setting

Published in 1978, the novel tells the life story of Poppie Rachel Nongena (neé Matati) from birth to her forties. In the author's note at the beginning of the book, Joubert states that the novel is based on the facts she collected on Poppie's life and is an attempt to describe one family's experience of that period as accurately as possible. According to Joubert, it is therefore not the aim of the novel to provide a comprehensive view of political and social issues that affected the lives of black people in South Africa during that time.

The novel takes the reader on a journey with Poppie from a relatively carefree childhood to an adulthood marked by trials and tribulations. Poppie's suffering begins when she and her husband have to leave Lambertsbaai for Cape Town. Poppie's suffering is caused mainly, but not exclusively, by the pass laws that were applicable to black South Africans at the time and the resultant forced removals and police harassment. The tension reaches a climax after the riots in 1976 when two of her children are apprehended for questioning about the whereabouts of her brother, who shot a police officer.

The novel is set in various towns and locations (black townships) in the Cape Province as well as Mdantsane in the former Transkei and Herschel in the former Ciskei. Poppie's relocation from one place of residence to the next, initially for economic reasons and later as a result of the pass laws, is central

⁹ All page references refer to the 1978 edition of the novel by Tafelberg.

to the plot – particularly in as far as it caused Poppie at times to be separated from her husband and children.

2.1.5.2 Black and white

The novel is not, in the first instance, a novel about black-white relationships in South Africa from 1936 (the year in which Poppie was born) to 1976. Through telling Poppie's story, however, the reader is brought strongly under the impression of the suffering that was caused by apartheid legislation such as the pass laws and the revolt against the apartheid dispensation (particularly in the form of the riots of 1960 and 1976).

But the novel does not tell a simple tale of black versus white. Through the richly textured account of Poppie's life, the reader (which at the time was probably white and Afrikaans speaking) is given an intimate view of Xhosa life. Examples of this include Poppie's wedding to Stone Nongena (p47-52), Bonsile's coming of age ceremony in Herschel (p202-211), and the funeral of tata-ka-Bonsile (Stone) (p173-177).

Throughout the novel, there is reference to the interactions between Xhosas and groups of other cultures. On the first page of the novel, we already read: *"Hulle het leer koring sny by die Boesmans. Die Boesmans was die kortetjies met die kroesies, die Damaras was die swartes en die Basters dié wat amper lyk soos witmense, met lang hare."* (They learnt from the Bushmen to cut wheat. The Bushmen were the short ones with the frizzy hair, the Damaras were the black ones and the Basters were those who almost looked like white

people with their long hair.) (p3). On p37 we read that *“Die bruin meisies was lief vir die Xhosa-mans, maar die Xhosa-meisies het nooit met ‘n bruinman gegaan nie, dis heeltemal uit ons geloof uit. Maar al my bruin vriendinne het Xhosa-kêrels gehad.”* (The coloured girls liked the Xhosa men, but the Xhosa girls would never go with a coloured man, it is completely outside of our faith. But all my coloured friends had Xhosa boyfriends.) and later on there is a touch of humour when Poppie chooses the typically coloured name of “Koopman” for a Xhosa relative of Stone’s to ensure that he is considered for a job reserved for coloureds (p138).

A recurring theme in Poppie’s life from the time that she met her husband, Stone Nongena, is the cultural differences and mutual prejudice between the “urban blacks” and the “homeland blacks”, as Mosie puts it (p253), or in Jakkie’s words, the “townborners” and the “amagoduka” (p254). Stone, who is from rural Herschel in what is later to be proclaimed part of the Transkei, is referred to by Poppie’s family as a “rou kaffer” (raw Kaffir) (e.g. p52; 116). The tension between the urban and rural Xhosas reach a climax when violence erupts between residents of the location (Langa) and the migrant workers who come from the rural areas to work in the city, who live in the “special quarters” or “bachelor’s quarters”.

2.1.5.3 Characterisation

From the reader’s first encounter with Poppie as a child growing up in the area of Upington in what is today the Northern Cape Province, the particularities of her Xhosa heritage are obvious. On page 6 and 7 we read that, as a baby,

Poppie was carried in a blanket on her grandmother's back. They had a goat in the back yard and her grandmother gave them bread, "magou" (runny sour maize porridge), griddlecakes (roosterkoek) and umphokoqo (crumbly maize porridge) with curd to eat.

Throughout the novel, the fact that Poppie is a Xhosa features prominently. Poppie would often preface her narration of traditional behaviour with "Ons Xhosas ..." (We Xhosas...). Poppie accepts the various duties and responsibilities she has as a Xhosa woman unquestioningly, but she is also a deeply devoted Christian, who gets strength from the church community she belongs to.

In Poppie's view, there is no conflict between her Christian faith and her traditional Xhosa customs and beliefs. When her friend, Mamdungwana, feels that the Xhosa coming to age ritual of "going to the bush" is pagan nonsense, Poppie responds that God is also served through the Xhosa traditions (p198).

Poppie grows up as an Afrikaans-speaking Xhosa and the fact that many words that are particular to Xhosa Afrikaans are included in her narration, contributes to her characterisation.

Much like Stephen Kumalo in Paton's novel and Kolisile in Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*, Poppie comes across as a simple, inherently good natured person. There is no comparison, however, between the level of roundedness that is accorded to the other two characters and that of Poppie in Joubert's novel. This may in part be ascribed to the fact that the reader spends forty years in

Poppie's company and less than a year with the other two characters. The fact that the reader shares in such a big part of Poppie's, life causes one to identify strongly with her, something that José Ortega y Gasset (1925 in Mpahlele, 2002) and Grové (1961) regards as essential for a successful novel.

Much of what the reader learns about Poppie is found in what is not said of her. In spite of her personal suffering, there are no instances in the novel where Poppie acts maliciously or out of hatred for others. In the very few cases where she gets angry, this arises from her strong attachment and protective feelings towards members of her family, particularly her brothers. On page 96, Poppie is so upset by her brother, Plank, being pulled from under the chicken coop by the police, that she shouts at the younger boys who laugh at the spectacle. She is strongly disapproving of Mosie's wife Rhoda, when Rhoda wears trousers the first time she comes to visit them: “*‘n Mens kom nie na jou skoonwerf in ‘n broek nie, Mama.*” (One doesn't come to the house of your in-laws wearing trousers, Mama.) (p. 130). Poppie's protective attitude towards her other brother, Hoedjie, also underlies her outburst towards Hoedjie's wife, Muis, on page 139.

Nowhere in the novel is there mention of Poppie's ambitions or dreams for the future. The reader never sees Poppie longing for a glamorous job, desiring fancy clothes, or a big house. Poppie is happy when her family is together and it is going well with everyone. When she arrives in the Ciskei, Poppie's loneliness becomes almost unbearable: “*Toe gaan ons in en ek voel nou baie hartseer, want die plek is so vreemd en ek ken niemand nie. Toe voel ek*

regtig ek is nou weggegooi...” (Then we went in and I felt very sad, because the place is so strange and I don’t know a soul. I really felt like I had been thrown away) (p151). It is perhaps because she asks very little from life that the reader is so deeply touched by her suffering. For Poppie, the future of her children is her biggest concern and she sacrifices herself to ensure that they get an education.

Having to earn money to support her children and other members of her family takes its toll on Poppie. On page 74, she says *”...ek is een wat vir nege werk. Sy begin huil. Ek is moeg, Mama.”* (...I am one who works for nine. She starts to cry. I am tired, Mama.), and on page 100 when she works long hours and has to visit her husband, Stone, in hospital on Sundays: *“Ek was altyd moeg en geworrie as ek by die huis kom, ek het seker nie altyd reg gemaak met die kinders nie.”* (I was always tired and worried when I got home, I probably didn’t always do right by the children.). As the novel progresses, this exhaustion, a feeling of capitulation, becomes a constant feature of Poppie’s life. After she has decided to give in to the pressure of the pass office and go to the Ciskei, we read: *“Maar bo alles het Poppie gevoel: ek is moeg.”* (But above all, Poppie felt: I am tired.) (p147). Of the uprising of 1976, Poppie says: *“As ek die krag gehad het, sou ek ook iets gedoen het, maar nou het ek nie die krag nie, nou is ek tevrede met die wêreld soos dit nou is.”* (If I had the strength, I would also have done something, but I don’t have the strength, now I am satisfied with the world as it is now.) (p247).

Although, for the most part, Poppie accepts her suffering unquestioningly, with the “silence of the ox” that Paton (p12) refers to, one sees flashes of

bitterness and resentment, even of (a very understated) rebellion against her circumstances. On p242 we read: “*Sy sê bitter: Nóú baklei julle. Hoekom het julle nie vir my baklei toe ek so swaar gekry het nie?*” (Embittered, she says: ‘Now you fight. Why didn’t you fight for me when I was suffering so badly?’)

While Poppie is a little girl, she enjoys going to school and does well. On page 11, her brother Plank shouts: “*Poppie kan ‘n versie opsê, Poppie is die slimste.*” (Poppie can recite a rhyme, Poppie is the cleverest.). However, Poppie’s schooling is interrupted when her mother relocates in search of better employment and ends when she has to look after her younger siblings while her mother is at work. While Poppie seems to accept this uncomplainingly, we later read: “*Poppie is jaloers dat Rhoda en haar ma meer geleerdheid het as wat hulle het, of as wat Mosie het.*” (Poppie is jealous because Rhoda and her mother are better educated than they are, or than Mosie is.) (p. 131).

Although Poppie is not well-educated, she is resourceful and manages to find work with various employers as a domestic worker. When she relocates to Mdantsane, she asks her mother to send her material and makes money by selling the clothes that she makes on her sewing machine.

2.1.5.4 Stereotype

As stated above, the novel does not promote stereotypical views of white or black South Africans. The cruelty of the white regime is apparent from the effects it has on the lives of Poppie and the members of her family. While

white prejudice towards blacks is always implicit in the narration, there are several instances where white people show kindness to Poppie (e.g some of her employers and Mrs Retief who runs the local state Tuberculosis programme).

Poppie's fellow residents in the location hate the black policemen. "*Die gevoel teen die swart poeliesse in uniform was verskriklik. As die mense sien 'n swart poelies wat alleen loop, vermoor hulle hom.*" (The feeling against the black policemen in uniform was terrible..... If people see a black policemen walking alone, they kill him.) (p. 94).

The tension between indigenous religions and Christianity that is the central theme in Brink's *Bidsprinkaan* and which also gets brief mention in *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*, is also touched upon in this novel.

2.1.5.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel starts off with a first person narration by the main character, Poppie Nongena. Throughout the novel, such sections of narration by Poppie are interspersed with passages of third person narration. Where Poppie tells the story, there is usually a marker, for example "*sê Poppie.*" (says Poppie). Here and there, the reader also encounters passages narrated by members of Poppie's family, e.g. buti Mosie (e.g. p264-5), and even short flashes by other characters such as Johnny Slapoog (p272).

Poppie and members of her family narrate in the Xhosa Afrikaans vernacular, which contains many turns of phrase and words not found in standard Afrikaans. These words from time to time also creep into the sections narrated in the third person. There is a subtle difference between the language in Poppie's narration, and that of her brother Mosie's. In Mosie's narration, there are many more English terms, including "cause why" and "like (for example "Maar ek is geworried, like" (But I'm worried, like) (p. 264)) that bring to mind so-called Cape Afrikaans.

Here and there in the novel, the voice of the third person narration also lapses into Poppie's vernacular. According to Van der Merwe (1994) this shows the extent to which the author identifies with her black characters.

The narration shifts naturally between the past tense and sections rendered in the present tense.

The most remarkable characteristic of the narration in Joubert's novel is perhaps that the characters are allowed to speak for themselves with no additional interpretation or implied judgement by the narrator, something that is regarded by Grové (1961) as a prerequisite for a good novel. The inner struggle of the characters, in particular of Poppie as the main character, is left mostly for the reader to deduce. This is very different from Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* where the reader is drawn very directly into the main character's private psychological battles. As stated at the beginning of the novel, Joubert also does not venture into arguments about the political issues of the day. In this respect, there is a vast difference between the understated narration in

Poppie's story and the attempt at comprehensive argumentation around the "native issue" made in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

2.1.6 *Proteus (Heart of the Hunter)* by Deon Meyer, 2002¹⁰

2.1.6.1 Background, plot and setting

Proteus (2002) by Deon Meyer is a suspense novel that tells the story of Tobela (Tiny) Mpayipheli, ex-MK soldier and former sniper for the East German Stasi and the Russian KGB who agrees to take a hard disk with classified information to Lusaka within 72 hours to settle an old debt to one Johnny Kleintjies. He escapes when members of the Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU) try to apprehend him at the airport and decides to make the journey on a BMW 1150 GS motorbike, which he "borrows" from his employer.

In a plot that is underpinned by the mystery about the identity of a notorious double agent, known as "Inkululeko", the reader gets to know Janina Mentz, head of the PIU, Tiger Mazibuko, who leads the Reaction Unit (RU) sent after Tobela, Vincent Radebe, a member of Janina Mentz's team, and the *Cape Times* reporter, Allison Healy, among a large cast of other characters.

Temporally, the novel is situated in the time it was published, with a flashback to one of the assassinations performed by Tobela (also known as "Umzingeli", the warrior) while in the service of the Russians in 1984. The main part of the

¹⁰ All page references refer to the 2002 edition of the novel by Human & Rousseau.

novel spans 72 hours in October. This is encapsulated by short sections that take place in March and November of the same year.

The novel is set for the most part in Southern Africa, as it chronicles Tobela's journey from Cape Town into Botswana. There are flashbacks to Tobela's time abroad in Paris, Amsterdam and Chicago, among other places.

2.1.6.2 Black and white

The novel acknowledges the political realities of the day. Reference is made to the incorporation of the different intelligence services after the first democratic elections in 1994 (p29). In the novel, Johnny Kleintjes is responsible for the integration of data of the different intelligence networks. Reference is made to political figures of the day, e.g. "Mandela en Nzo" (Mandela and Nzo) on p30, to Johnny Kleintjes, Janina Mentz and Tobela Mpayipheli's participation in "the struggle" (p30, p49, p79), to affirmative action (p36), to "*die ANC, MK, PAC of Apla*" (the ANC, MK, PAC or Apla) (p52), to incarceration and torture of black activists by the security police under apartheid (p94 and 95).

The blackness of the main character, Tobela Mpayipheli, is introduced early in the novel. Before the reader knows Tobela's name, clues as to his racial identity are given when, while pursuing his "enemy" in France, he thinks of the Transkei (p7) and recalls the names of his forefathers, Phalo, Rharhabe, Ngqika and Maqoma (p7) we are told that he is an African warrior and speaks Xhosa.

The first direct reference to Tobela's blackness is in the words of his victim, Dorffling, who asks: "*What fucking language is that, nigger?*" (p8). In the main body of the novel, which is situated in South Africa, there are also many references to racial tensions and the after effects of apartheid. Janina Mentz is keenly aware of the limited opportunities that exist "for a white woman in a black administration" (vir 'n wit vrou in 'n swart administrasie). The NIA official, Masethla, tells Janina that "her people" removed some of the films from the NIA database. When Janina asks whether "her people" refers to the Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU), he answers: "Nee. Die wittes." (No. The whites.) The woman Tobela loves, Miriam Nzululwazi, has difficulty speaking with the female attorney, Beneke, when she goes with Tobela to visit his friend Zatopek van Heerden. "*Sy en Miriam het Engels gepraat, maar dit wou nie werk nie. Regsgeleerde en teemaker. Die kloof van velkleur en kultuur en driehonderd jaar se Afrika-geskiedenis het gapend indie ongemaklike stiltes tussen hulle gelê*" (She and Miriam spoke English, but it didn't work. Legal expert and teagirl. The divide of skin colour and culture and three hundred years of the history of Africa lay gaping in the uncomfortable silences between them) (p. 148). Later in the novel, Miriam does not trust Janina Mentz, because Janina is white (p178).

There are a number of instances where offensive statements such as the one referred to earlier by Dorffling are made. On page 109, Masethla from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), says to Janina Mentz "*Fok jou, jou wit teef*" (Fuck you, you white bitch) and on page 266 Tobela asks the helicopter pilot whether he thinks he (Tobela) is a "*dom kaffertjie*" (dumb little kaffir).

In general, however, Meyer treats issues of race in a reconciliatory rather than a divisive manner. He presents a picture of a South African society where racial diversity is the norm, where black and white (and everyone in between) work together in relative harmony. The director for whom Janina Mentz, a white, Afrikaans speaking woman, works, is a Zulu (p20); Janina earns the respect of the formidable Christmas “Tiger” Mazibuko despite the fact that he initially struggled to take her seriously (p31); both Janina (p38) and Tiger’s (p38) teams are racially diverse; the Minister of Intelligence is a Tswana woman and the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry a grey haired white man (p165). A stray Griqua songwriter even manages to find a way into the novel in the form of Koos Kok (p162).

Often in the novel, the reader is not directly informed about the race of the characters. On p30, for example, the mention of Johnny Kleintjes sitting at home reading the “*wittes se koerante*” (white newspapers) leads the reader to believe that he is probably a coloured man. On p38 one deduces from the names of Janina Mentz’s team that they are racially diverse. It only emerges on page 60 that AJM Williams, who interrogates Ismail Mohammed on page 13, is a coloured man. Rudewaan Quinn, a member of Janina Mentz’ team, is first introduced on p38, but it is only on page 276 that reference is made to his race. “*Quinn, die bruin man, is lank en atleties.*” (Quinn, the coloured man, is tall and athletic.). This indirectly conveys the message that the race of the different characters is of lesser importance than their other personal traits and actions.

In spite of the instances of harsh, racist remarks made by/to some of the characters referred to above, the general spirit of racial interaction between Meyer's very diverse cast of characters, is one of good-natured teasing. On p50 Tobela wants to “[*speel*] ’n potjie skaak [...] tussen sy Zoeloe-vriend se selffoonpratende rykdomjagende kliënte deur, terwyl hulle in Xhosa goediglik met die wittes spot” (play a game of chess in between his Zulu friend's cellphone chatting, wealth chasing clients, while they make good-natured fun of the whites in Xhosa). When Tobela goes to “borrow” the motorbike from his employer, he makes up a story that the “Xhosa again has to clean up the Whitey boss' mess” (p55). After the visit to the “gangster house” in Mitchell's Plain where Mazibuko gave Da Costa orders to shoot one of the suspects, one of the other members of the reaction unit, Zweletini, jokingly accuses Mazibuko of racial discrimination: “*net die koloniste mag skiet, die arme swartes mag net kyk*” (only the colonists are allowed to shoot, the poor blacks can only stand by and watch) (p73). Tobela remembers an incident where his Odessa instructor, Otto Müller, remarked “*I haff never taught a Schwarzer before.*” Tobela answered “*I have never taken orders from ze Whitezer before.*” (p111). On page 186, the notorious druglord Orlando Arendse laughingly says that “*Dit is apartheid se skuld*” (Apartheid is to blame) that he has a criminal career. Another example of this “good-natured teasing” (goedige gespot) is found on p259 when Klein-Joe Moroka and the other members of the party staked out close to the bridge over the Modder River dare each other to sing, a dare that starts with the statement “*Julle Whiteys kan nie...*” (You Whiteys don't know how to...).

Whereas in *Cry, the Beloved Country* there is a pervasive theme of fear, Meyer's novel seems to carry a hint of optimism, of hope for the future. This is best captured in Tobela's thoughts when he hears the singing of "Shosholoza" by the diverse group waiting to ambush him at the Modder River: "*Dit laat sien hom visioene van swart en wit en bruin in groter, perfekte harmonie, die moontlikhede magies.*" (It causes him to see visions of black and white and brown in greater, perfect hamony, the possibilities are magical) (p260).

2.1.6.3 Characterisation

As indicated above, Tobela Mpayipheli is introduced in the first few pages of the novel as a Xhosa "warrior from the plains of Africa" (kryger van die vlaktes van Afrika) (p7), known as Umzingeli. It later emerges that Tobela served as "the ANC's exchange student" (die ANC se uitruilstudent) (p228) to the Russian KGB and the East German Stasi. He is 40 years old when the main plot unfolds. On p189 we learn that Tobela can speak French, which he probably learnt in the two years during which he worked as a baker's assistant in France (p218) after his career as trained assassin ended.

Tobela is presented as a well-rounded character. The reader sees his inner struggle between his persona as Umzingeli, the warrior, and the peace-loving farmer and family man he aspires to be (e.g. p147) after having met Miriam and later her son, Pakamile (p20, p86). The tension that existed between the vastly different personalities of Tobela's father, Lawrence (a religious minister), and his uncle, Senzeni (who recruited him into the Struggle), "*Die duif en die valk. Jakob en Esau*" (The dove and the hawk, Jacob and Esau)

(p92), is apparent in the struggle Tobela experiences between his old and new self. The possibility that Tobela can change his nature (for which Meyer uses the parallel of the shapeshifting Greek god Proteus (p173), but which, according to Zatopek van Heerden's theory of genetic programming, is impossible) is presented not only as the key to Tobela's personal salvation, but also as "hope for Mother Africa" (p195).

Early in the novel, the reader learns about the special relationship between Tobela and Miriam's young son, Pakamile. Tobela goes to a lot of trouble to contribute to Pakamile's education and teaches him how to "farm" in a vegetable garden in Miriam's back yard (p20). The vegetable garden is a temporary substitute for the real thing, as Tobela has bought a farm at the Cala River in the Transkei and plans to build a house there for the three of them and to become a full-time farmer: "*Om die hande wat baklei en gebreek het, te laat bou. Om met sweet en konsentrasie en spiere 'n blyplek te bou, om sy hande in die grond te steek, om die aarde om te dolwe en te plant en te laat groei*" (To let the hands that fought and broke, build. To build a home with sweat and concentration and muscle, to stick his hands in the ground, to turn the soil and plant and grow) (p126).

This escapist ideal does not mean that Tobela is not concerned with the political issues of the day. On page 102 and 103 there is a rather philosophical section (much like the sections in which Zatopek van Heerden argues about genetic programming (e.g. p195)) in which Tobela ponders the plight of Africa as the "Red Continent" (Rooi Kontinent). This train of thought is taken further in the section on page 302 where Tobela considers the reasons

for the differences between Botswana and South Africa. On his way to Petrusville, Tobela sees the colourful landscape and thinks “*Kleur het hierdie land opgefok. Die verskil in kleur.*” (It is colour that has fucked up this country. The difference in colour.) (p195). On p225 we read that Tobela’s conversations with Miriam included discussions on “*Sy kommer oor die geweld en die armoede in die townships. Die wegsyfer van Xhosa-kultuur in die woestynsand van ‘n nabootsing van alles wat Amerikaans is.*” (His concern about the violence and the poverty in the townships. The disappearance of Xhosa culture in the desert sands of an imitation of all things American.).

On p229 Tobela’s friend Zatopek van Heerden, an erstwhile policeman and private investigator turned professor in psychology (p190), describes Tobela as an intelligent, but uncomplicated, action-oriented man.

The reader gets to know Tobela in part through what other characters have to say or find out about him, but mostly through his own thoughts in the sections of the novel where Tobela is the focaliser. Tobela’s thoughts are presented just like those of the other characters who are given turns to focalise. He is presented as mature and complex, very unlike the naïve and one-dimensional characters we encounter in *Toiings* and *Swart Pelgrim*.

And, lest we forget, from that moment on page 217 that Tobela becomes aware of the motorbike as an “extension of his body” (verlenging van sy liggaam) and understands “the addiction that the white clients speak of” (die verslawing [. . .] waarvan die wit kliënte praat), he is a member of the biking

fraternity and, more than that, one of the select few who can call themselves BMW bikers.

2.1.6.4 Stereotype

Whereas earlier writers (for instance Venter in *Swart Pelgrim*) present “the white man” and “the native” as types, Meyer is at pains to present his characters as individuals in their own right. This is strengthened by the shifts in focalisation (see paragraph 2.6.5 below) and the characterisation of the supporting characters (see paragraph 2.6.3).

2.1.6.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel is narrated in the third person by an omniscient and omnipresent narrator. There are, however, frequent shifts in focalisation through which Meyer presents, in addition to the main character, an unusually large number of the characters in the novel as fairly rounded. As mentioned above, the most prominent of these are Janina Mentz and Christmas “Tiger” Mazibuko, Vincent Radebe and Allison Healy. This “equal treatment” given by the narrator to a diverse group of characters, contributes to the spirit of optimism in the South African diversity that is created by the novel.

2.1.7 *Bidsprinkaan (Praying Mantis)* by André P Brink, 2005

2.1.7.1 Background, plot and setting

The publication of *Bidsprinkaan* coincided with Brink's seventieth birthday. The novel spans a period of about 65 years from 1760 to round about 1825. This is not the first time that Brink writes about the Cape colonial history, this period is also the setting for his novels *Houd-den-Bek* (1982) and *Inteendeel* (1993).

Bidsprinkaan tells the life story of Kupido Kakkerlak, a Khoi-Khoi convert who later becomes a missionary. Kupido is born in an unusual manner to a Khoi-Khoi farm worker (he is "delivered" by an eagle). He later leaves the farm with the travelling salesman, Servaas Ziervogel. After marrying the soap maker Anna Vigilant, a San woman, he meets Reverends van der Kemp and Read of the London Missionary Society. He converts and later becomes a missionary, and is later sent to run a mission station in the remote and harsh Dithakong area. Here he becomes "forgotten" by the church and suffers extreme hunger and deprivation. When Reverend Moffat finally visits the missionary station, Kupido is summarily fired. The novel ends where Kupido rides off into the unknown on a wagon with a freed slave called Arend.

The novel is set in what is today known as the Western and Northern Cape provinces, mostly in the Karoo. In James Read's narration in the second part of the novel, he remembers journeys he had taken to England, Brazil, Portugal and finally to the Cape.

The novel is an example of magical realism and explores the role of the narrative as a guiding element of the main character's life. The plot centres around Cupido's struggle to reconcile the narratives of the Christian religion with the Khoi-Khoi faith his mother taught him.

2.1.7.2 Black and white

The reader is introduced to Cupido's race (he is a Khoi-Khoi, or Hottentot) through his mother, who is described as a "gewone Hottentotvrou" (common Hottentot woman)(p10). Early on in the novel, "eight Bushmen" are listed among the other trophies of the master's hunting expedition. On p11, Bushmen children and a small troop of drifting Hottentot are caught and "booked in" as farm workers.

Particularly in the first part of the novel, there is much evidence of racial prejudice. Among other things, this is apparent from the master's views on his workers (lazy, dirty, etc) while he views himself as a "*regvaardige man*" (a fair man) p11. Cupido's mother is given corporal punishment every time she leaves the farm without permission and, when baby Cupido is believed to have died, the farm workers have to finish the day's work before they may bury him. The author does not present a simple picture of a bad master and good workers as is done to a certain extent in *Houd den Bek* and *Kennis van die aand*. Preparing for baby Cupido's funeral, the workers drink, smoke dagga and steal one of the farmer's sheep.

On p44 we read: *“Maar Cupido hou hom skaars. Hy is kopsku vir vreemdelinge, veral wittes, aan wie hy hom nog nooit mooi kon wen nie.”* (But Cupido keeps a low profile. He is wary of strangers, in particular of whites, whom he could not get quite used to).

When Servaas Ziervogel says to Cupido that he should become a preacher, Cupido answers *“Ek is ‘n Hottentot, Baas.”* (I am a Hottentot, Master.) (p57).

Kupido’s first wife, Anna Vigilant, limps because of an injury she sustained when she attempted to climb into the soap pot, hoping that it would make her white. *“Want vandat sy as klein kind in die Boesmanland gevang is, het sy geweet: bruin is ‘n ding wat jy nie wil wees nie.”* (Because, since she had been caught as a small child in the Bushmanland, she had known this: brown isn’t something you want to be.) (p. 71).

After Cupido commits murder, Anna warns him: *“maar om hier in ‘n witmensedorp moord te pleeg, is anders. Geen seep was jou ooit weer wit nie.”* (but to commit murder here in the white people’s town, is different. No soap will ever wash you white again.) p81.

Kupido, who is a carpenter, and his fellow black craftsmen, earn less than the white residents of the Cape pay for their daughters’ school fees (p. 84). Khoi and white people sit on different sides of the church (p85).

When James Read describes his relationship with Cupido, he says *“Ten eerste was hy natuurlik ‘n Hottentot, ek ‘n blanke man. In ‘n land soos dié is*

dit helaas van belang, dalk selfs deurslaggewend.” (In the first place, he was of course a Hottentot, I a white man. In a land such as this, that is alas of importance, maybe even the determining factor.) (p122).

The main theme of the novel is Kupido’s spiritual coming of age. The novel does not comment directly on racism. But, as Van der Kemp states on page 126 *“In ‘n land soos dié is daar geen verskil tussen ‘n ‘politieke’ en ‘n ‘godsdiensstige’ daad nie.”* (In a country such as ours, there is not difference between a political and a religious deed.). Kupido’s second wife, Katryn, also blames the fact that Kupido is black for the manner in which he is treated by the missionary authorities: *“Ek sê jou, as jy wit was, sou hy [Moffat] lankal hier gewees het. As jy wit was, sou jy lankal jou geld gekry het. As jy wit was, sou hulle vir ons gesorg het, kos en klere en alles.”* (Let me tell you, had you been white, he [Moffat] would have been here long ago. Had you been white, you would have long had your money. Had you been white, they would have looked after us, food and clothes and everything.) (p219).

2.1.7.3 Characterisation

The reader gets to know Kupido mostly through his spirituality. This is portrayed in a believable manner through the use of magical realism. At first, Kupido’s spirituality centres on his close relationship with the Hottentot or Khoikhoi god Heitsi-Eibib, which co-existed in Kupido’s mind with other mythical characters such as the Hei-Noen, the Sobo Khoi and the evil Sarê. Thanks to Heitsi-Eibib, Kupido initially enjoys uncanny success as a hunter, which makes him valuable in the eyes of his master. However, when Kupido

accidentally says the name of Heitsi-Eibib out loud one day (p. 37), the god withdraws from him and he loses his skill.

Humour is used to great effect to lend depth to Cupido's character. Examples of this are his attempt to fly (p.24), his letters to God and the missionaries and the way in which he curses his wagon when it finally breaks down (p223).

The character of Cupido is strongly influenced by relationships with a small number of people. Firstly, there is his mother, who teaches him the Hottentot religion. After his mother's disappearance, Cupido forms a relationship with Servaas Ziervogel, the travelling salesman, music man and preacher. Ziervogel has a profound impact on Cupido's life, firstly by introducing Cupido to a mirror for the first time in his life. Cupido's naïve understanding of what a mirror is, is at the same time humorous and deeply touching. In 1790, when Ziervogel gives Cupido a mirror as parting gift, he describes it as “...*dié vreemdeling wat terselfdertyd sy ander self was*” (that stranger that was at the same time his other self) (p. 60).

Ziervogel also introduces Cupido to Christianity, and, although he initially resists the thought, Cupido gradually warms to the idea of converting. On page 57 we read that “*Al hoe meer het hy begin wonder of dit nie beter sou wees om maar te vergeet van Heitsi-Eibib se wêreld en in te kom in die wêreld van die Boek nie.*” (More and more, he started to wonder whether it would not be better to forget about the world of Heitsi-Eibib and to get into the world of the Book.). Ziervogel also teaches Cupido to read and write.

On the journey with Ziervogel, Kupido develops into a drinker, a fighter and a lecher (p. 59). Yet, unlike the black characters in Mikro's *Toiings*, Kupido is not characterised as a stereotypical coloured buffoon.

After Kupido and Ziervogel part ways, Kupido's next significant relationship is with Anna Vigilant. Kupido has a magical first encounter with Anna, a San woman who is renowned for the soap she makes. Like Kupido's mother, Anna is strongly spiritual. She believes in the San god Tkgagen and has the ability to "dream" things as she wishes them to be.

Although Kupido is happy with Anna, particularly after they move to Graaff-Reinett, he remains restless, he steals, drinks and cannot remain faithful to Anna. He refers to a "hunger", a "coal of fire", that is burning inside of him (p. 82). Things come to a head when he murders the angry husband of one of the women he had an affair with.

The next relationship that plays a significant part in Kupido's characterisation, is that with the missionary Van der Kemp, under whose guidance Kupido is baptised. Anker (2008: 8) speaks of the "hybrid identity" Kupido develops as a result of his struggle to reconcile Christianity and the traditional spirituality of the Khoikhoi. According to Anker (*ibid*), the mirror he receives as gift from Servaas Ziervogel, which allows Kupido to experience the magical *within* reality, becomes a metaphor for this duality in Kupido's character.

Kupido embraces his role as missionary with childlike enthusiasm. Storming and destroying the stone piles built in honour of Heitsi-Eibib, he bears a

resemblance to Don Quixote (Painter, 2005). His naïve perception of the world is shown, for example through his belief that he should eat his Bible so that the words can become part of him and through his letters to God. But although Kupido is often characterised in a humorous way, it is not done in the one-dimensional manner we find in Mikro's *Toiings*. Kupido is funny, but the humour serves only to portray him as a profoundly tragic character. Most notably, as the novel progresses and he finds himself abandoned at Dithakong, Kupido loses his childlike faith in God and his trust in the white missionaries. This comes to a head during the Reverend Moffat's visit eight years after Kupido's arrival at Dithakong. Although he is starving, Kupido refuses the coffee Moffat offers him.

It is towards the end of the novel that Kupido's spirituality expands to make space for the spiritual and the physical, and also for the Christian and Khoikhoi faith. On p183 he says: *"Of course I believe in the spirit. But also in the star. And in the clay pot in which I store my dreams."* (Natuurlik glo ek in die gees. Maar ook in die ster. En in die kleipot waarin ek my drome bêre.) and on p202: *"That maybe it does not matter so much if Tsui-Goab says one thing and Tkaggen another and the Lord God yet another. For all he knows, there are also other gods in other places."* (Dat dit dalk nie soveel saak maak as Tsui-Goab een ding praat en Tkaggen 'n ander ding en die Here-God weer 'n ander nie. Vir al wat hy weet, is daar op ander plekke ook nog ander gode.)

More than that, Kupido progresses to a point where he senses that there may be things that lie "beyond the word", for example on p226: *"Maybe it is those things for which there are no words, in particular, that matter."* (Dalk is dit juis

dié dat daar nie 'n woord voor is nie, wat saak maak.) (see also Anker, 2008 and Painter, 2005.)

Kupido Kakkerlak is not the only well-rounded character in the novel. Through the narration of the second part of the novel, the reader is also given insight into the character of the fallen Reverend James read, who, although extremely prejudiced and also flawed in other respects, comes to respect Kupido and recognise how unjustly he had been treated.

2.1.7.4 Stereotype

Stereotype exists in the novel as a vice of some of the characters, but is not a characteristic of the narration itself. Kupido's mother is "*n gewone Hottentotvrou, en ongetwyfeld in haar Baas se oë so vuil en lui soos al die ander*" (a normal Hottentot woman, and undoubtedly in her master's eyes as dirty and lazy as all the rest) (p10).

A further example of a stereotype is found in the farmer's pronouncement on p11 that "*Die goed teel ook aan nes kakkerlakke. Kom al agter die ruik van kos aan.*" (The creatures multiply like cockroaches. They come after the smell of food.) (p11).

On p28 it is speculated that the master's children probably viewed Kupido much the same as the tame monkey that they had kept in the yard and taught tricks.

When Cupido makes known his desire to learn to read and write, it is not encouraged. “*Wat wil ‘n hotnot maak met lees en skryf, het hy [die baas] vererg gevra, “dan ken hy glad nie meer sy plek nie.”* (‘What does a coloured want with reading and writing,’ he [the master] asked crossly, ‘then he won’t know his place anymore.’) This carries echoes of the issue Josef Malan experiences in *Kennis van die Aand* with regard to “knowing his place”.

James Read’s prejudice against blacks (whom he views as “heathens”, e.g. on p129) is clear from his narration in part two of the novel.

From the author’s note printed at the back of the novel, it is clear that Brink consciously avoided the stereotype of the clown or buffoon, the “jolly hotnot” (jolly coloured). He states that: “*Kupido Kakkerlak could be spontaneous and unaffected, but he was no clown.*” (Kupido Kakkerlak kon spontaan en ongekunsteld wees, maar hy was nie ‘n harlekyn nie.)

2.1.7.5 Narration and focalisation

The novel consists of three parts. The first and third part is narrated in the third person, with the focalisation mainly that of Cupido, but with occasional shifts, for example to Cupido’s mother (Part 1, Chapter 3), Servaas Ziervogel (p49) or Reverend Moffat (p232).

The middle part of the book is narrated in the first person by Reverend James Read, the man who saves Cupido when he nearly drowns being baptised and who works with Rev van der Kemp as a missionary until he leaves the ministry

due to “temptation”. The style of narration in this section of the novel bears a resemblance to typical nineteenth century reporting (see also Painter, 2005). It is interesting to note that Read is not one of the characters that Kupido has a very close relationship with, yet his narration gives important insight into Kupido’s character.

As Anker (2008) points out, the narrator in *Bidsprinkaan* is not entirely trustworthy. Every now and again, the veracity of events that we are told of, is questioned, e.g. on page 34 “*Hoe sou mens ooit vir seker kon sê?*” (How would one ever be able to say for sure?) and later “*Het hy of het hy nie?*” (Did he or did he not?). This destabilises the narrative perspective, a perspective that is already impossible to determine exactly in a magical realistic novel (Faris, 2004:43) as referred to by Anker (2008).

It is appropriate that, in the third part of the novel, the focalisation is mostly that of Kupido. The central theme of this part is Kupido’s spiritual growth. He rejects the notion that one has to choose a specific religion and reject all others and embraces the notion that “*dat dit dalk nie soveel saak maak as Tsui-Goab een ding praat en Tkaggen ‘n ander ding en die Here-God weer ‘n ander nie*” (it possibly doesn’t matter all that much whether Tsui-Goab says one thing and Tkaggen another and the Lord God yet another) (p202). This is reinforced by Kupido’s reference to God and Tsui-Goab as interchangeable on p225 and finally when Kupido asks Arend on p245 to help him rebuild the stone pile in honour of Heitsi-Eibib.

2.1.8 *Lerato*, by Desirée Homann (unpublished), 2011

2.1.8.1 Background, plot and setting

Desirée Homann's unpublished novel, *Lerato* (2010), tells the story of Lerato Mokwena who, as a young girl, moves from the Lesotho highlands to the city with her mother and brother after her father, a subsistence cattle farmer, becomes ill and dies. In the squatter community of Marabastad in Pretoria, Lerato is at first protected by her uncle Caiphus, who has taken over the role of family patriarch. After Lerato's mother passes away from tuberculosis, however, Lerato increasingly finds herself under threat from her drunken uncle. One night as she struggles with him, the settlement catches fire and Lerato flees to the nearby municipal clinic where she has befriended the nursing sister, Seipathi, with nothing more than the clothes on her back. With Seipathi's assistance, Lerato finds a job as shop assistant at Metco, a large fabric store owned by the Omarjee family. The physical attraction between Lerato and Subesh, one of the Omarjee sons who manage the Metco store, soon erupts and the young Lerato is subjected to a range of wild emotions as she discovers her own sexuality. However, one evening Lerato and Subesh have an argument and in the heat of the moment Lerato mentions a job offer she received from Marcus Starke, a fashion designer that she got to know while working at Metco. The following day, Lerato is informed that her employment with Metco has been terminated. Lerato is deeply depressed and has given up on the offer made by Marcus when he arrives at Metco one Friday morning. Having seen the conditions Lerato lives in in the dilapidated old pre-fab school building across the street from Metco, Marcus insists that

Lerato come to live with him when she accepts the offer to be appointed as his assistant. She is thrown in at the deep end as Marcus is preparing to participate in an international fashion show. However, during the show, Lerato finds out that she is pregnant and soon afterwards she learns that Marcus is sick and dying. He plans for her to take over the business after his death. Lerato has to come to terms with being handed the life of her dreams, but having to deal with unexpected losses and fears along the way.

The story is set in the inner city and old eastern suburbs of Pretoria, with dreams of and a visit to the mountains where Lerato lived as a child. It spans about ten years of Lerato's life.

2.1.8.2 Black and white

To the South African reader, Lerato's blackness is immediately apparent from her name and other names in the opening passage, as well as the reference to the traditional Sotho lifestyle (blankets, hut, ponies etc). Her experience of life in the informal settlement in Marabastad is also, in the South African context, a "black experience".

When Lerato finds work at the textile retailer, Metco, she notices that the black workers are treated as inferior by the Indian ones. While the Metco workers are all black, the clients are mostly white.

When Lerato is asked by Marcus Starke to come and work for him as his assistant, he jokingly says that he needs a black face in his business. At

Marcus Starke Fine Designs the workers are all black, while the owner (Marcus) is white.

Marcus's mother, Mercia, shows her own prejudice when she uses the term "these people" (of blacks) when she cautions Marcus's not to allow his black housekeeper, Martha, to slack off.

In spite of the above, the novel does not explore black/white tensions or political issues at all. The focus is entirely on the story of a young girl who searches for love and self-actualisation. Lerato's dreams come true despite the odds she faces and the reader joins her as she struggles to come to terms with her "luck".

2.1.8.3 Characterisation

Lerato is characterised as a naïve, but intelligent girl. Her character develops from a girl who is a victim and a spectator, to a young woman who takes charge of and "owns" her life. In this respect, Lerato bears similarities to Brink's Josef Malan in *Kennis van die Aand*.

Just like the other black main characters discussed in the study, Lerato is an outsider. She does not feel at home in the city and yearns for the mountains where she grew up (reminding the reader of Toiings' feelings of displacement when he is away from the farm). Although she lives in poverty, Lerato dreams of another world, a world that is personified by the pictures she sees in

fashion magazines. However, when she gets the opportunity to become part of this world, it causes a violent inner conflict and feelings of self doubt.

The search for love is a central theme in the characterisation of Lerato (her name means “Love”). She loses her father at a young age and is left at the mercy of a disinterested mother and a predatory uncle. Lerato becomes infatuated with her manager at Metco, Subesh, and has a brief sexual relationship with him. She then meets the gay fashion designer, Marcus, whom she comes to love. Finally, she experiences the love of a mother for her child.

2.1.8.4 Stereotype

The novel deliberately breaks down commonly held stereotypes of black people. Lerato’s naivety is linked to her age, not to her race. She does not become a “type” that represents “blacks” or “black women” as a category. Her struggle towards individuation is not that of a black woman trying to fit into a white world, but rather that of any woman grappling with her own fear and success.

As indicated in paragraph 2.1.8.2 above, there are a few examples of racial prejudice in the text. This reflects the reality of the South African context in which the novel is located. As is the case in Meyer’s *Proteus* and Brink’s *Kennis van die Aand*, racial bias and stereotypes are reported in the narration, while the narration and focalisation per se remain unbiased. This is different

from the biased (to varying extents) narration of Mikro's *Toiings*, Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*.

2.1.8.5 Narration and focalisation

The story is narrated in the third person by a reliable narrator. The focalisation is mainly that of the main character, Lerato, drawing the reader into her life and experience of events and into her dreams. Now and again, however, the focalisation shifts to an undefined perspective that "sees" Lerato from the outside.

2.2 SUMMARY

The close reading and analysis of the selected texts in this chapter provides a thorough phenomenological description of the identified text elements (for example, characterisation, focalisation, etc). This description provides the basis on which the comparison and interpretation that follows in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation will be done.

CHAPTER 3

COMPARISON OF THE STUDY TEXTS

3. Introduction

Each of the novels discussed in this study is unique in many respects. It is therefore not possible to make an absolute comparison between them on the basis of certain text elements (e.g. characterisation, setting, plot).

From the close reading and analysis of the primary study texts that is provided in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, similarities emerge between novels that, on the face of it, have nothing in common. The narration of Josef Malan's childhood years on the farm carries strong echoes of the world in which Toiings finds himself; Josef places the farmer's daughter, Hermien, on a pedestal, just as Toiings does with his employer's wife, Miemie. In both novels, there is mention of the farmhouse that is off limits to the workers and Josef addresses the farmer with the same "Baas, ja, Baas" that Toiings uses.

Poppie Nongena spends her childhood in Blikkiesdorp, the location Toiings goes to visit. Lerato has difficulty "owning" her life rather than viewing it as a spectator, much like Josef Malan, who lives life by proxy through the theatre. The class difference between more educated blacks and rural tribesmen is referred to in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (p14) and also in *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*, where Poppie's brother, Plank, is outraged by the fact that

she is to marry a “rou kaffer” (raw kaffir) (p 52). In both *Swart Pelgrim* and *Proteus*, the black main character falls in love with a woman called Miriam.

The above examples are weak, almost accidental similarities. It seems, however, that stronger similarities exist between *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*; between *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan*; and between *Proteus* and *Lerato. Toiings* and *Kennis van die Aand* do not have the same level of similarity with any of the other study texts. (It should be noted, however, that the literature study indicates that there are strong parallels between *Toiings* and, for example, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. It can also be assumed that *Kennis van die Aand* will have much in common with other examples of struggle literature, e.g *Life and Times of Michael K* by JM Coetzee.)

The identified similarities provide clues to the research question posed in Chapter 1, namely: How and why do white South African authors make use of black main characters in their novels?

3.1 The How

3.1.1 *Toiings* – the endearing antics of the simple-minded black

The black main character in Mikro's novel remains one-dimensional – there is little evidence of development. Beyond Toiings's desire to be rich and his longing for a wife, the reader knows very little of him. Toiings's childlike understanding of the world, the way he dresses and his attempts at

impressing the women he likes, is presented in a comical, sometimes even ridiculous manner. Most of the other members of the Blikkiesdorp community are depicted as fun-loving drunkards.

Toiings does not question the social dispensation of the day – black farm workers who are treated as chattel by white farmers, cruel corporal punishment, and the general view of blacks as errant children rather than equal human beings, characterise the novel.

3.1.2 *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim* – the rural native in the city of the white man

The similarities between *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim* are immediately apparent. Both novels chronicle a visit by a rural “native” to the “city of the white man”, both lament the destruction of the “land” as the result of white greed on the one hand and black ignorance on the other.

In both novels, the black main character is essentially a “good man”, a man of the soil committed to this family and his community. In both novels, however, the main character is flawed to a lesser or greater extent. Stephen Khumalo’s transgressions amount to no more than telling small untruths and making hurtful remarks. Kolisile, on the other hand, commits adultery and becomes involved in crime. The stereotype of “the good kaffir” (Paton, 1948:42) is stronger in *Swart Pelgrim*, where Kolisile is portrayed in accordance with the nineteenth century notion of the “noble savage” as referred to by Mphahlele (2002:370). Van der Merwe (1994), remarks, however, that Kolisile is a

complex character that exhibits characteristics of both the good and bad black stereotype and struggles to reconcile the two.

The main contrast between Paton's novel and that of Venter is that, in addition to the narrative, Paton's novel also includes long tracts of political argumentation, lending it more credibility as an honest attempt at creating a "social record" (as stated by Paton at the beginning of the book), than Venter's novel.

3.1.3 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan* – true stories

Although Poppie Nongena and Kupido Kakkerlak are vastly different characters, the novels have a similar feel. In both novels, the truth is expertly turned into a story that allows the reader to intimately share the life's journey of the main character, a character who is tossed about by external forces over which he or she has no control. The main characters in both novels move from relative carelessness to a state of utter dejection. Poppie moves from a carefree childhood to a life that is increasingly encumbered by apartheid legislation and racial harassment. Kupido's spiritual conviction and delusions of grandeur end in utter dejection and finally, in starvation.

The element of magical realism imbues Brink's novel with an added element of "literariness". While Poppie's struggle remains largely one against external forces, Kupido also experiences an intense inner struggle between his

allegiance to his childhood deity, Heitsi-Eibib, and western Christian religion, at the hand of which he experiences unspeakable neglect.

3.1.4 *Proteus* and *Lerato* – main characters who happen to be black

In the novels by Meyer and Homann the “blackness” of the main characters, although acknowledged, is not central to the plot. In Meyer’s novel, Tobela Mpayipheli’s Xhosa background is given significance in the reference to “Umzingeli” (“warrior” in isiXhosa), while in Homann’s novel *Lerato* Mokoena’s Sotho roots feature in dreams of the mountains where she grew up.

True to the genre of the suspense novel, the plot in *Proteus* centres around a conspiracy to protect the identity of a double agent in the so-called “Presidential Intelligence Unit (PIU)”. As the theme of the novel is espionage, the political reality of the day features in, but is not the main focus of, the novel. In *Lerato*, the central theme is the main character’s journey towards self-actualisation, a variation on the theme of the “small town girl made good”.

In both novels, the character set is racially diverse. In Meyer’s novel, in particular, characters of different races (e.g. Janina Mentz, Tiger Mazibuko), are presented with the same degree of roundedness. This is supported by the shifts in focalisation. In *Lerato* characters of different races also interact with each other closely, but there is an unspoken resistance against a black woman being “the boss” – overcoming this barrier, also in her own mind, becomes central to *Lerato*’s story.

3.1.5 *Kennis van die Aand* – a novel about apartheid

Brink's novel bears similarities to *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan* (a later work by Brink) in that it tells the life story of someone who is crushed by the machinery of the state (or, in the case of *Bidsprinkaan's* Kupido Kakkerlak, of the church). The main difference, however, is that *Kennis* (as the novel is referred to in the author's memoirs) is a fictional work. Some critics may view this distinction as inconsequential, seeing that in both Poppie and *Bidsprinkaan* the facts as researched by the author are intensively fleshed out by details that have their origin in the imagination (however well-informed) of the author.

One could argue, however, that the fact that *Kennis* is a work of fiction, allowed Brink the freedom to build the 'story's own truth' (Grové, 1961:204) unfettered by historical facts. But this is only partly true – in *Kennis* Brink takes no liberties with the portrayal of the social realities of South Africa in the heyday of the apartheid dispensation. Documented cases exist of all the aspects of apartheid that cause Josef Malan's suffering and death. In a work of fiction, one generally expects to get to know more of the "inner reality" of the characters, their intimate thoughts and neuroses, their spirituality. And this is indeed the case in *Kennis*, particularly through Josef Malan's identification with historical Christian martyrs and the subtext of Calderon's *Life is a Dream*. In *Bidsprinkaan*, however, the reader is also given the details of Kupido Kakkerlak's inner journey, and in particular of his spirituality, although one would normally not expect this in a novel based on facts.

Although *Kennis van die Aand* is placed in a separate category here, it therefore should be noted that there is an argument for grouping it with *Poppie* and *Bidsprinkaan*. The discussion under “The Why” below will, however, provide further argument for viewing it as different from the “true” stories.

3.2 The Why

3.2.1 The novel and society

The sociology of literature, or literary sociology, is a field of study generally agreed to have been pioneered by Robert Escarpit, in his book *Sociologie de la Littérature* (1958). Escarpit advocated the sociology or a sociological perspective as a useful tool for explaining how literature functions as a social institution. Escarpit viewed the product and practice of literature a social “faits” (i.e. made by society).

The field of literary sociology has since expanded significantly to include reception aesthetics, publishing, book trade and the commodity aspect of literature, the relationship between literature and group identities, the role of authorship and the intention of the author, as well as the role of ethics and morality in literature. There are strong interfaces between literary sociology and the study of politics in literature, as the sociology of literature takes an interest in the power relations between different groups in society.

From the analysis of the selected novels it is clear that Mphahlele is correct when he says that *“The artist rejects certain features of the world, but also*

accepts others and gives them a high status” (Mphahlele, 2002: 394). He adds that *“The author’s intention or purpose helps him to be selective in what he explores or declaims, so that he may move his or her audience”* (ibid: 409). Grové (1961: 203) agrees when he says that in a novel the author creates a ‘separate self-sustaining’ (aparte, selfonderhoudende) world, *“n wêreld wat soms ingrypend, soms in geringer mate verskil van die alledaagse wêreld wat ons ken, maar wat in prinsipe nooit kongruent daaraan kan wees nie. Die wette wat in ons wêreld geld, geld selde of ooit presies in die wêreld van die boek.”* (a world that sometimes differs radically and sometimes only slightly from the day-to-day world we know, but which, in principle, can never be congruent with it. The laws that apply in our world, seldom, if ever, apply in exactly the same way in the world of the book). The question to aspiring authors therefore, in the words of the writer in Etienne van Heerden’s novel (2007: 261), is: *“Op watter manier wil julle lieg?”* (How do you choose to lie?).

This selective rendition of reality in texts is part of what makes the world of the novel strange and new, something that, according to the Russian Formalists, is a prerequisite for good art. Mphahlele (2002) argues that in this selective portrayal of reality (or the “violation of the ordinary” (die alledaagse geweld aan te doen) as Van Heerden (2007: 167) puts it), “what an artist produces is consciously or unconsciously shaped by his or her social relationships and role in society”.

According to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1925), a work is “good” if it succeeds in involving the reader in the lives of the characters, i.e if

the reader is moved by the fate, the joys and sorrows of the characters. If this is true – and there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that it is – part of the purpose of the “violation of the ordinary” referred to above, is probably to move the reader by making him or her care about the characters. How such a thing is at all possible, remains a mystery, but there is possibly some truth in the following statement by Deon Meyer (2008):

“I don’t think a person’s mind can distinguish between fictional people and real people. You hear what they say. You know what they feel, more than you know about the emotions of real people. The identification is therefore very strong.” (Author’s translation).

The question then, is whether the white South African authors of the primary study texts discussed in this paper succeed in involving their readers in the lives of their black main characters. Perhaps the question is broader than that: Is it possible for a white author to portray a black main character in a convincing and authentic manner? And, stepping into even murkier waters: Is it acceptable (in other words morally and ethically defensible) to do so?

Herman Charles Bosman answers no to both questions when he says (2003) *“. . . how can a white man get into a black man’s skin – and vice versa? That sort of thing is a presumption, and can produce only falseness in art. No, they must write their own literature. We must write ours.”*

Mphahlele seems to agree with Bosman (ibid) when he states that *“The indigenous humanity of Africa will always be a mystery to the white writer”*

(2002:370) and *“Whites will continue to be shadowy figures or ready-made portraits in my fiction. I have ceased to care how whites appear in my writings.”* (ibid: 374). Mphahlele quotes a number of black authors who share this sentiment:

- *“I am black because I am black; everything I write, poems and stories, will be black without any artificial strain.”* Charles F Gordon
- *“Black words do not exist in this country apart from the minds and voices of black people.”* Quentin Hill
- *“It is better that black people write it [the black experience] ourselves rather than have it written for us exploitatively.”* Julia Fields
- *“We do not want a black Santa Claus or a black Peter Pan. We want Change, not a white society painted black.”* Elton Hill-Abu Ishak

When Krog (2009:268), is asked *“But how will you live together in your country (or in mine) if you don’t begin to imagine one another?”*, she responds that *“in a country where we have come from different civilizations, then lived apart in unequal and distorted relationships that formed generations of us, our imagination is simply not capable of imagining a reality as – or with – the other.”* She explains this incapability in the following way: *“I simply do not know enough about blackness, or birdness, or mountainness, or even Englishness, for that matter, to imagine it in terms other than my exact self or the exotic opposite of myself.”*

William Styron, author of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, writes (2008: 101) that his presumption as a white author to write a novel about a slave revolutionary was met with outrage by black academics. He writes that he

“began to learn with great discomfort the consequences of my audacity in acquiring the persona of a black man.” Yet it is Styron’s (ibid: 98) view that, *“in the creation of novels and stories the writer should be free to demolish the barrier of color, to cross the forbidden line and write from the point of view of someone with a different skin.”*

Rampersad (1994:7) agrees, but on certain conditions: *“I would say then that, yes, certainly, a white scholar can write a penetrating [...] biography of a black man or woman – provided that the scholar is steeped in the knowledge of the particular set of broad cultural circumstances out of which the subject came, and provided that the scholar has a degree of sympathy for that culture and the individual concerned.”*

What is it, then, that a white writer hopes to achieve when choosing a black main character? According to Mphahlele, early Afrikaans writers (he mentions Totius, Celliers, Leipoldt and Visser) *“set their audience at ease, flattering their pioneering sentiments and self-love.”* (2002: 369). (Note that Allport (1954) found that a love-prejudice towards the self is often accompanied by a hate-prejudice towards the ‘other’.)

There are two sides to the relationship between fiction and reality. On the one hand, there is the author whose reality precipitates in his or her writing to a lesser or greater extent. On the other, there are questions as to the impact that literary works can have on society. Mphahlele (2002:320) states that *“... there is no easy one-to-one relationship between literature and life.”* He asks whether the *“demolition of a social order in a poem, a novel, a play and so on*

[will] eventually erode or subvert that order in real life" (ibid: 375). He expresses the suspicion that literature not only records and comments on life, but is also "a transcendental force capable of shaping the human spirit in ways we can never articulate or define in precise terms" (ibid: 378). But, Mphahlele warns, art cannot incite into action, "the essence of art lies in its indirectness of impact, in its cumulative force" (ibid: 397). According to Mphahlele, writing can only affect the community indirectly through the education of the individual. As to what exactly the nature of this "education" is, he states: "Our instincts are pressed in art against the changed shape of reality [achieved by the artist]. We thus reorganize our emotions stirred up by the artist, so that we acquire a new attitude" (ibid: 397). It would seem that the writer Sebastiaan Graaff in Van Heerden's novel (2007: 145) is therefore unnecessarily pessimistic (as is Krog, quoted above) when he thinks: "Watse hoop het sy verbeelding teen die werklikheid? Tog niks!" (What hope does his imagination have against reality? None!).

It is important to note that, in his seminal study on prejudice, Allport (1954) found that, although stereotypes resist change, they do change. According to Allport (1954) this change can be achieved through education and the media. Seeing that the medium used by both education and the media is the written and spoken word, it follows that literature also has the potential of changing stereotypes.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is today the object of fierce criticism for the stereotypical view it portrays of black people and its exaggerated sentimentality – the same criticism that is levelled against novels

such as Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. One should keep in mind, however, that Stowe's novel had as its aim to promote the abolitionist cause. History would have that it succeeded: the novel is believed to have contributed to the American Civil War in the 1860's. So, too, are Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* and Joubert's *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* credited with being instrumental in bringing about a change in attitude that ultimately led to the the fall of apartheid.

In some respects, the white authors whose works are discussed in this study, do what black authors have already done: Already in 1915, Sol Plaatje published his documentary work *Native Life in South Africa*. HIE Dhlomo's epic poem *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* bemoans the destruction of tribal life at the hands of the white man's greed. In Peter Abrahams' novel *Path of Thunder*, a coloured man falls in love with a white woman. As these stories were, however, for the most part not read by white readers, their potential for changing the perceptions of whites remained largely untapped.

Gordimer (1993) puts her finger on the spot when she argues that, as a white South African writer of her time, the question was not only 'For whom do you write?', but also 'For whom *can* you write?'. Gordimer (1993) laments the limitation she experiences as a writer who 'writes from within a certain camp'. Fletcher (1993) adds another dimension to the limitation imposed on writers by South Africa's particular history. She says (Fletcher, 1993:11) that "*it is the fate of South African writers that the world expects them to deal with political issues.*" She adds that apartheid, while providing writers with a morally urgent and powerful subject, also denied them certain choices if they wanted to be

taken seriously. Brink (1998:15) agrees that apartheid made it very difficult for writers to write about ordinary human situations without being open for accusations of *“fiddling while Rome burns”*. This was all the more so because of the fact that literature could for some time continue to “report” on apartheid South Africa after other media had been silenced.

Mphahlele (ibid) is of the opinion that Brink, Leroux, Breytenbach and Joubert, by contrast to the early Afrikaans writers *“have come to jolt their audience out of their sense of political triumph, upset their self-satisfaction and lofty notions of their God-ordained mission; to ridicule their rituals.”*

In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to unearth something of the ‘why’ that lies behind the use of a black main character in each of the selected texts.

3.2.2 *Toiings*

It would be easy for a modern day reader to assume that Venter’s aim with *Toiings* was also to *“set [his] audience at ease, flattering their pioneering sentiments and self-love”* as Mphahlele (2002: 369) says of the early Afrikaans writers. Mikro is indeed guilty of portraying his black characters, including the main character, in a strongly stereotypical manner that is bound to offend.

February (1981), however, notes that Mikro’s novels and stories, in which “the coloured” was treated at least with empathy, were a radical departure from

how coloured people had been treated in Afrikaans fiction up to that point. Van der Merwe (1994) remarks that, by placing a non-white character at the centre of the novel, Mikro makes a radical departure from the Afrikaans prose of the time (before 1948), which generally had as its aim to propagate Afrikaner nationalism. According to Beukes and Lategan (1959: 256), the *Toiings*-trilogy speaks of Mikro's "*sincere, earnest love for the Coloured whose life and mentality he knows so intimately.*" (author's translation). In spite of the patronising odour this pronouncement has, it is supported by the author himself in Nienaber (1947), as quoted by Beukes and Lategan (*ibid*), when he says that:

"I had a message and had to deliver it [. . .]. I didn't want you to laugh at Toiings . . . Yes, they [the Coloureds] also suffer, strive, hope, laugh, live, mourn. And they are at our gates. We may not be frivolous about their future. Toiings approached you as a beggar, his hands outstretched for a bit of compassion and understanding. In my mind's eye I saw the Coloureds, all the Coloureds, standing like that, begging from you . . . I then saw them as pilgrims travelling with us to the same place." (author's translation).

It is clear, therefore, that Mikro, while to a large extent writing from within the Afrikaner ideologies of his time, had as his aim to generate empathy and understanding for coloured people.

As is the case in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mikro seems to give a central place to "*die wondermag van die allesbegrypende liefde*" (the wonderful power of love that understands all) (Beukes and Lategan, 1959:255). Whereas Paton and

Venter present the complexity of the 'native question', Mikro seems to suggest a simple solution, captured in the old adage "love conquers all".

3.2.3 *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Swart Pelgrim*

As indicated in Chapter 2, Paton views his novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* as a "social record". The intention of the author is clear from the structure of the novel, which is characterised by what Callan (1982) refers to as "*the dramatic choral chapters that seem to break the sequence of the story for social commentary*".

As furthermore indicated in the analysis of the novels, there are many similarities between Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. Venter also tries to convey to his (Afrikaans) readers something of the dilemma faced by a rural black person in the "city of the White Man". However, Venter goes about the project in a different way, building a story world around his main character, Kolisile, without the long sections of social commentary found in Paton's novel. As hinted at by Grové (1961), however, in terms of social impact, both authors seem to have the same aim.

Van der Merwe (1994:40) views *Swart Pelgrim* as "*a novel of great historical importance*" in that it was "*one of the first attempts in Afrikaans literature to depict the black man as a person*" (ibid: 39).

3.2.4 *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* and *Bidsprinkaan*

Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena was Elsa Joubert's most successful novel. In Chapter 2, reference is made to the author's note at the beginning of the book in which Joubert states that she tried to describe one family's experience of that period as accurately as possible. She makes it clear that it is not the aim of the book to comprehensively address the social or political issues of the time. In an interview with Melt Myburg (December 2009), Joubert states that she had been driven by the will to bring the facts to 'her people', something that she viewed almost as a calling.

In an interview with the author, Joubert (2010) said that she had hoped with *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (which she abbreviates as *Poppie*) to address the ignorance of white readers in respect of the lives of black South Africans. At the time, several books written by black writers had been banned by the government and, although they lived close by, white people had no idea of how black people lived or thought. In preparation for a local travel guide, Joubert had already been studying black culture in South Africa for about ten years when the opportunity arose to write the novel (the life story of her domestic worker, Eunice Ntsatha). Joubert therefore had both the knowledge and sympathy that is, according to Rampersad (1994) required in order for a white person to write a black person's story well. Joubert (2010) adds that the fact that Ntsatha spoke Afrikaans, was one of the key factors that made it possible for her (Joubert) to enter the world of the story.

Joubert (2010) says that she hoped with her novel to touch the hearts and minds of her readers. It was for this reason that she took great care to ensure that, although the novel is fiction, all the events referred to in it, are factually correct. Although the material that she used for the novel was of a political nature, she opted to write a human story and not a political treatise. The success of this approach is apparent from the continued success enjoyed by the novel (*Poppie* the drama has recently again been prescribed to high school learners). Joubert believes that an author has a social responsibility to hold a mirror to society, and with *Poppie*, she believes that she had managed to do that. The novel was a talking point, from university professors to the residents of the Cape Flats, who waited for the *Rapport* each Sunday to read the latest excerpt from the novel. The feedback she personally received was overwhelming. Although there was criticism here and there, the general response was that *Poppie* had opened people's eyes to the plight of black people.

It is apparent that Brink has the same objective. In an interview with Gerrit Brand (*Die Burger*, Junie 2005), he states that "*Writing history is no longer about 'great men', but about normal people. Personal memories and subjective interpretations therefore become important again, as well as the mythical dimension*" (author's translation) (Geskietskrywing gaan nie meer oor 'groot manne' nie, maar oor gewone mense. Persoonlike herinnerings en subjektiewe interpretasies word dus weer belangrik, ook die mitiese.).

It is therefore not surprising that Brink does not assign the same importance to 'the truth' as Joubert does. By venturing into the realm of the magical, Brink

affords his reader a wider perspective on his main character, Kupido Kakkerlak. Rampersad (1994:2&3), in his study on writing or telling black lives, puts a pre-occupation with ‘truth’ in perspective when he states that: “*The greatest biography [...] remains an approximation, surely*” and “*what a biographer hopes to recapture is impossible to recapture altogether – that is, the spirit and the truth of his or her subject’s life*”.

3.2.5 *Proteus* and *Lerato*

As is clear from the quote referred to earlier in this chapter, Meyer (2008) believes that it is not possible for the reader to distinguish between real and fictional characters, which causes readers to identify very strongly with the characters in novels. When Meyer therefore presents his reader with a cast of equally rounded, racially diverse characters, he portrays a South Africa where, in spite of a number of problems, diversity “works”. During an interview with the researcher, Meyer (2010) indicated that this portrayal is not aspirational, but stems from his personal optimism about South African society.

With *Lerato*, the audacious white author attempts to present a young black girl as someone with the same dreams and aspirations, and the same fears, as any other girl would have. Although, unlike in *Proteus*, the focalisation in this novel is only through the main character, Lerato, the author attempts through the plot to trivialise to a certain extent the racial differences between her characters and to give more prominence to their individual human experiences. It is hoped that the reader (the imagined readership is a female one) will identify with Lerato regardless of her colour.

3.2.6 *Kennis van die Aand*

In his memoirs, Brink (2009: 245) states that *Kennis van die Aand* was the first novel in which he wrote openly against the apartheid government. It is therefore an example (in an even stronger sense than the novels by Paton and Venter referred to above) of *littérature engagée*. Brink states that the novel was written in the “rage and pain” Baldwin (1955) refers to. He was amazed at the reaction elicited by *Kennis* (as he refers to the novel), as love across the colour bar had already appeared in English novels, such as *An Occasion for Loving* by Nadine Gordimer. This probably explains the stir caused by Venter’s *Swart Pelgrim* in spite of the fact that an English novel with very much the same theme (Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country*) had already been published a few years before.

When Ernst Lindenberg, a friend of Brink’s, criticised *Kennis* because the coloured Josef Malan behaved and reacted exactly like a white person, Brink responded that that was exactly what he had hoped to achieve (Brink, 2009: 246).

Brink (ibid: 250) is of the opinion that the success enjoyed by *Kennis* internationally caused growing international interest in South African literature and in the manner in which local authors fought against censure.

3.3 SUMMARY

The primary research question was how and why white South African novelists use black main characters. This chapter shows that the black main characters in the selected texts are presented in different ways. Similarities could be identified in the way in which the black main character is portrayed in some of the texts. It is clear that, in all cases, the intention of the author was to gain the reader's sympathy for the black main character.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4. Good intentions manifest in different ways

From the analysis and comparison of the primary study texts in Chapters 2 and 3, it is clear that, in all eight selected novels, it was the intention of the author to elicit sympathy for, or enable (varying degrees of) identification with, the black main character and in so doing to challenge existing perceptions. The authors go about this in two distinct ways.

4.1 Different, but human

The first of two categories that could be identified are novels in which the author introduces the black main character as someone who comes from a different cultural world into that of the white characters in the novel and, by implication, of the white reader. By sharing the joys and sorrows of the main character, the reader comes to an understanding of his/her humanity and can therefore no longer sustain stereotypical views of black people as a homogenous, faceless entity – views often characterised by pronouncements such as “You blacks . . .” “Your black man always . . .” “You people . . .”.

In these novels the story creates an opportunity for the reader to engage with someone he or she would probably never have had a relationship with in real life.

A further study could investigate the response of black readers to the selected novels in more detail by way of a reception aesthetics approach.

4.1.1 Fictional historiography – when truth is on the side of the author

The author can achieve this through a form of fictional historiography, through which the life of a historical character is chronicled, e.g. Joubert's *Poppie Nongena* and Brink's *Kupido Kakkerlak*. It is possible that the mere indication that the story is "based on facts" (as in the case of *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*) or "a true story" (e.g. *Bidsprinkaan*) makes it more likely that the reader will believe what happens in the story – a prerequisite for success if he aim is getting the reader's sympathy for the black main character.

4.1.2 Imaginary friends

Creating understanding for the black main character as "different but human" can also be achieved through a purely fictional work, as is the case in Mikro's *Toiings*, or Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Venter's *Swart Pelgrim*. It should be noted that all three these novels are set in the current reality of their time. While the characters and plot are fictional, the setting very often is not. While the novels by Paton and Venter engage directly with the socio-political issues of the day, and are clearly focused on the plight of the black South African in a white-dominated, urbanising society, Mikro seems to condone the political dispensation of the time, including the cruel abuse by white farmers of

their black workers. However unpalatable this, as well as the patronising tone of Mikro's novel, is for a reader from the (new) South Africa of almost 85 years later, one has to accept that the author's intention was that of achieving an enhanced understanding, even compassion, for Toiings and, by association, for coloured people. The same good intention was the driving force behind the novels by Paton and Venter, although these, too, have been subject to harsh criticism for their patronising tone, romantic notions and thinly veiled bias.

4.2 We are the same

In presenting their black main characters Brink (with *Kennis van die Aand*), Meyer and Homann go to great lengths to portray them as "just the same as any other person". These authors focus on the similarities between (white and black) people. The intention to depict Josef Malan as in essence the same as any white man, was clearly stated by Brink (2009:246). Meyer (2010) also indicated that he could only make progress with the character of Tobela Mpayipheli once he had started to focus on the similarities between himself and the character rather than the differences. This is true of all three novels, in spite of the fact that they had different objectives. For instance, in Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* the insanity of apartheid is driven home very effectively by portraying its victim, Josef Malan, as a person who, apart from his skin colour, is just like the white reader. The other two novels, Meyer's *Proteus* and Homann's *Lerato*, do not have a political objective. These novels, to different degrees, present a picture of South African society in which diversity is not problematised. It is not surprising that these works are fictional. The racial

harmony they portray can be criticised for being too selective a view of reality (see Mphahlele, 2002: 409).

4.3 Conclusion

From the above, it would appear that white South African authors who use black main characters fall mainly into two different categories. Among the authors of the selected texts, some (Mikro, 1934; Paton, 1948; Venter, 1952; Joubert, 1978 and Brink, 2005) choose to portray black people as different from whites, but worthy of love. In this category, some authors base their novels on historic facts, while others write fictional stories set in the social reality of the day. A further distinction is that some of the novels have political issues as a central theme, while others address these issues askance, if at all. While in some of these novels the narration is biased (notably less so in the novels based on facts), they intentionally avoid the simple dichotomy of a “love prejudice” for the self accompanied by a “hate prejudice” for the other as described by Allport (1954).

In the second category of novels are those in which the black main character is presented as no different from the white reader (the novels by Brink, 1973; Meyer, 2002 and Homann, 2011). Again, these novels differ from each other as to the degree in which political issues are central to the plot. At the heart of these novels is a desire to answer in the affirmative the prejudicial question so aptly formulated by Styron (2008: 97): “*could a Negro really own a mind as subtle, as richly informed, as broadly inquiring and embracing as that of a white man?*”

However, whether they fall into the first or second category, in all of the selected texts one can clearly discern *“the longing to break down false barriers to reconcile the self and the other, and create a world of harmony and understanding”* (Van der Merwe, 1994: 120).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5. Conclusion

Joubert (2010), says that a writer chooses to write. The study suggests that writers choose to write for different reasons. Some write out of rage and pain (e.g Brink with *Kennis van die Aand*), others to address ignorance (e.g. Mikro with *Toiings* and Elsa Joubert with *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*), some to rewrite history while commemorating a birthday (Brink with *Bidsprinkaan*) and yet others mainly to entertain (e.g Deon Meyer with *Proteus*). Whatever the reason, a writer chooses to write and writing is therefore intentional. Van der Merwe (1994) argues that there is not only intent in choosing to write, but also in choosing what to write and how to write it. A writer, says Van der Merwe (1994) is never neutral, but chooses a point of view and tries to influence the reader to accept the point of view of the book. Therefore, when a white author chooses to use a black main character, it is not by accident.

It is clear from the analysis of the study texts that the political reality of the day had a strong influence on the choice and presentation of the black main character in each of the texts. This relates to Joubert's (2010) statement that the writer has to hold a mirror to society. It is therefore no surprise that the moral urgency with which authors like Brink (1973) and Joubert (1978) presented their main characters during the apartheid era is not found in the novels published before or after that period. By the same token, it is unlikely

that novels showing black characters as ‘different but human’ will be produced in a post apartheid society.

It is fitting to expand Joubert’s view on writing in the words of Van der Merwe (1994:120) “*Literature is partly a mirror, partly a crystal ball.*” In 1993, Visser considered the “politics of future projection in South African fiction”. Studying Schoeman’s *Promised Land* (1978), Gordimer’s *July’s People* (1981) and Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), he found that projections of a post-apartheid South Africa were apocalyptic, with only *July’s People* conveying some optimism about the future.

That South Africa has weathered the storm of political transition far better than anticipated by the authors studied by Visser, is not only clear from the way in which Tobela Mpayipheli and Lerato Mokoena are portrayed in the respective novels, but also from the fact that there was no pressing societal need for Meyer or Homann to make a political statement through their black main characters. Instead, these characters were chosen because the authors found them interesting (Meyer 2010).

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Transkripsie van telefoniese onderhoud met Elsa Joubert (tel 021 424 6402) oor *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* op Dinsdag, 27 Julie 2010 om 10:30

1. Hoe het dit gekom dat jy besluit het om Poppie se storie te skryf?

Ek het vanoggend gesit en dink baie van die vrae wat jy my moontlik sal vra word beantwoord in my outobiografie, *Reisiger*, waarin ek 'n hele hoofstuk aan *Poppie* wy. Daar was baie redes waarom ek die boek beskryf het. My huishulp het in geld nodig gehad, sy wou die huis waarin sy gewoon het in Mdantsane vir R1000 koop. Ons het dikwels gespot en gelag – ek het gesê 'vertel my jou storie, dan skryf ek dit en dan kry jy die geld'.

Ek het ook behoefte gehad om vir die Afrikaner 'wit' gemeenskap te vertel hoe swartmense lewe – hulle het niks geweet nie. Ek wou daardie onkunde beveg. Ek het toe reeds baie praatjies gelewer en ook artikels geskryf oor swart skrywers. Die Regering het hulle boeke verbied en daarom het mense nie geweet hoe hulle dink of leef nie, al was hulle net 'n klipgooi van ons af. Ek het dikwels vir die Burger hieroor geskryf.

2. Het jy ooit bedenkinge gehad daarvoor om as wit outeur 'n swart vrou se storie te vertel? Is dit oor die algemeen problematies dat wit outeurs swart karakters se stories vertel? Hoekom/hoekom nie?

Toe ek by 'n akademie in Switserland was, het hulle my dieselfde vraag gevra. Daar was 'n beweging in Amerika wat te velde getrek het teen wit skrywers wat geld maak uit swartmense se leed. Maar van my eie mense moes ek nooit sulke aantygings aanhoor nie, eerder die teenoorgestelde. Ook ná die oorgang was daar geen sodanige kritiek nie. Ek het immers van Mbeki 'n silwer Mapungubwe-penning ontvang. Hy het spesifiek na Poppie verwys.

3. Die fokaliserende instansie in die roman is hoofsaaklik Poppie. Het dit enige besondere uitdagings aan jou gestel om deur die oë van 'n swart vrou te moet skryf? Indien wel, wat was die uitdagings?

Dit was 'n besondere uitdaging en baie harde werk. Drie maal per week het ons vir 'n uur of twee met die bandopnemer gesit. Waar ons in die Boland gelewe het, het ons nie swartmense geken nie. Tog het ek vir 'n paar jaar lank al navorsing gedoen vir 'n Suid-Afrikaanse reisboek wat ek beplan het. Ek het by skole, toordokters, hospitale, magistraatskantore ens besoek afgelê om my te deurdrenk met die swart wêreld. Ek was gelukkig dat ek my teen daardie tyd toe reeds vir tien jaar daarop toegespits het om die swart ervaring te leer ken en verstaan. Ek was dus gereed om haar te ontmoet en sy vir my. Dit het ook baie gehelp dat haar moedertaal Afrikaans was.

4. Lesers is waarskynlik meer geneig om 'n storie wat op die waarheid gebaseer is, te glo. Gee dit 'n skrywer die geleentheid om jou leser se denke/ingesteldheid oor die werklikheid te beïnvloed?

Dat dit 'n ware verhaal was, het definitief die invloed van die boek sterker gemaak. Ek wou die sluier oor ons eie mense se oë lig. Elke feit in die boek het ek geverifieer, onder meer deur in die howe te sit met die Cilliers-kommissie se verhore. Ek het besluit ek moet 'n boek gee wat niemand sou kon sê nonsens is nie. Niemand moes dit

kon afskryf nie. Dit het jare se harde werk geverg. Selfs die name van die lokasie in Uppington ens, wat intussen verander het, het ek gaan navors.

5. Uit die outeursnota voor in die roman is dit duidelik dat jy nie 'n uitgesproke politieke oogmerk gehad het nie. Was daar ten spyte daarvan 'n versluisde oogmerk om jou leser anders oor swart en wit te laat dink?

Ek wou graag mense se gemoedere aanraak. Ek moes egter skerm dat die boek nie 'n politieke pamflet raak nie – wat ek wou skryf was 'n menslike verhaal. Ek wou graag dat daar in mense se gemoedere 'n mededoë met die swart bevolking opstaan. Natuurlik was dit politieke stof en ek wou dit graag gebruik. Boeke wat egter bloot 'n politieke oogmerk het, is reeds vergeet, maar algemene menslikheid is tydloos – Poppie word nou nog gelees. Poppie die drama word nou vir skole voorgeskryf. Die uitgewers het ook 'n gids tot die drama bygevoeg – dis deur 'n ander persoon geskryf.

6. Het jy al ooit enige terugvoering ontvang wat jou laat dink dat jy daarin geslaag het?

Die terugvoering wat ek oor *Poppie* gekry het, was oorweldigend. Die briewe en pos het ingestroom. Mense sou byvoorbeeld sê 'ek kyk nou met ander oë na my tuinier' of '*Poppie* het mos laat groei oor klipharte' en 'die boek het 'n blinding vir my laat opgaan'.

Ons het saam met Amerikaners in 'n restaurant gaan eet, toe kom vra die sjef of hy die boek kan leen terwyl ons eet. In 'n Hotel in Hermanus het die vrou wat die kamers skoonmaak vir my gesê hoe sy die boek geniet. Die boek het gesprek toe alle klasse in die land. Die Sondagkoerant Rapport het die hele roman in aflewerings geplaas en die swartmense op die Kaapse Vlakte het tougestaan om dit in die hande te kry.

7. Voel jy dat jy as outeur 'n sosiale verantwoordelikheid het, en hoe verwoord jy daardie verantwoordelikheid? Het jy daardie verantwoordelikheid met die skryf van *Poppie* nagekom?

Ja, ek voel tog 'n skrywer het 'n sosiale verantwoordelikheid, 'n skrywer moet 'n spieël vir die samelewing ophou. In die Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde het ons baie hieroor geargumenteer, *litterature engagée* was 'n groot besprekingspunt. Die Gilde se besprekings en jaarvergaderings is ongelukkig nie goed gedokumenteer nie. Ons was die enigste groep Afrikaanse skrywers, ons het gekap teen die Regering, as't ware hulle hakskene gebyt. By die vergaderings is daar byvoorbeeld mosies aanvaar teen die regering. Die pers was ook mal oor ons en ons radikale uitsprake is deur hulle opgeraap.

Soos ek in 'n koerantartikel gesê het, 'n skrywer kies om te skryf. Maar ek het ook gevoel ek kan nie net teen maatskaplike euwels skryf nie, daarom is Poppie 'n menslike verhaal. By 'n Gildeberaad in die 80er jare is daar gevra of die skrywer nog relevant is. Ek dink 'n skrywer moet relevant wees aan jouself, jy moet skryf waaraan jy behoefte het en relevant wees aan jou eie menswees. Ek onthou nog hoe 'n skrywer by die beraad gevra het of 'n mens dan nie net oor 'n vlinder kan skryf nie. Nadine Gordimer het geantwoord dat as jy oor vlinders wil skryf, behoort jy nie 'n skrywer te wees nie.

8. Jy't iewers in 'n onderhoud gesê *Poppie* is die roman wat jou die naaste aan die hart lê van al jou boeke. Hoekom?

Nee, *Poppie* is nie die boek wat my die naaste aan die hart lê nie, *Missionaris* is. Maar *Poppie* was revolusionêr, dit was beslis my suksesvolste boek. Ek moes baie skerm, een maal het drie Amerikaners my op een middag gebel oor rolprentregte.

Ons het destyds met groot dringendheid geskryf, *Kennis van die Aand* van André Brink was met die hart geskryf. Die moderne boeke het nie dieselfde dringendheid nie.

Transkripsie van persoonlike onderhoud met Deon Meyer oor *Proteus*, op Donderdag, 5 Augustus 2010 om 09:00 by die Wanderers Protea Hotel in Johannesburg

1. Hoekom het jy besluit op 'n swart hoofkarakter vir die roman?

Thobela Mpayipheli het in 'n vorige boek, *Orion*, 'n kleiner rol gehad. Ek het gedink hy is 'n interessante karakter wat genoeg bied vir 'n boek van sy eie. Ek het nog nie voorheen 'n swart protagonis gebruik nie. Ek wou graag 'n nuwe uitdaging aanpak. Dis vir my belangrik om dit met elke boek te doen, om aan te hou groei. Vir *Orion* moes ek baie nalees oor Umkhonto we Sizwe. Afrikaanse mense weet niks van daardie geskiedenis nie, hulle sien MK lede as terroriste, maar dit was mense wat geglo het in wat hulle doen.

2. Het jy ooit bedenkinge gehad oor die gebruik van 'n swart hoofkarakter en, indien wel, hoekom?

Ek het nie soseer bedenkinge gehad nie, maar die skryfproses was 'n groot uitdaging.

3. Het die gebruik van 'n swart hoofkarakter enige besondere uitdagings aan jou gestel? Indien wel, wat was die uitdagings?

Ek het baie navorsing gedoen oor die Xhosa-kultuur, geskiedenis en leefstyl. Ek het met baie mense gepraat. Tog het ek gesukkel en baie gewroeg. Ek het besef ek fokus op die verskille tussen my en Thobela en het toe doelbewus op die ooreenkomste begin fokus. Dit was vir my 'n les in menseverhoudinge en het nou deel van my lewensfilosofie geword.

4. Daar's baie kritiek teen wit skrywers wat "namens" swartmense skryf. Wat is jou kommentaar daarop?

Ek het geen kritiek ontvang nie, slegs positiewe terugvoer, ook van swart lesers, veral ná die verskyning van die Engelse vertaling. Dit was seker 'n risiko.

5. In *Proteus* is daar baie diverse karakters wat gerond gekarakteriseer word en daarom min of meer ewe sterk in die verhaal figureer. Sê jy daardeur iets van hoe die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing is of kan wees?

Nee. Ek probeer om my karakters helder te sien, sodat dit eg volgens elkeen se persoonlikheid is wanneer hulle optree. Ek het min karakters wat rassiste is, omdat ek rassiste haat – ek wil hulle nie in 'n boek sit nie. My karakters is verteenwoordigend van die publiek. Daar is baie bereidwilligheid en mense is bereid om met mekaar klaar te kom. Ek het 'n paar jaar gelede in Soweto met ouens gesels. Ons het heerlik gelag oor grappe wat hulle gemaak het waar die wit ou die 'butt of the joke' was. Dit het my baie insig gegee in hoe hulle dink.

6. Ek het op jou webbladsy gelees dat jy nie dink lesers onderskei tussen die karakters in 'n boek en werklike mense nie. Dink jy die feit dat mense die wêreld van die storie glo, gee jou die geleentheid om hulle denke/ingesteldheid oor die werklikheid te beïnvloed?

Ek bestee dikwels meer tyd met my karakters as met regte mense. Ek dink 'n mens se brein reageer op die menslikheid van karakters. Karakters in 'n boek bly nie vir 'n mens eendimensioneel nie.

7. Wat wou jy bereik deur die gebruik van 'n swart hoofkarakter en die uitbeelding van verhoudings tussen swart en wit in *Proteus*? M.a.w was daar 'n versluisde oogmerk om jou leser anders oor swart en wit te laat dink?

Ek het geen agenda gehad of doelbewustelik probeer om 'n politieke standpunt te stel nie. Dit is gevaarlik in hierdie genre om 'n spesifieke filosofie of sienswyse te bevorder. In die skryfproses word die skrywer egter tot seker insigte gedwing. Ek moet in die eerste plek die leser vermaak, maar vermaak is 'n wye konsep, ek probeer dus altyd in 'n boek iets insluit wat my intellektueel vermaak het. Toe ek *Infanta* geskryf het, het ek byvoorbeeld baie belang gestel in die verskynsel van misdaad teen kinders en het dit toe in die boek ingesluit.

8. Jy skryf vir die populêre mark. Is jou oogmerk suiwer om jou leser te vermaak, of voel jy het as skrywer 'n soort sosiale verantwoordelikheid? Verduidelik asb.

Ek sien geen sosiale verantwoordelikheid in my skryfwerk nie. Ek is verantwoordelik aan my lesers. Ek handhaaf sekere beginsels oor byvoorbeeld die vlak van geweld in my boeke, hoe kru ek skryf ens. Dit gaan oor respek vir die leser. Daar is ook 'n mate van respek vir ons land en die gemeenskap. Ek sal dus nie goed skryf wat die demokrasie in gevaar stel of mense teenoor mekaar te stel nie. Ek het egter geen agenda om sosiale kommentaar te lewer nie.

Hoe meer ek oorsee toer, hoe meer bewus raak ek oor wanpersepsies wat oor SA bestaan. Ek voel ek het 'n verantwoordelikheid om rondom die beeld van ons land wat ek na buite projekteer. Ek wil nie persepsies oor misdadigheid, geweld of korrupsie uitbuit vir eie gewin nie. Op 'n manier bemoelik dit die skryfproses.

Skryf is veelvlakkig. Dit is 'n ontdekkingsstog van "kwessies" om sodoende 'n groter perspektief te kry. Literêre werke soos *Disgrace* kan diskordant eindig. In my genre kan ek wel ondersoekend skryf, maar ek word deur die konvensies van die genre beperk. Om internasionaal suksesvol te wees, moet 'n mens 'n handelsmerk vestig. En deur die konvensies te oortree, gaan jy die ontwikkeling van die handelsmerk skade doen. Dit sal dalk later vir my moontlik wees om groter risiko's te neem.

As 'n mens objektief na Suid-Afrika gaan kyk, is daar wel disfunksie, maar oor die algemeen funksioneer ons samelewing tog. Daar is ook in ander lande disfunksie – in New Jersey in die VSA is daar meer slaggate as in SA, daar is ook kragonderbrekings. Ek dink dikwels mense raak so vasgevang in hulle eie probleme dat hulle perspektief verloor. Die skaal van probleme is dalk kleiner in die eerste wêreld, maar dieselfde probleme kom eintlik oral voor. Kyk maar na die wêreldbekersukses – daar is baie lande wat dit nie sou kon doen nie. Ek probeer om objektief te wees en vas te stel hoe ons werklik met ander lande vergelyk. Ek het onlangs 'n baie positiewe artikel op News 24 gelees oor die stand van die ekonomie in SA. Baie van die negatiewe kritiek word op leuens gebaseer. Ek is 'n idealis. Ek probeer my karakters gebalanseer

uitbeeld. Baie mense kritiseer my oor hoe ek die polisie uitbeeld, maar ek glo daar is baie goeie polisiemanne wat net hulle werk probeer doen.