

**Novel:**

*Holo Meta Bolus*

and

**Mini-dissertation:**

*“Sal jy my verstaan?”*: The representation of post-apartheid Afrikaner repudiation in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics.

By

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## Declaration

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**Title of Novel:**

*Holo Meta Bolus*

**Title of Dissertation:**

“*Sal jy my verstaan?*”: The representation of post-apartheid Afrikaner repudiation in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics.

I declare that this novel and dissertation are my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the university policy and implications in this regard.



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24 December 2021

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## Abstract

*Holo Meta Bolus* is a coming-of-age novel where the theme of identity is explored in many different aspects. The protagonist, a post-apartheid 19-year-old, rejects the cultural identity of Boer (i.e. traditional Calvinistic Afrikaner), which he was born into, and adopts several stereotypical identities he encounters in the city of Pretoria, namely “jock”, “skater” and “hippie”. He also struggles with the identity-related questions of his social status, as well as what it means to be an adult.

The theme of post-apartheid Afrikaner repudiation is further explored in the mini-dissertation, which analyses the lyrics of punk band Fokofpolisiekar using psychoanalyst Erik Erikson’s theoretical framework of identity crisis and repudiation. Fokofpolisiekar is a music group that formed in 2003, which sparked much debate with their controversial lyrics that outright reject and criticise the traditional Afrikaner culture that they were born into.

Erikson’s theoretical framework presents eight stages of psychosocial development of a healthy individual from infancy to late adulthood. According to this framework, the fifth stage is adolescence, and the successful completion of this stage results in the adaptive strength of fidelity, while individuals unsuccessful in this stage suffer from the malignancy of repudiation.

The dissertation argues that the speaker in Fokofpolisiekar’s early lyrics has developed Erikson’s so called developmental malignancy of repudiation, and links this to the socio-political circumstances of the band members’ upbringing. Another argument is that later lyrics (2017 onwards) indicate that the same speaker eventually overcomes this repudiation and gains Erikson’s developmental virtue of fidelity.

### Key terms:

*Holo Meta Bolus*, coming-of-age, Fokofpolisiekar, Erik Erikson, post-apartheid Afrikaner, identity, repudiation, fidelity.

# Holo Meta Bolus

Ruben Cruywagen



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## Chapter One: Egg

January – February 2013

When I once told someone about it, the person said that the name “Zastron” sounds like it could be a subsection of Mordor. It’s not such an epic place, though: if you somehow manage to find it on a map, you’ll see it’s a speck in the middle of nowhere, in the nowhere country of South Africa. I’m a male, born and raised on a farm near it – born just after the country had been freed from the cancerous growth that was Apartheid, and we enter my story when I was a fragile and squishy 18-year-old: when the post-op nowhere land was still fragile itself – still fearing some sort of relapse.

To be specific, it was January 2013, and it was beginning to get dark in the arid province of the Free State. I was in my bland little room, second in the long passage of the farmhouse I’d grown up in, just few paces away from the master bedroom, where was located the tyrannical hub of my father. *Long may he reign...*

Those cruel couple of paces were of little effect in retarding sound travel from my quaint little zen cave to that throne room of my parents’. Thus, I found it hard to exploit my sparse privacy, especially since most liberating acts I wished to indulge in were of a high-decibelled nature. As a result, there was no blasting vulgar music, and no cinematically experiencing R-rated movies.

And of course, there was then the issue of decorating my bedroom. I poked this domestic bear when I was about 14 years old: to my excitement I had received an old FHM calendar from an older cousin. The glossy booklet was about two years past a “useful” or “utilitarian” state, so it was purely art at that point; I decided, boldly, that art needed to be hung (after a good while of secret ownership enjoyment, naturally). I nearly got hung for it – by Bible bookmark-ribbons presumably. Ma had come into my nest for whatever reason – snooping I suppose – and being a good little subservient wife, she immediately informed the lord of our land of my vulgar new room brightener. Punishment and art genocide followed promptly.

Boy... I can still picture the now cremated rack of “August”, her long brown curly locks just barely concealing the lovely central mammary ornamentation... Anyway, where was I? Ah yes – I was lying in my mundane little room, having a teensy panic attack, but I tried to keep it silent as to not disturb the pristine quiet of my father’s realm. The cause of my unease was simple: I was to leave for Pretoria, and its namesake University, in the morning. This was it: the end of a chapter in my life – the only chapter I’d ever known. Now I would suddenly be faced with a new home, new responsibilities, new challenges, and a new set of friends – or probably a lack thereof – and I felt woefully *un-*up to the challenge.

To illustrate the foreignness of the experience to come, I'll provide an account of an embarrassing incident a week before I was to leave: I had suddenly realised that I hadn't gotten the uniform that I would need for this new academic institution! 'Ma, when are we going to go get the university uniform!?' I had asked at this realisation, angry at her for being as irresponsible and forgetful as I. She laughed at me for a good five minutes before she explained that this wasn't like school where I had to wear what they told me to wear – I could wear anything I wanted. I was "an adult now". I didn't feel like one. Adults don't get laughed at like that.

This ignorance concerning such non-farm matters could be put down to the fact that I hadn't had much exposure to another lifestyle. Sure, I had family in Bloemfontein, so I had tasted a bit of city life's tartness, but I was really a *boerseun*. While that was my "genre" of person, I should try to keep you from jumping to conclusions: sure, I wore khaki, two-tone shirts and *vellies*, and all that, but only because I'd hardly ever even dreamed I could be anything else. And when I did, I was terrified at the prospect of what my parents would do if I attempted being something else. Such an abandonment of my "birth-genre" seemed certain to destroy me, or at least render me totally isolated. So, in this portable prison I remained – bitter.

The fleshy penitentiary that was my body had just completed the leisurely packing of stuff to accompany my pilgrimage to higher education. The contents of my bags included my laptop, farm appropriate clothes (I had basically no alternatives), stationery, and my secret hip flask. I'd tried to stuff in my beloved soft-cover copy of *The Lord of the Rings*, but the thousand-page tome was just too cumbersome. *It's probably for the best; it's not like I'll have time to read it anyway*, I consoled myself. With no responsibilities left to distract me, I nervously stared at my room in farewell; I'd actually managed to spruce it up nicely within the restrictions of his Highness Pa, and his matrimonial overseer. The cream-coloured walls had my three best landscape paintings: a meadow with a sunrise, a mountain at night, and a river flowing through savannah. The wooden floor had a beautiful brown cowskin mat. I also had a little shrine of random objects on my bed-side table: a large-calibre cartridge, an old cricket ball, a zippo lighter, a large moonstone gem and a baobab bonsai. They were placed in a way that they could serve as the objects of a still life that I'd never got around to doing, and I wondered here if my opportunity had gone by.

I was bored with being nervous, so I decided to have a walk around the farmlands to ponder my abysmal situation. My window could graciously open sufficiently for my skinny-ass to be able slip out of the house unnoticed; I did so now as I had done countless times in the past – never got caught. Why did I sneak out though? It's true that I was indeed allowed to just waltz out the front door, but you see, then the elder-authority would have *known* I'd left. To go and tell them meant they would remind me of dinner which was to commence soon. On top of this, I planned on going somewhere they'd rather I

didn't, and they would, without doubt, ask me where I would walk to, which would annoy me, because:  
*Why should they know exactly where I walk to? Am I not 18?*

By sneaking out, I avoided all this. If they wanted to find me (unlikely) they'd go to my room first and see I wasn't there, then go to the TV room and see I wasn't there either, then they'd shout one of my nicknames and I'd not answer, and then they'd maybe look outside for a bit... By then their wrinkly attention spans would have hopefully stopped the pursuit to rather ignore my existence and instead watch TV or eat a snack or murder some insect pests in the house. To tell them, to come up with some story, to listen to their irksome reply – it seemed like much too much effort.

Besides, I liked the idea that not a soul knew where I was.

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Softly I walked to the gate of the fence dividing the farmhouse from the farmlands. On my way I saw Bob, our sheepdog, having a rest under a tree. He took note of me, but only came over when I quietly told him to do so. He was to accompany me on my ramble – this would be the last time we could do so for quite a while, after all. I never realised how great a hound I had until a trip to my aunt and uncle in Bloemfontein, who had several of what I'd now call "city dogs" (though "shitty dogs" would also work). These ever-hyperactive, useless bundles of fur *always* wanted your attention, and couldn't entertain themselves at all – extremely annoying! By contrast, Bob, like most proper farm dogs, was always too exhausted from his daily labours to be a needy, slobbering mutt. If he could, I bet Bob would have smoked and drunk lots of coffee – both would be of cheap and strong brands. He's a proud, stoic son-of-a-bitch (literally).

*Why Bob?* I now thought whilst patting his lean back as he merrily came to answer duty's call. *Why do Afrikaners, like my parents, give things English names when they can't even speak the language properly? Too much Western television I suppose.* Then I wondered, not for the first time, if Bob even knew that his name was Bob. I experimented: 'Bob!' I called to him, and he looked at me. He looked in front of him again: 'Frank!' I called in the exact same way and he looked at me again. *Hmm...*

When I reached the iron-gate, I turned to face my childhood home. *It's green!?* I thought in bizarre surprise. Our house had been painted a revolting lime green over a previous white coat several years prior. Somehow, I'd ignored that whole phenomenon. If you had asked me what colour the house was when I was lying in the room a few minutes before I'd have absentmindedly said: "white" because that's the colour it was during my earliest years. But things had changed, and I hadn't taken much notice. I also became aware that the pots for the potted plants at the front door had cats painted on them, and realised I'd become completely oblivious to them too. I questioned whether I had ever truly looked at

them. My observation drifted to the nearby sausage tree which had been so apt for climbing as a child, and was later ignored after Pa said I was not allowed to – that I was not some “little Tarzan” anymore.

I began walking down the dirt road to the farmlands with Bob quietly following: his padded paws giving a light percussive rhythm to the melodies of birds preparing for their slumber. Soon we came to pass the family gravesite, where, like my father, I had a spot reserved. *How sweet*. One tombstone in particular often caught my eye. It was the tombstone of my grandfather, which read: **Francois Johannes Terblanche “Cois” Knollenhoven**. He had died soon after my birth, so I effectively never met him. When I was 10, Pa took me to the graves and said: ‘This is where your grandfather and his wife are buried. This is where I’ll be buried in a couple of decades, and where you’ll end up eventually as well.’ I remember feeling very strange: for the first time I had to face the prospect of my death and the concept of nothingness, and had to question what it meant to exist.

I marched past this intrusive dirt patch and continued the miniature pilgrimage. A pilgrimage needs a destination, and mine was a small yet dense collection of bluegum trees half a kilometre or so from the house. This area served as my forest of fantasy as a kid. It was my *Hogwarts*, my *Tatooine*, my *Gotham* and, most importantly, my *Middle Earth*.

It was just over a hill, out of sight from any road. And the house, crucially. I was about five years of age when I formed my first memory of it. I went there with Pa and Ma and my older sister, who commented on how she wanted to play in there, and how I was not allowed to. ‘He’s still too young to play in there,’ she often dictated. Oh right, I have a sister: Wilhelmina Susanna Gertruida. She’s almost five years older than me. When she was just 21, she married a 28-year-old Boer, who owns land not far from ours. She just went from our farm, to another farm.

I remember when I was seven and Gertruida, or “Sussie” as the family exclusively calls her, was eleven. She had asked Ma if she could go play there: she was desperate for a playmate, so she asked if I could also go along – I think I was to be Ron Stoppable for her Kim Possible. ‘I’ll keep him safe!’ Before that, I had only been beyond the tree line with Ma and Pa, so I couldn’t relish the site properly, but Sussie was a much more distracted person; as soon as we got there, I slipped away unnoticed...

Man, I enjoyed it! It was so liberating! At the time I was all about *Pokémon*, so I had about half an hour of pretending I was a pocket-monster slave trader, with stones serving as superb *Poké balls*. These stones were even assigned to specific *Pokémon*, and you bet your life I remembered *exactly* which stone was which *Pokémon*’s. The best, most spherical rock belonged to *Eevee* – my favourite. To hell with that yellow rat *Pikachu*. It’s funny to think that rock of *Eevee* is probably still in one piece somewhere on the farm to this day.

After my half hour of bliss, Sussie’s frantic calling became a little too loud for me to pretend I couldn’t hear it. I put my stones incarcerating my *Pokémon* down in a hollow of a tree, and returned to Sussie.

‘Are you deaf or something, you stupid little *Gogga!*?’ “Gogga” was the awful pet name she had for me, because of the way I would squirm when tickled.

The imaginary *Poké* prisons were still there the next time I went to the bluegum forest. That next time was a while later of course, considering how Sussie obviously told Ma of my little departure. But I eventually couldn’t resist, and as an eight-year-old, for the first time, I snuck out my bedroom window around 5 p.m. and slipped back in unnoticed an hour or so later. I think my *Eevee* had just made a *Charizard* his little bitch.

Bluegums aren’t native to South Africa; Ma once casually mentioned that we should eventually chop them all down as they were “sucking up too much water” or some dumb crap like that. I was around nine at the time and protested tragically: ‘What?! No, don’t!’

Pa inquired meanly: ‘Why do you want to keep it?’

‘I-it’s not their fault, they didn’t choose to be planted here.’

‘You’re too old to play there still, Gogga,’ Sussie chirped in, instantly seeing through my excuse.

‘Shut up, I don’t...’

‘We’ll do what we must, *Boet*.’

“Boet” – Pa called me that often. The rest of the family too, though much less frequently. I hated being called *Boet*, it’s such a strong title, almost like Pa was trying to label me into beefier son. At least my name never became vestigial, like Sussie’s did. The closest I came to expressing my dislike, however, was pretending to not register that I was being called when the caller chose to use “Boet”, and then when they resorted to a more accepted designation I’d pretend to realise they were calling me, and quickly respond.

Thankfully they never did get around to getting rid of my woodland sanctuary. When 18-year-old me now got to the edge of the little forest of invasives, smelling its familiar eucalyptus aroma, I couldn’t help but smile and bitterly accept that I was parting from it. I didn’t cry, but if I wanted to, I easily could have.

I made my way deep inside and sat on a rock with a bluegum to support my back. Here, I was reminded of all my childhood phases. There were so many, but the main ones I recalled were *Pokémon*, *Harry Potter*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Lord of the Rings*, the latter definitely being the most obsessive. My dynamic daydreaming would sporadically return and linger in Tolkien’s wondrous world, and I’d be all sorts of characters – even my own creations. Each of these phases was transient though; they seemed so important at the time, but I could switch obsessions quickly. The one day I’d be a cowboy through and through, then the next day I’d watch *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* because it happened to be on TV, and then I’d be *Jedi* immediately. I’d see my make-shift revolvers (i.e. curved sticks) lying there between the bluegums and I’d wonder: *How the hell could I have been something as lame as a cowboy?*



Naturally, my reminiscing segued into my teenager years, where these woods became a slightly more debauched outlet. My first proper drunken state was in there at 16, and was very soon followed by my first ethanol flavoured vomit – right at some bluegum roots. It was just me and two delinquent “friends”, who really just needed a place to get wasted in privacy. Naturally those idiots were transient as well. I felt my first little hangover the next morning, and though the panacea of youth diminished its bite, it was enough to convince me that I was not yet ready for such indulgences. I thus avoided alcohol afterwards for the most part (a sip here and there) and drunkenness entirely.

I also had my first drag of a cigarette in there when I was 17; I was petrified to do something so ridiculously naughty, but somehow even more afraid of seeming lame to my “friends” – these were a different set from the alcohol duo – so I filled my trap and released the plume without letting it pass to my throat. I hadn’t had any other encounters with cigarettes up to this point. These peer-pressuring peers of mine were some more temporary people – an actual *girl* was there this time too.

Speaking of which, I bet the some of you are expecting me to say I had my first sexual encounter in this secret wood, but no – I hadn’t even kissed a girl properly at 18 years into my life. The closest thing to a smooch I’d had at this point was a few months after that first puff of the devil’s stick. It was at a party at a nearby farm, where a reasonably attractive girl from our school, who I was awkwardly talking to, got dared by a drunk passer-by to kiss me. She was embarrassed, but probably didn’t want to seem like a coward, so it was just a touch of the lips. Of course, as soon as the glorious idiot came up to us and said: ‘You should kiss this man!’ I couldn’t move from fear.

Whenever my thoughts wandered to my lack of a good old snog, and other boys telling me how they’d done anal (*Yeah right*), I sort of just squashed any feelings of inadequacy best I could. They came through though, of course. A good few came through as I sat recollecting in the forest. I recalled how, when I was 14, I’d “fantasized” about taking a girl there. I excitedly believed I’d eventually succeed before my schooling was complete. At this point, as an 18-year-old, I had some considerable remorse for not trying harder, or being better.

*I didn’t even come close... Was it because my school had only 300 pupils? Or was it that I didn’t really like any of those stupid girls? Maybe it was because none of them happened to fancy me... I decided the latter was the least liked, but ultimately the most credible answer, so I stopped my questioning and embraced my scrappy knowledge of the matter: I guess it’s just one of those things.*

To distract myself from these thoughts, I looked through the dull green canopy of the alien trees and saw the fog of the Milky Way. I’d always found Space’s fluorescent acne a pleasant sight, but I was oblivious as to how amazing a stargazing location our farm actually was, since it was normal to me. At its sight, I remembered how visitors from cities would often comment on how nice it was to see the stars so clearly – that one could actually make out the Milky Way here. It suddenly occurred to me that I would not see the galactic structure from the light-raped Pretoria.

*Damn, I'm really going to a different place tomorrow*, it struck me at last. *What does the night sky look like in that polluted mess? Is it just dark navy? Or are all the stars just dimmer? Is it like looking at a lamp with smoke in front of it?* I couldn't come to a sensible conclusion. I felt queasy, just like I had as a six-year-old before the first day of proper school – so much unknown, so much forced adaptation. It occurred to me here that I had not mentally prepared at all for this departure from the quiet, familiar farm, to the dirty, dangerous city.

*What if all this that has come to pass was the best part of my life, and right now is the very end?* It seemed to me now that I hadn't been paying much attention to my life up to this point – it was like I'd been living a fantasy all along. I was just a socially awkward lowlife living in isolation with very little experience of city life, and now I was going to have to deal with it.

I decided that this outstretched and depressing goodbye to the wondrous patch of white-barked trees was causing this distress, and that continued walking was needed to keep the anxiety at bay. I therefore left my bluegum zen garden for the fields where our sheep were contained.

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Bob, who had been very interested in the smells at the base of a medium-sized bluegum, heard my summons and came trotting along. I smiled at his goofy demeanour as we made our way out the forest. There were many times in the past when, rather piteously, I'd felt that he was the only living thing I cared for. The rest could go bugger themselves: Sussie always insulting and belittling me, and making idiotic comments; Pa always disciplining and controlling me, and always prone to a derogatory person-genre sentencing (just ask his poor workers); Ma not helping me in my plight, yet clearly sympathetic; and school friends, who all seemed to be gestating forms of Pa and his archaic ways, weren't any source of solace either.

Good old Bob had been a reliable mitigation against the more irksome days of my upbringing, so as a meagre reward I picked up a stick and taunted him with it. 'Go get it, Bob!' and I chucked it. He brought it back at a pace telling of his advancing age. I threw it again, this time harder, to alleviate my stress. I alleviated too much it seemed: Bob was unable to find the stick under the blanket of dusk, and naturally the honourable hound would never simply bring back a different stick and hope to fool me. I thus picked up a new stick. Before I threw it, however, I realised it was bigger than the previous one... It also felt much nicer to hold... It was nice and straight, unlike the crooked lost one. It was... *sword like*....

I almost gave it a good swing to eviscerate the air in front of me, in order to relish its aptness as a makeshift weapon, but my adultifying brain told that me I couldn't.

*Don't be childish – you're far too old now, and you're going to university tomorrow!* This stick was perhaps superior to the previous one as a m el e weapon, but when I threw it for Bob, it was revealed

that it was not suitable for a game of fetch – he couldn't manage its length and didn't bother bringing it back. Greeting us as the treeline dissolved was a moonlit field where some of our woolly livestock were kept. Looking at the familiar plot, I remembered taking Pa's quad bike for a spin around these fields without permission as a 13-year-old in a particularly reckless mood – a highly forbidden act.

My parents had this old grey leather belt which they hung menacingly on a nail in the living room. In my life, I've never seen it wrapped around a waist – it's only ever been used as an instrument for corporal punishment. An actual encounter was relatively rare – a threat of its diabolical use was usually all that was given – but after the illegal quad bike fiasco, encounter it I indeed did. That rendezvous with the leather pain-utensil that proceeded when I got home will always be remembered as the worst.

*'Nou gaan ek jou kruisskyf goed voeter, Boet.'*

I sat on a rocky outcrop overlooking the sheep, and vividly remembered this penalty. I knew it would happen before I did it – I knew I'd be lashed like it was the 17<sup>th</sup> century. So why did I do it? Well, it was a direct reaction to a monumental incident – monumental in effect but rather mundane in surface value. It was a simple school rugby game against the nearby Ntatyana Primary. It was their only, and therefore best team, against my school's worst team – the B team. I was on this team. I was born with bones that didn't have much surface area for muscles or fat – this blatant defiance of his own beefier genetic makeup never sat well with Pa. In a desperate attempt to compensate for my build, so ill-suited for rugby, he'd try to psych me up before my stupid little matches: 'Use your speed!'; 'Side-step those fatties!'; 'Play good and Coach will put you on the A-team!'.

We were the far more well-nourished team, to put it bluntly: it was like playing against a team of me's at every position, not just left-wing where a me was at least not entirely hopeless. They did have a lot of passion though, and never gave up, but on top of our team's decadent weight advantage was the blatant bias of the referee, whose son was actually at my school, and who was friends with some of my teammates' parents.

Naturally, the result was that we were crushing them soon after the starting whistle. I abhorred it – I felt very sorry for my opponents who really were trying their best, but received no consolation. It was clear that I alone was in this sympathetic state: my teammates had an insatiable lust to dominate ever more, and our parents revelled in the undeniable supremacy of their offspring. Well, all except my Pa, who was not at all pleased by his son's clear unwillingness to play his best – displeasure he verbally expressed from the side-line. He especially didn't enjoy my "accidental" knock-ons and poor passes.

Near the end, when the point gap had spread to a pitiful chasm, and the opposition's admirable spirit was very nearly spent, I received a pass and was in the clear to score an easy try to make our score even more gargantuan.

I simply couldn't. I halted and saw my honourable opponent scrambling from his ill-position to tackle me – his face furious with the frustration of unrewarded zeal. I just tossed the awkwardly shaped

inflatable his way. He fumbled, but caught it, and ran like a mad soldier, only to be halted by a wall of fleshy privilege.

‘What the fuck?!’ and alternative forms thereof was the question sent my way from my teammates, their parents, and Pa, in the minutes following, all accompanied with a face of utter disgust. My replies were inconsistent; some were along the lines of: ‘We were already winning,’ others were more like: ‘It was funny,’ and most were simply: ‘I don’t know...’ but my delivery of this variety was constant: with a quiet voice, head looking down and shoulders shrugged.

That last reaction was the most truthful one – I didn’t know myself why I’d felt so unwilling to further demolish our rival. Pa was wrathfully disappointed in me. He expressed this with a few minutes of insults on our way home, followed by a silent treatment which lasted, to some degree, really, the remainder of my school years. It was a match that changed me – changed the way I was treated by peers and parents. I seriously had to question who my people were for the first time. I had to ask myself whether or not I liked them anymore. And as a result, all of a sudden, those little snippets of scorn from non-Boers, which had infiltrated the censors put up by family and school and had reached my ears, were no longer just pushed aside by my brain as nonsense, but objectively considered. And eventually, after many months of slow contemplation, they were accepted as valid. Not as completely true necessarily, but I could see their point.

And what can you do when you find credibility in the evidence that your people are the bad guys? *The Sith, Team Rocket, the followers of Sauron* – no one wants to be part of them, so it cultivated a desire in me to disassociate myself from my own people. And so, I *needed* to perform some gesture of rebellion: I therefore got on that quad bike of Pa, the royal steed I had only been allowed to ride on as a passenger a few times before, and gloriously disobeyed. And his painful penalty which I received thereafter was my great symbolic permission: I was, from then on, entitled to hate him.

And here, on my walk in the fields at 18, I remembered only the beating – a sickly satisfying justification of my parental dislike. By this time, I hardly ever consciously recalled any of the revelation moments anymore, like that rugby game – it was just a continuous feeling of disgust toward my family and fellows. Eventually, with all this remembering, I’d realise I was leaving my pathetic, unhappy mother; my scornful, disgusting sister; and most importantly, my archaic, power-abusive father, and this would make me slightly excited for my departure. But only after a good while. Not until I finished my mental slideshow of that godforsaken grey belt – not for wearing. Never worn.

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Even though I’d reached 18, my dad was still partial to a good grey belt threatening, so I set off back home to be present for dinner. My perfect sneaking out record was almost besmirched here at the very

end of my farm life proper: Ma was in the garden as I entered the farmhouse's outer perimeter, speaking on her cell phone. I only noticed her once very close to the house: I did a spastic but silent jerk in the air, then ducked and used the obscuring properties of a nearby bush.

Cowering from mummy's gaze, I soon heard her say "*tata*" and I watched her go inside. I then bade Bob farewell with a good neck scratch and crawled through my room's window. I exited my room and went to the bathroom. I took a wazz, but did it lady-style to enable the reading of a magazine – a *National Geographic*. Something I read in it said people were brilliant and referenced a new development as evidence. Another thing I read a few pages further said people were rubbish, and used new climate change evidence as evidence. *People are rubbish*, I agreed.

After flushing, I judged my appearance in the bathroom mirror. Oh right, you probably want a description of me? Well, I'm fairly tall – just over six feet – but this was an asset basically made pointless by my scrawniness. At this point I liked to think that my abdomen had a ghost of a six-pack when I flexed, but in truth it was just an illusion because there was no layer of fat to conceal the miniscule stomach muscle layer. My tiny thorax just above was pitiful in terms of muscle so I could fool no one who looked at my tummy. I may have been above average height, but I didn't feel tall. When I mentally pictured guys who I knew were shorter than me standing by my side, they were usually taller. This was probably because I only became tall at 15, after a particularly high-octane growth spurt. Before then I was either average or just below.

Anyway, my eyes are dark blue, and my nose is long. My hair is blonde and ever so slightly curly when spared the scissors a good while. I say that, but Pa never really let my mane grow much. He'd say he already had one daughter and didn't need another. The one time the keratinous fibres did get long was on a trip to family in Namaqualand when I was 16 – no barber was near, so I got a little bob going.

Here, as an 18-year-old, I had only just started shaving and felt a little ashamed about this, since my testosterone hogging schoolmate Gunter, for instance, had already started when he was 13. I only had moustache and chin fuzz really – not a dense forest but rather a sparse savannah. I knew Pa would scorn me at dinner for being lazy, and looking like a "*grotman*". At this point my shoulders still had their strange, magnetic attraction to my throat, as if they were trying to cover my jugular from sharp objects like nasty comments. They must have also been heavier in the front than back, because they would hang forward, and those blue eyes of mine were in love with the floor.

'*Frans!*..' Ma shyly shouted as I was just about to exit the bathroom. 'Dinner will be ready in ten minutes!' That's my name by the way – Frans. Well, it's a nickname actually. My official certificates and identification documents read: **Francois Johannes Terblanche Knollenhoven**. That should sound familiar – it's the exact same name of my Grandpa. That's why his gravestone often snagged my attention, and one reason why I disliked that name-composite mess. I was just glad that the moniker he had reaped from Francois was "*Cois*", and I "*Frans*". *He's not me. I'm Frans and he was Cois.*

Cois, however, is a strange derivative, and I always thought that the chance was fairly good that I had another ancestor, also named Francois Johannes Terblanche Knollenhoven, but *also* nicknamed Frans, looming in the murky, dead past... I never asked Pa to confirm or cure my fear though. I also grew to dislike it because it's so inescapably Boer: the many forenames, the fact that it's inherited from my grandfather, that there's a surname-name shoved in there, and then the surname itself – it's all so very *plaas*.

To pass the few minutes until dinner, I wandered into Sussie's room. I hadn't observed this section of the kingdom in a long time, probably because it had been pretty much forbidden grounds throughout my youth. But now that it was being left I, wanted to. The vacant room was almost identical to how she'd left it when she moved out, save for the empty wardrobe. Another feature that was different was a large, incomplete jigsaw puzzle on the desk – it must have been a thousand-piece one. The whole rim (the easy part) was complete, but the centre had obviously proven a bit tricky for Sussie; it was mostly fragmented with a few clusters of pieces put together, but I had no idea what the image was supposed to be. It seemed as if it was perhaps a calm, impressionist picnic scene with several merry people, but I could just as easily fill in the gaps with my deranged imagination so that it became a group of werewolves gorging themselves on the flesh of a virgin. The box with the picture was nowhere in sight, and I didn't want to evoke Sussie's annoying wrath by rummaging around.

This incomplete and inconceivable image was frustrating me, so my eyes wandered to the rest of the room. They settled on a tragic picture honouring a deceased school friend of Sussie. Her name was Emily Hanter, and she'd killed herself with pills after a serious bout of anorexia. I'd not thought about her for a while, but there had been a time in my teens when Emily had been a permanent tenant in my mind.

The picture Sussie had chosen was, to me, a testament to her delicately sinister nature: it was of the poor girl somewhere in the short period of time where her psychological disorder had done away with her less attractive weight to a point of attractive slimness, after which the doing-away continued to a sickly skinniness. Okay, I'll admit: my sister probably wasn't consciously being sinister – she was just being ignorantly idiotic. Standing there in the doorway and mulling over Emily's fate – once again remembering the disturbing sight of her with toothpick-limbs, thinned hair and skeletal face – I once again failed to fathom anorexia.

*How can someone become so blind as to not see that their weight-loss obsession is making them unhealthy and unattractive to the opposite extreme? How could you lose logic so? Can people's nastiness really be so effective? Is it just a gene that makes you loony, or does it come from simply thinking the wrong way? Is it maybe some environmental influence, like just drinking too much coffee or something?*

The idea of innocently drinking or thinking oneself crazy made me uneasy. I was not well versed, or even well worded in psychology, so I gave up on this questioning. Anyway, it was dinner time. *Let's not let her not eating become my not eating.*

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For me, that primal satisfaction of stuffing one's face was always somewhat tarnished at home dinners by Pa. This was the official podium where he announced or reminded us of rules of his design, and it was also the stage where he regularly insisted that the country was somehow going backwards – despite the liberation of tens of millions, which had somehow been attained without total mayhem and our annihilation – especially when we had guests visiting his dominion and the brandy was out the cabinet.

I sat down at the table and put food on my plate. I unconsciously made sure not to spoon from any dish which Pa was subjugating. The dinner table was a wooden one covered with an old white tablecloth. This table was in the large living room where the TV and a pool table were as well. We ate out of vile yellow plates Ma had gotten as a gift from her mother years ago.

Ma said a quiet grace once we were done plating up. As soon as she finished saying “Amen”, Pa asked: ‘When are you getting rid of that face fungus, Boet?’

I told him I’d “apply fungicide after dinner”. Ma laughed gently; Pa nodded silently. I considered his reaction and thought: *I bet he's thinking that I might actually use fungicide and is contemplating whether to tell me I'd better shave, or else it'll be the grey belt.*

The table could seat six; Pa always sat at the same head, and Ma always sat at a side near him. Sussie and I would vary between the remaining spaces, until the wedlocked wench moved out. Sussie came to visit quite frequently – she ate a meal with us about once a week. The main reason why her room had not altered since she left was because she slept over in a select subset of those dinner visits (and apparently failed at jigsaw puzzles).

This table was also the venue where we used to play board games, but we hadn't played anything since a certain game of monopoly. I can't exactly remember what age I was, but I was definitely older than 14, so let's say 15. That game was awful: I got very unlucky, and that combined with my innate board game badness, meant I was eliminated quickly and had to wash the dishes as a result. I sulked and spectated moodily – a fact Sussie eagerly pointed out. Pa became particularly livid over my teenage sulking this occasion. He began shouting at me, asked why I insisted on being “such a baby”, lectured me on my “bad attitude”, and even pulled out some of my past infringements of his decrees – one of which involved his quad bike.

He said it was time I started becoming a man, and even threw in a grey belt threat somewhere. Pathetically, I cried at his rage, which succeeded in getting him to leave me alone, but at the cost of his



virulent disappointment in me. And seeing him shaking his red head at my disgraceful, wet face, was even worse.

I made a point that night that I would not cry anymore. There had been a few close calls, but for three years, up to this very night, I had succeeded in maintaining the drought.

As usual, Ma was the first to finish her meal this evening – she always dished up a very small amount. She’s very careful about her figure: ever since age started taking its toll, she’d been determined to stay thin. Her name is Roelien Gertruida (née Steenkamp). She’s five foot eight and skinny like me – thanks to her efforts. She has dark green eyes and bobbed blonde hair.

Pa, also eating less these days (though still quite a bit and loudly), was now out his two-tone royal robes, and in one of his old T-shirts. This one was dark blue with lime-green paint splotches. He still had the khaki shorts on and was barefoot.

Frederik Johannes Gerhard “Frik” Knollenhoven is his name. His buddies call him *Knollies*, not that he saw them very often anymore. No one ever called me Knollies, thank goodness. What does my dad look like, I sense you wondering? Well, he’s just a fat twat really.

Okay, okay fine. He had short dark brown and grey hair, blue eyes and, as usual, a clean-shaven face. He’s a tad shorter than my mom (ha-ha), and I suppose he’s not really *that* fat – not compared to some other Boers his age.

I was eating politely, but a lot, which is the way it has been since I was 14. Before that I didn’t have much of an appetite, which had been a source of some annoyance for my father – for copious amounts of food was what he’d prescribed to cure my thinness. This night we had roast lamb (like most nights, as you might guess) with potatoes and butternut.

Pa cleared his throat of the residue of these with a grunt, and then inquired: ‘You ready for tomorrow?’

No...

‘Ja, Pa.’

‘We’re leaving here at 6 o’clock, got it?’

‘6,’ I said nodding, ‘how long is the drive?’

‘About seven hours, right, Frik?’ Ma contributed.

‘Hmm,’ Pa hummed in affirmation. Looking blankly at the tablecloth, then, lifting his eyes to me, he said: ‘You must keep yourself safe and out of trouble, Boet.’

*Oh, boy here we go.* I kept my most neutral face.

‘Remember all my res stories? Nowadays I hear it’s toned down a bit, but still. Keep your wits about you. Don’t ever get stupidly drunk, and keep far away from drugs and bad girls.’ He took a sip of juice, gulped manly and resumed: ‘You’re going to be on your own now for the most part, and we think it will be good for your uh ... *nervousness.*’



I could tell he didn't like saying that last word – he didn't like to admit that I had such a lack of confidence. Ma had definitely put him up to it. He paused to gather himself after this ordeal, then awkwardly said: 'Just remember, what people think of you is about as much worth as that old tractor of ours standing next to the new John Deere: you can do something with it if you really tried, but really you're wasting your time.'

Ma forced a little laugh at this joke, since Pa had paused for comic effect, and he smiled at its apparent success. 'Plus-minus bugger-all in other words.'

*Blah blah...*

I nodded blankly. I was enrolled for BSc Agricultural Sciences. I didn't want to do it – I didn't want the farm, or my own farm, or that damn grave spot, or that fucking grey belt (never ever worn) – not to use on my prospective spawn, or to use it to keep my khaki shorts up, or even to satisfy my possible future wife's possible fetishes! But this is what Pa wanted, and I was such a little wuss.

I also didn't want to be stuck any longer with an equivalent of my old school crowd, which is what I suspected my Agriculture classes would be filled with. I had expressed my opposition to the whole affair only to my cousin who had also gone to the University of Pretoria, or "Tuks" as she called it. She consoled me by informing me that all BSc students were thrown together in the first year, so I'd be able to meet all manner of people, and that I could very easily switch to a different BSc degree within the first two years, since the modules were near identical.

*Maybe I'll do that without telling them,* I tried to tell myself. I also took an extra module for fun: Visual Arts. Pa wasn't too impressed with the extra cash he had to dish out for it, but Ma had convinced him: 'Ag, Knollies, he'll just improve his wonderful landscapes!'

I knew that landscapes would not be the only thing I'd have to do. I'd never had the guts to do anything else on my own though, and was excited at this forced horizon broadening. I even secretly hoped they'd throw in a nude project somewhere. Female nude, I should specify. The art module only began in the second semester though.

After dinner, as usual, Pa puffed on his pipe and suckled on some brandy on the porch. Ma watched some terrible Afrikaans series in the living room – she drank rooibos tea. I was back in my bedroom, considering whether or not to dig my secret hip flask out the travel bag I'd packed it into and use the rum inside to calm my nerves, but of course my microscopic rebellion-gland decided against it. I lay and thought for a while.

*Maybe it will be great, maybe everything will change! The city has so much "opportunity" right? Perhaps I'll finally get a girlfriend, and have many friends, and find out what I actually want to do with my life...*

I went and brushed my teeth. Looking at my frothy reflection, I thought further: *What if no one likes me? What if classes and tests and assignments take up all my time? What if I catch some city disease?! What if I get lost and no one helps me and I become a hobo?!*

*Don't get lost*, I implored myself, and then had an early night.

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The birds were chirping in the chilly, dawn-lit world when my cellular alarm woke me the following morning. I've always liked that time of day, probably because on the rare occasion that I was awake at that time as a kid, it was usually because I was going on holiday. Its reminder now counteracted some of my apprehension: *I suppose I am going on a holiday of sorts now too...* Pa was well awake, and solemnly asked me if I wanted coffee.

'Please,' I replied. He put two sugars in it, even though I had been drinking it with only one for about 10 years. *Maybe he actually does remember my preference, but still wants to fatten me up.*

I didn't exhibit my annoyance – I just gulped it halfway and donated the rest to some of the plants outside. After this I went to gently wake Ma and said my farewell. She was teary eyed, which made me feel awkward. Then she said '*Sterkte, my kind.*' "*My kind*" was a title for me that's unique to her, and now, like always, it gave me a tender, queasy feeling inside, but supercharged by the tears and the circumstances.

We then put my stuff into the Toyota Fortuner and left. Three minutes later, and we went past the Knollenhoven Kingdom's bounds, and I felt a peculiar feeling mixture: a blend of despair with a hint of excitement. I tried my best to ignore the awful *plaas* radio Pa listened to, and focused instead on the gentle hum of tyre on tarmac. I think the only things Pa said to me were: "Do you want to stop here?" and "Look at that Ferrari coming past".

Besides "No", and "Oh!" the only thing I said was a question: 'How many students does Tuks have?'

'About 40 thousand I think.'

That number broke my mind. I refused to try and comprehend how one area could manage such an army. 'So, the campus is big?' I asked, fearing all those thousands squished into cramped little rooms and pathways.

'Ja, it has more than one though. You'll go to class on main campus, and your residence is on LC de Villiers – the sport campus.'

I passed the time by enjoying my surroundings: I looked for interesting details in the ever-altering landscape and I looked for nicely shaped clouds before they disintegrated. And I thought about things. And I napped.

It was a dreary, drizzling Pretoria that we drove into, and I took this as a bad omen. It was just after 1 o'clock when we got to tannie Susan's home in the suburb of Faerie Glen – we were to have lunch there. This non-biological aunt of mine was a friendly, timid widow, who married a friend of Pa, and it was through her he met my mom. He was once good friends with this woman, but old Frik didn't spend much time with friends anymore.

*I guess people generally lose the need for many friends as they age. Or do they just lose contact in their suffocating responsibilities? Or does everyone become annoying to you and you simply stop looking for fresh friends?* I contemplated this as we sat in silence in my aunt's lavender-scented dining room. I concluded that it was just one of those things.

Susan provided pretty good roast chicken and mash potato, and the universe provided music in the form of the thundershower. It was muggy, so Susan had a fan on, furiously moving about nitrogen, oxygen, water vapour and whatever the hell chemical smells like lavender – *Maybe I'll learn that in chemistry.* I looked at the spinning contraption head-on for a moment and the wind blew into my face causing my eyes to water faintly; I looked straight down at my food to hide them, and blinked away the degrading moisture.

'You farm boys must be quite irritated by this rain being wasted here in the city instead of there in the countryside where it's needed,' my aunt said over the natural patter and artificial drone.

Pa smiled. 'Ag, I suppose you city folk also like a nice green garden.'

She addressed her answer to me to include me in the "conversation": 'Your garden feeds people when it's green, ours just looks nice,' and she chuckled. I smiled politely.

After lunch, Pa said he'd like to lie down in the guest bedroom before we carried on our journey.

'Please go right ahead, Frik. Frans, you'd like to watch television I suppose?'

*Not really.*

I watched TV until about 4:30, when Pa awoke and said it was time to go.

We got onto the road again, this time bound for the residence. We passed buildings and shops much larger than I was used to seeing anywhere other than a digital screen. There were tons of cars, and pedestrians everywhere, and their inevitable by-products – litter, noise and odour. It was all very alien to me, and now it would be home for a few years...

After about 15 minutes, we were at one of the boom gates of this sports campus Pa told me of – LC de Villiers. In this section were all the male residences. The residence, or res for short, that I was in, was Geelhout: a name that kept in the fashion of the other res names like Kremetart, Wilger, and Hemelbesem. Mind you not all are botanically themed; for instance, there's *Voortrekker*, were Geelhout's "main rivals", mainly because their building was closest to ours.

The day after this, our hazing was to start. Most boys would not arrive until then, but we could come a little earlier, and Pa had said that it was best to show eagerness to be there, else they may pick on you. I really wasn't eager, so I didn't see how punctuality would contribute to this façade.

Pa asked a bespectacled individual in second year, named Tom, where to go. Tom kindly showed us the way. My room, along with all the other first years', was on the second floor; this was so that we had the maximal travel distance in and out the building.

Pa unlocked the door to my new room. Or should I say *our* door to *our* room: I would be sharing with some other first year – *God help us*. The room was tiny. There were two bunk bed sort of things with the bed up top, and a desk and shelves at the bottom. A small part of me appreciated the efficiency of the contraption, but there was a *much* larger part that was appalled by the way we were being housed like this was a concentration camp.

As Pa and I were setting my stuff down, we heard a woman's voice from the corridor. 'You're number four, right my boy?' a woman asked.

'I think so,' said a timid sounding boy.

'Yes man, I remember the res father said so.' The key unlocked the door so it must have been correct.

'Ah, you have a new friend to chat to tonight,' Pa commented whilst throwing my belongings wherever he decided they should go.

I didn't make friends with the timid boy that night, or any night for that matter. I would soon get to know him, but this night, I simply locked my door after Pa left at 6:30 p.m., got out my laptop and played *Skyrim*. Funny enough, Mr Timid was almost definitely on his laptop as well – he was always on his laptop.

Pa rarely bought me video games, but *Skyrim* I just had to have after seeing the trailers and reading the reviews – it was like a Nordic *Lord of the Rings*! He'd bought it, but not before he had said that I should have outgrown computer games by then, which were "childish things". I was 17 when I got it, and I saw it as the last chance to be a teenager and go on a virtual adventure. I'd convinced him by fibbing that the *Nord Dragonborn* on the cover was in fact a Viking and that this was a historical game. I played it here with earphones, fearing that the other boy with the soft tenor voice might hear me playing a video game and judge me as juvenile, or worse, decide to come and watch.

By 9 p.m. I was tired of levelling up my *Argonian* wizard, so I quit, unsatisfied. I was actually a little proud of my dissatisfaction: I took it as evidence that I was indeed outgrowing such "childish things". I went to brush my teeth at the communal bathroom. I didn't like the idea that my new bathroom was several other men's as well, but at least I got to use it now, first, before they tainted it. After my teeth were cleaned, I went to my room, took off my green Jeep T-shirt and put on my white vest. I took my khaki shorts off too, and simply slept in my white underpants – curled up to resemble a squishy egg.

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‘You lot must understand something,’ said Mr Smegma in a militant tone the following day as he came close to one of the first years, all sitting in rows, and speaking spit right onto his scalp. ‘The next month and a bit is your audition, or your interview if you prefer, to see if you’re worthy to become part of the family of Geelhout.’

That’s what I had almost immediately named him in my head: *Mr Smegma*. His real name was Cobus, though. He was on the residence committee, so he was the “RC” that was our head hazer. He was giving us his speech in the Geelhout main hall, *us* being the new first years who were all sitting on the floor, cross-legged.

‘My name is Cobus, but you must call me *General* Cobus. We all have ranks in this, the most highly organised of the residences.’ At the word “organised” I could tell he had to fight back a laugh. ‘All the head RCs, such as myself and the Prim, are Generals. Then, all fourth years and above, and the other RCs are Colonels. Third years are Majors, and second years are Captains.

‘If you lot have any sort of logic, you probably think you’re Lieutenants, right? Wrong!’ he’d put a preposterous amount of effort into that last syllable. ‘You lot are *Firsties*! If you make it through hazing, then you’ll be *semi*-Lieutenants, and if you live until September, *then* only will you be Lieutenants. If you indeed do make full Lieutenant you may become a Veteran when you leave res, and be invited back for special occasions.’

*Ooh goodie*, I thought. Pa had actually attained some older version of this Veteran status, though he never went back to any Geelhout event, as far as I know.

‘Oh, there’s another rank,’ *General* Smegma said remembering, ‘it’s the only one higher than General, and that’s *Pope*. This is what a Geelhout member becomes upon his *seventh* year here. There’s only one person in the res who currently has that title. He’s been here for *eight* years.’ He looked at his peers with a smirk and then back at us. ‘One crazy bastard when he was younger.’

He continued over the “firsties” murmur of awe at an eight-year res career. A boy behind me hissed to his friend: ‘*Eight* years? What a beast!’

I was just wondering: *Pope!*? *In what army is that a military rank?*

Our dictator continued going on about the hazing details, like how we needed to know all RCs names off by heart, and the founders of Geelhout and so forth, but then he got interrupted: ‘Bla-bla-bla! Shut it, you *poes!*’ said a ballsy dude in the second row.

General Smegma pulled an astonished face, went up to said dude and grabbed him by the collar. Wrenching him up, he shouted: ‘You just made my day! Now I get to demonstrate what happens to cheeky little firsties!’

‘You don’t have the guts to do anything, you cocksucker,’ said a *separate* ballsy dude in the fourth row. Let’s call him Ballsy-two.

General Smegma switched language in his excitement: ‘*Fantasties: Dirk, gryp daai etter asseblief!*’ Colonel Dirk, a massive third year, obliged.

I couldn’t believe the guts of these two guys – *Are all city boys like this?* General Smegma handed the struggling Ballsy-one to another RC who held him down. The Colonel had Ballsy-two in his submission.

The General got a baseball bat out from behind a chair and shouted: ‘Now I’m *die moer in!*’ As he was walking to the Ballsy-bros, a *third* ballsy individual jumped up from the third row and ran with flailing arms to the RCs up front. He got punched in the stomach by an RC who then held him still. General Smegma shouted in ire and proceeded to smash one of the nearby windows – the terrible sound making a few of us twitch. And yes, I was one of them – I was quite the wide-eyed observer.

The three ballsy blokes were held ready to receive their beating. *Where the hell have my parents abandoned me to!?* I thought as malicious momentum was added to the bat. Just before the club was to strike Ballsy-one though, General Smegma halted it. The whole congregation up front, including the ballsy triplets, looked at their astonished audience and started to laugh hysterically. While they were laughing, I noticed Ballsy-three was none other than Tom the *second* year, who had helped me into my room. We all then realised: the whole thing was a gag. We’d later learn they had all chipped in to pay for the broken window.

I was relieved when they said the ballsy threesome were just pretending to be first years, but still a bit queasy. General Smegma told us he wanted us to know that the coming weeks were going to be a testing time to be sure, but that it was supposed to be fun as well.

‘Just don’t cause *kak* and obey your superiors, and it will be *lekker*,’ assured the General. After the performance of the Ballsy threesome, we were given our first-year guides, wherein was contained all the names of important people and the rules and the songs we needed to learn.

I couldn’t concentrate after the simulated-horror I’d just witnessed. I was still digesting the feelings it had brought up – a familiar mixture of nausea and rage. Familiar in literal sense I should say: I quickly realised it was the precise feeling I’d felt when I saw 15-year-old Sussie get an enthusiastic grey belt massage on her rear after she’d attempted to sneak out the house for a party. I had wanted to take something and beat Pa with it, but I was too afraid. Pa really didn’t hurt her *that* much, but Sussie never did anything naughty again, and I didn’t dare for a very long time.

I struggled to understand Sussie. *She too was maltreated by parents and culture, but she just carried on in it! She went from daddy’s grey, to hubby’s brown, and I’m positive that that brown will meet many an offspring’s bottom. And I won’t be surprised if it also meets a few unfortunate workers’*

*skins as well. Maybe she got accustomed by the grey, or maybe she likes the new one's sting – maybe that's a girl thing. Maybe hubby only wears elasticated khaki shorts. Maybe it's just one of those things...*

After the lengthy and theatrical introduction, we were given a tour of the res building and some of LC de Villiers. We were first shown the other res buildings in the immediate vicinity – told what their names were and precisely why they were all complete garbage.

Lunch was to be held in the Geelhout cafeteria. While we were sitting there waiting for it, the RCs told us to introduce ourselves. We went around stating our names and surnames. I was apprehensive to do this: it would have been nerve-racking enough to simply give my favoured sobriquet to a group of strangers simply because of good old stage fright, but I had to reveal my surname as well. I hated telling people my surname and seeing them realise that I was very Afrikaans. Even *Afrikaans* people thought my name was excessively Afrikaans. So, with an unreasonably active heart, I quickly informed everyone that I was named 'Frans Knollenhoven'. A few boys cackled at my funny sounding surname – question-repeating it to ensure they'd heard right – and gave that look that they now knew that I was very Afrikaans, and their brains had filed my skinny folder accordingly.

Two guys actually gave their second name, but one in particular had a triad of forenames like me: his conduct made it clear that he was a shy soul, but he had no problem spouting the nona-syllabic earsore that was his name: 'Jan Jacobus Nicolaas Volschenk. But my call-name is just Jan.'

'Yussus!' went General Smegma at this lengthy designation.

*His surname is almost as Afrikaans as mine!* I thought as I eyed him here. He wore *plaas* clothes like me, and he reminded me of my schoolmates back home. With introductions out of the way, food (which was *just* better than awful) was served. The RCs left, and the chatting began.

There were a few obvious pairs of old friends who had come to res together, but mostly no one knew anyone. Of the 20 of us, there were two boys who mainly kept the conversation going. The one was a barrel-chested bloke from Johannesburg: Joseph ('Call me Joe') Gordow. Joe was fat, but an attractive fat – a confident fat. The other was a tall, muscly fellow from Pretoria named Jean-Paul Egar, so of course he was JP for short. He was very assertive. These two loud guys would quickly become the "alphas" in our micro-society.

Then there was a good number of lesser men who laughed at their jokes and made comments in between – these would eventually fall into either the JP or the Joe the group. I'll refer to them as their subordinates. Carl Hart, Hope Latola and Charlie van Beth were examples in this subset. The rest were just silently listening or having private two-man conversations, such as Nigel and Phineas. I fell into the former category – I hardly spoke at all. My fellow mutes included the aforementioned Jan, and a very strange individual named Bloomstein Botha, who's voice I recognised as the timid boy's that had arrived at the res just after myself the previous evening. I at least spoke when spoken to and didn't make a fool of myself when I did, but this Bloomstein made me look like a bloody socialite. He was asked by Joe

what he studied, and he answered “IT...” without lifting his industrial-grade glasses from his food, in a quiet, squeaky voice – his scrawny body huddled into itself.

‘Computer Science, you know...’ he elaborated excruciatingly.

The boys threw looks of discomfort, amusement and pity to one another, since he wouldn’t see it anyway. ‘Okay, that’s cool, man...’ said JP with a raised eyebrow.

So this is what a “nerd” looks like in the flesh, I thought as I inspected this specimen I’d not encountered in my farm life.

I comforted myself at that first lunch with a self-comparison to this Mr Timid: *At least I wasn’t as pathetic as Bloomstein*. I’m ashamed to admit it, but I made a habit out of it too: the ungraceful sod became my frequent *comfort-comparison* from that day onward, for a good while. But, hey, I needed such a relief, in such an alien milieu.

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That night we were in the hall again, where it was time to learn the res songs – pop-hit garbage further degraded by changing the words to res-patriotism nonsense. Basically, we shouted how we were pathetic little first years but wished to become a part of Geelhout in tunes anyone blessed with a radio would be able to recognise. I REALLY hated these sessions because I really can’t sing.

Midway through our late dinner (which sounded very similar to what I imagine cavemen sounded like at meal time in the Palaeolithic), a second year ran into the cafeteria and casually told us that we had better go hide in the bushes outside, because a troop of drunk Majors were coming to “hurt” us. We all ran out – those people who actually talked during lunch and dinner were beaming at this prospect of harm from our superiors.

I was quite frightened if I’m honest, so I instinctively climbed a tree, like I had on occasion as a youngster when Pa was threatening to get the grey belt – I had always been good at climbing thanks to my skinny build. The other retards jumped in bushes or behind trees.

‘You fuckers are dirty! You need to be cleaned before you can stay in my home!’ we heard someone say in the distance. A loud group of about five came spraying soapy water out of water guns right into the bushes – no doubt, they had been kindly informed of our exact location. Everyone below got soaked, but I went unnoticed in my lofty hideaway.

We were ordered by the Generals and Colonels to get into a neat row on the lawn. I descended, and as I landed with a thud on the ground someone said: ‘There’s a dry one!’ and I promptly got undried in my face and crotch.



‘He was in the tree, the sneaky firstie!’ one said, and my peers looked at me – one of the quiet ones – in a new light: with curious humour and admiration. We were told to go to our communal bathrooms, get clean and then wait in front of our RC room.

There were two wings of each floor, and mine, the right, had both the extroverts – Joe and JP. *Yay me*. We were in the bathroom when Joe broke a short silence by drawing everyone’s attention to me: ‘Hey! This *poes* is the one who nearly didn’t get wet!’

‘Ja!’ said one of his subordinates stupidly.

I just smiled and nodded.

‘What’s your name again?’

‘Frans.’

‘Na, you’re *Treeman*, I’d say!’ Joe said confidently.

‘Ha-ha, ja, old *Treeman*!’ said another subordinate, contributing to the possible sticking of this label. Some chuckles went around. I didn’t like that nickname – it sounded like some scansional Neanderthal’s name. I sure as hell wasn’t going to introduce myself as “*Treeman*”.

‘And you? What nickname do you get?’ JP asked Joe.

‘...Call me fat *poes*,’ said Joe, displaying his incredible creativity.

He was entirely English, but still very liberal with that P-word, as it seemed were many other boys at this res, despite not being Afrikaans either. It makes sense I guess, since it has that magical prop-it-anywhere-in-the-sentence trait.

I’ve got this abstract system I invented myself that one can use to gauge the vulgarity of a word, and I’m reminded that putting the P-bomb through the tool yields a peculiar result...

I call it *The Grandmother Index*, and it functions as such: take any word and imagine: what will your grandmother do if you said it in front of her? Can you say it in front of your Nana without her smacking you or scolding you or doing that stupid shocked expression that resembles an angry yawn? The reaction determines the score on the scale. Most words are fine; most words are like “fine” too. You can say ‘fine’ in front of your gran, and she won’t bat an aged eyelid, of course. Then there’s the tiny bit more vulgar “flip”: most grannies won’t do anything if you say that in their dwindled earshot, even though they know it’s just a substitute for a swear word, and that’s what you actually mean – she appreciates the effort. And that brings us the popular non-substitute: “fuck”. Would you dare blare out one of those in her company!? Thus, it naturally scores high on the Grandmother Index. You get the idea.

“*Poes*” is so vulgar it might break the index. It’s one of the few kinks in an otherwise perfect system. It’s so vulgar, it’s looped right around the vulgarity spectrum and has reached “fine” again, because you may very well be able to say it in front of your granny-dearest without consequence, because her ears might have been spared the slimy syllable all her life.

Then again, maybe I'm wrong in my assumption of the prudence of the past; maybe your grandmamma even dropped a few P-bombs in the good old days!

Most of the dudes showered to get rid of the Majors' detergent residue. I was still shower-shy, so I took off the sudsy clothes and just splashed myself in my underpants at a basin. Then I returned to my sleep-cubicle and adorned my sleeping clothes. While doing this I saw one of the boys who fell into the Joe-subordinate category was my roommate – Charlie van Beth. He was a Midrand boy who would fail nearly everything this year, but he'd stay until November wasting his mother's money. I judged him to be an acceptable roommate here: his pronounced skinniness that nearly equalled mine, combined with his being shorter than me, made me feel a bit better about my physique.

The room across from me was occupied by Jan, the other *boerseun*, but I'd soon discover that Jan was much more than just born into that classification, like I was. He loved *anything* to do with *plaas*, and couldn't wait to get a section of his dad's farm in Limpopo to practise on once he graduated.

It was a magnetic attraction that he had to me, because *I* had something to do with *plaas*. As soon as hazing began, he would shyly but insistently initiate conversations with me. Although I wanted to leave behind that crowd of mini-Knollies that were my schoolmates, now that I was away from their natural habitat, even more than that, I wanted at least *some* company – I wanted the security of at least one pal. Everyone else seemed to accept that Jan and I *had* to be mates, so I couldn't make a very strong connection with anyone else. So, Jan and I inevitably became friends. And he was a nice enough dude – I found some comfort in his tales of *his* farm life. *At least someone had a positive experience in such an environment.*

When we were all waiting in front of our RC's room that first day of hazing, we weren't friends yet though, but this was the first instance of a conversation starter of his fired at me: 'Is it a tree plantation you come from, *Treeman?*' he joked. His dialogue shot had been in Afrikaans, so I replied in that tongue too. I told him it was actually sheep, not trees, and that "I never climbed any of those either". He laughed, though I suspect more to gain allegiance with me than actual amusement.

Soon the massive RC, Colonel Dirk, came out of the room. 'Alright boys, here's your Geelhout shirts. You'll be wearing them tomorrow with any decent shorts.' He had a very deep, velvety voice, especially now that it was soaked in sleepiness. The shirts were dull yellow golf-shirts with the Geelhout crest on the breast pocket.

'What if we get cold?' JP japed.

Dirk smirked a little. 'Then you either find another res or you swallow some concrete and harden the fuck up.' Even I laughed a little at that. We were excused to bed after this – it was 11 p.m. Joe and JP and their respective subordinates made some noise in the hall. Dirk quickly put a stop to that. He made those people go and wash dishes at 11:30. I was quiet in bed.

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The rest of my hazing memory is pretty hazy, since sleep deprivation was very much intrinsic to the process. I'm only going to provide the highlights. They kept us busy with the craziest, most useless crap. For example, we once were told by drunk third years to get into the bushes in front of the building and make animal noises. We were each assigned our own animal: Joe was to be the howler monkey, Carl got the whale, and I was assigned the majestic algae. I made gargling noises behind a shrub midst my fellow first years' impressions of porcupines, sloths, eels and Voortrekker res members (who were imitated by JP with offensive noises of a severely mentally handicapped individual, which I'm ashamed to say I found hilarious).

'What the *heck* are you?' Jan asked me – I think we could be considered friends by then. This early he still avoided swearing like a good *plaas* boy.

I replied: 'I'm your mom after she visited me last night: "*garglegarglegargle gulp*".' That was the first time I made everyone burst out laughing. JP had said: 'Treeman, that was beautiful.'

We were told to go do our "wonderful" wildlife impressions that night for the girls' residences instead of serenading them, which is what we did every other night. One serenading session, Joe was tipsy on sherry and when the song was over, and he was really close to this one girl, he just kissed her, and left. She was surprised, but seemed fine with it. He proudly pretended afterwards like it was no big deal. I was baffled – *What if she pressed charges, à la sexual assault?!*

Another highlight concerned those books we got with the names and rules in. If you were asked someone's name or something you were required to know, and did not, the book was defiled some way, but you had to keep it. Mine was used as a napkin by none other than General Smegma when I couldn't recall the name of a founder of the res. JP's was nailed to a tree; they said they would be kind so only used two nails – it still took some effort to remove it. One belonging to a subordinate of Joe's was put on a braai for about a few seconds, which left beautiful diamond char marks. Pretty much everyone's got some treatment.

Let's see what else... The older boys would also do this thing where they'd steal something like a shoe out your room and leave a note saying who took it and what his room number was. Then you had to go ask for it back, but you had to be naked and you could only take your pillowcase to cover your junk. 'Thanks a bunch for borrowing it to me, man!' they'd say warmly when you inquired about your missing object.

Once, third years came into our rooms in pairs at 2 a.m. making a lot of noise and asking us facts and names very aggressively. Once you answered correctly, they switched their demeanour instantly and were super nice and cheery. 'Well done, bro! Really sorry for the disturbance and all, here let me

make you comfortable,’ and they proceeded to very tenderly tuck you in while telling you about their first year – ‘You know, when I was a little Lieutenant ...’

I heard some boys were even told a bedtime story like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Once they were done, they said something like: ‘Now don’t move and ruin all my hard work, okay!’ or they whispered to one another something like: ‘Boy, if they move I’m going to be very upset!’ and then they gave you a pat or a kiss on the forehead. As they were leaving my pair said to one another: ‘Now let’s go wash our hands.’ They came back after an hour or so, trying to be very quiet as to not wake you, and if you had moved from your tucked in position, they sprayed you with water. Charlie got soaked.

Possibly the funniest was what happened to a subordinate of JP, Hope. A Captain asked him to do him a favour in his room. He made Hope put on a fake moustache, shades and a silver shirt, then told him to flick the lights on and off while holding his phone playing a disco song. Meanwhile the Captain danced ridiculously for his girlfriend on the bed. He then took his clothes off and made out with her until the song was done. The second year thanked “DJ Hope” and sent him on his way. Apparently, the girl was red with embarrassment.

And then we obviously had to do chores all the time, like make tea and coffee. A fourth year once called me over as I walked past him and his friends in the courtyard. ‘Listen, my friend. I’d like a cup of tea.’

He just stared at me, so I said: ‘Okay, Colonel.’

He lifted a finger as I said so and continued: ‘I’d like a cup of tea with honey.’

‘Right.’

The finger lifted again. ‘I’d like a cup of tea with honey, and cinnamon added.’ The same stare.

‘I can do tha—’

‘I’d like a cup of tea with honey and cinnamon, and with some lemon juice.’

‘Okay?’ I said, waiting. This time he just nodded. As I was about to walk away, he shouted: ‘Wait!’

‘Yes, Colonel?’

‘You didn’t ask me how much honey I’d like.’

‘How much honey would you like?’

‘I’d like a teaspoonful, but not a heaped teaspoon, a flat one.’

I could see where this was going, so pre-emptively inquired: ‘And how much cinnamon and lemon juice would you like, Colonel?’

He laughed along with the rest of his buddies. ‘Clever one, this one. A pinch and a squirt.’

I went and made this cup of tea with a flat teaspoon of honey, a pinch of cinnamon and squirt of lemon juice (and considered putting in a dollop of saliva too), but when I brought it to him, he frowned disappointedly. ‘This is just one?’

‘...’

‘But I asked you for a cup of tea. I also asked you for a cup of tea with honey. I also asked you for a cup of tea with honey and cinnamon. And let’s not forget, I also asked you for a cup of tea with honey and cinnamon and lemon juice!’ His company roared with laughter as I made a face of incredulity. I left to go make the teas. A few hours later I saw that only one and a half of the four had actually been drunk.

There was one activity that I would have had to participate in, had I been there two or three decades earlier, but it was no longer compulsory, and that was attending the church service on Sunday mornings. On our first Saturday there, one of our RCs told us that most of the res was going to a nearby church the next day which had been Geelhout’s choice for decades, and that we were not obligated anymore these days but strongly urged; at first I groaned inside, as usual, at the prospect of hymns first thing in the morning. But then it struck me that Pa and Ma were not around, and that I was “not obligated” to go!

Naturally, one of the effects of that momentous rugby game against Ntatyana Primary had been a reconsideration of the Faith of my villainous people. I’d never really gotten into Christianity up to that point, but I had believed everything that everyone’d told me, even where it clashed with science or logic. But when Pa gave me that top-tier thrashing after the quad bike ride, my loyalty to their religion leak out, right along with the sweat, tears and the little bit of blood. It was a way of getting back at them, though I didn’t dare tell them this. It was my little secret – not meaning any of the words I mouthed on Sundays. I wasn’t sure what my view on creation was anymore, except that I was *not* a *Dopper* – I just tried my best not to think about it at all (especially that whole hell business).

So, every Sunday at Geelhout, I didn’t go with my comrades to the church. Ironically, it had been the closest thing I’d encountered that I would’ve described as a religious experience: that first Sunday morning spent lazing in bed, for the first time ever basically – revelling in my sloth and the quietness of res.

I heard two of my fellow firsties gossip about me once: ‘But I thought Boers were super religious.’

‘They are. He’s probably not allowed to attend any church other than his, probably *Dopper* or something.’ This made me livid, but I let them believe what they wanted. Unfortunately, my attendance of res was probably a few centuries too early for washing dishes to not be obligatory. I don’t think any second year washed any dishes until March, when we were freed from the torment of hazing and welcomed to the Geelhout family, but more on that later.

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In the last week of January, all first years had these tedious general introductory sessions from their faculties, where they tried their best to inform us about the extraordinarily complicated admin and

workings of the university. These were held the week before the rest of the students would come to campus and proper classes would start.

Of course, campus was nothing like I had imagined it. Bless my dumb little imagination – I had envisioned something akin to a prestigious old England university. Reality was not disappointing though, for there was plenty of prettiness on the main campus: the old Jacaranda trees, the weird sculptures all around, and the variety of buildings looming over the neat walkways, the best of which was the Old Arts.

The preparatory meetings were split-up according to surname; I was in a group of G-L, which contained none of the few res boys that I had grown somewhat close to (so basically Jan and Charlie), but instead boasted the likes of the fat Joe Gordow, the awkward Phineas I can't remember his surname, and the oafish Carl Hart. I sat with these boys, but said hardly anything.

By the time these were over and proper classes began I had become fairly chatty with Imelela, one the gate guards of LC – he was extremely friendly, so everyone was chatty with him. I greeted him as I slowed my bicycle to go past the boom-gate each morning.

He'd make small talk in Afrikaans. One morning he'd said: 'Hello, *slimkind!* Do you get a lot of speeding tickets on that bike of yours?'

On the first day of proper lectures he asked: 'Are you going to fill that brain nicely today!?'

I answered: 'Yes!' and gestured my head swelling from all the knowledge. I chuckled on my short ride to campus at the ghastly thought of what a cruel fate must befall a person to actually have their head swell like that – gargantuan tumours came to mind.

The first lecture's venue was one I'd never been to before, so I had consulted a map the evening before and memorised the route. By my standards there had been a hell of a lot of people during the introductory lectures, but I knew there would be even *more* people on campus now that it would not only be first years.

Still, the droves of people clogging the route I had to take was quite shocking. They reminded me of the enormous flocks of birds that devoured the insects on our farm about once a year: swooping their way around furiously, so that one had to duck every so often. Those birds did us some good – ridding us of pests – but these cocks and tits had little positive effect on me – they instead brought apprehension. I found myself wanting to find seclusion as quickly as I could, yet, antagonistically, I also wanted to drink in all the novel faces.

Some people walked close by me and laughed, I immediately asked myself if was doing anything embarrassing. *Do I look funny? Is my zip open? Are they laughing at something else? Have I sprouted some hilarious growth I'm unaware of, like those enormous tumours!?* The second time it happened I took a detour to a bathroom to check for any abnormalities in my appearance – I could diagnose nothing.

It must have been the distracting hordes of people and my little self-examination, but I was soon uncertain whether or not I was still on the correct track.

*I'm sure this is still right; I'll carry on and find the next landmark. Or perhaps I'll get extremely lost and miss the first damn class... I should turn around.*

I went back the way I came until I was at an early section where I could be assured of having regained my bearings. I concentrated and I followed the streets and paths. It turned out I had been right when I thought myself lost, which conjured up feelings of regret at my senseless waste of time and energy, and disappointment for not believing in myself.

I did not get any relief from the swarm of people in my lecture, which was Physics for Life Sciences. The nest of people was like a concert crowd, except hardly anyone was excited for this show. This was one of two lecture streams we could choose from; since the alternative stream clashed with another common subject, most had to take this one. So, the massive lecture hall, called *AE du Toit*, was absolutely brimming.

It was a no brainer that I'd go to the alternative lecture stream, but I had to stay for this class's remainder though: being in the middle of the bench meant escape would be arduous, not to mention hundreds of eyes would observe me from their perches.

With me was Jan, who, predictably, was also enrolled for Agriculture; JP, who was doing Genetics; Phineas, in the basic BSc Biology trying to get into medicine; and Deon, studying Botany.

I can't remember much of this lesson itself – I was too busy contemplating how we were supposed to act. We were adults now, so we couldn't act like school kids right? But I didn't feel like we could act like our parents. Observing my peers, I saw all manner of behaviours: some reminded me of my most immature matric classmates, while others looked like grown-ups at church, and everything in between. I decided I'd lean more towards the mature side, but when the class was over, and my notes were a sparse, pretty much useless set of bullet points, I didn't feel very responsible.

Next, I had Mathematics, where I met our Slovakian Professor, who would constantly have to repeat himself throughout the semester, due to his heavy accent. There were plenty of attractive girls in my classes: as a *plaas* boy deprived of such delights throughout school, I noticed this automatically. But, I remember seeing a particularly beautiful girl for the first time in this lecture. I thought to myself: *So far, she's the prettiest girl I've seen in BSc*. She kept this title once I'd seen all the pretty girls my classes had to offer. She had curly brown hair, strikingly green eyes, and was tall and slim. My head couldn't come to grips with the fact that she was actually *real* – that she had ungraceful things like bodily functions – it insisted that she was some higher being, come to hang around the fallible mortals.

In other words, she was exactly what I didn't need in my Maths class – a sublime burden.

We had an hour break after Maths (spent getting chow at the cafeteria) and then Chemistry. The introductory lecture was given by a moustached man, who told us his was supposedly one of the hardest

subjects on campus, to a great groan from the class of 700. I saw Tom the *second* year near the back, once again sitting among first years – he must have flunked this subject and was thus living evidence of its difficulty.

After these was another hour break followed by a stupid literature class – just to make sure we could read and write I suppose. Then was the general biological class, which most people were happy to have since biology is what most signed up for. As the class ended, I was not too glad to find out that my infernal surname had caused me to have the Friday afternoon Practical slot for this subject.

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I had the first of those practicals that following Friday; none of my fellow Geelhout semi-Lieutenants was burdened with this awful schedule-blemish, so I had to endure it alone. After it, us new Geelhouts were to have our first proper social – with the girl res *Kleinooi* – and after that we were to be shown some of the bars and clubs at Hatfield Square. The social was a braai held on LC de Villiers, which is a massive campus in size, but the space is mostly taken up by soccer, rugby and hockey fields. There is, however, a little area in a corner with a man-made lake where some brick braais are located.

I was nervous for the social when I was cycling back to res after the prac – it seemed like such a big deal to be given access to these girls who were deliberately separated from us normally.

When I got to my floor, most of the boys were in the bathroom excitedly making themselves pretty with things like gel, cologne and blemish concealer. I took a shower (it may have been my first there without wearing a swimming costume or underpants), went to my room and took out the clothes I intended to wear. My rum-housing hip flask fell out of the breast pocket of the dark green and navy two-tone I'd selected. I heeded Fate's clear communication and administered a small portion of its contents to calm myself down.

*Take it with tonight!* I thought, the idea being to save money on booze at the bars. But in its glossy grey I saw a premonition: bulky bouncers violently throwing me out of their bar for breaking their institution's rules. I thus stowed the transportable tot dispenser in my green K-Way jacket's inner pocket after one last sip.

Jan was wearing one of his two-tones too – red and khaki. I only realised that we looked like fraternal twins with a mother that dressed us when it was already too late. I found my doppelganger in JP's room laughing at something the assertive prick had said. I realised then and there that Jan was fast becoming a JP subordinate.

JP saw me standing at his doorway and said: 'Hey! Look at these two *plaas* boys! You may get some *plaas meisie* attention with those two-tones, but remember: they're not *stout* like these city girls.'



JP was wearing a white vest with some dumb shit written on it, like **OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE**, and had paired it with jeans. It was here that I started to comprehend that my farm attire was quite conspicuous in this foreign habitat. Up to this point I'd been fond of my two-tones, my khakis and my *vellies*: it was what all my friends at school wore, and I was used to them. I knew city people dressed differently but I didn't realise that they'd be able to spot a *boerseun* from his threads. It made perfect sense, but this was the first time I was forced to realise it.

It wasn't just my name – it was my *appearance* that formed the bars to my person-genre cell. The idea of dressing like JP made me feel peculiar, though. I guess the cage was comfortable.

We were to walk to LC's clubhouse and braai area with some RCs – a good 20-minute walk. The girls were to be dropped off by minibuses. On the way we were told by our superiors that if at any time we were in a group consisting of only boys, we'd all have to skinny dip in the dam immediately. I decided to stick with either JP or Joe, since they were fond of telling us about all their accomplishments with women, and would therefore probably not be hindered by femalophobia as I was.

When we got there, the girls had not yet arrived. It was our job to make the fires and set out the snacks. While doing this, JP told us he would be on the lookout for his friend from school who was now in Kleinooi. Apparently, she had "tits that could knock a building down".

My body had a surge of adrenalin as soon as the two minibuses arrived – pregnant with mature females. The nervousness went *Super Saiyan*.

*I guess skinny dipping isn't so bad...*

I quickly pretended to be busy rearranging the snacks. With my back turned to the damsels, I heard them sing their ridiculous greeting song of how they're the least slutty res and how we must be kind to them, or they'd gang up on us. We all clapped after their recital, and the girls spread out and introduced themselves to groups of Geelhout semi-Lieutenants in the manner they'd been taught. Jan was positioned close to JP, and I quickly went next to him, trying to look as cool and nonchalant as possible. Three plump girls came to us and we made conversation. I'm ashamed to admit that I was glad to be eased into the socializing with this set of girls, whom I found unattractive.

JP was very friendly and talkative, though of course, he was insincere and just wanted to get away from the "fat chicks", as he would refer to them as soon as he was unburdened of their company. Jan and I were quiet – I made a single funny comment to which one of the girls reacted with a hearty chuckle. Jan spoke slightly more than me, but it was all drivel.

JP terminated the conversation after a small while: 'Well girls, it was lovely meeting you, but our superiors require us to meet at least 10 girls tonight, so until later.' They were understanding.

'Got us away from the buffalo herd,' he whispered, 'no need to thanks me, boys, I take care of my own!'

‘Joh, thanks, bro,’ said Jan with worrying levels of awe. We went to the snacks and devoured some, and as we were masticating, JP said: ‘That’s my friend from school. Hey, Sara!’

A giggle of res girls saw JP and came over. Sara’s knockers were pretty damn big, I quickly noticed. – *Possible demolition devices indeed!* And by the terror I felt at their approach, I might as well have been a sentient building marked for destruction.

There were four of them, all attractive. Sara, who seemed to be the one in a leadership role, was the prettiest. She awoke in me one of those most primal of instincts: that one found in the brain between the *eat* and the *don’t-get-eaten* lobes.

The interaction started with my introduction being met with polite hellos followed by a quick state in them of clear lack of interest in me. Any of my attempts at small talk was met with their seeming somewhat desperate to put a stop to the activity. And because of this I dared not practise any activity even akin to flirting.

Once or twice, when the group was chatting and my psychotic humour instinctively blurted out something funny, they’d chuckle and I’d feel good and tried connecting again, but it would once more soon be met with that same lack of interest. Then my usual reaction to such events commenced.

I thought: *Am I not attractive? Do I have a crap personality? Well, they seem to brush me off before I’ve said much, so I don’t think that’s it... Do I smell? Does my breath reek? Am I not big or muscled enough? Maybe it’s a metaphysical thing. Is this a simulation? Is someone screwing with me? Am I living in a work of fiction and someone is just imagining all this crap?!*

(Uh-oh, I’m on to me...)

*Some dudes that I think are puss ugly do a lot better than me. I’m not puss ugly, right? People who know me well seemed to think that I’m a fairly cool person. I shower once a day, brush my teeth after meals and I use popular deodorant. I know smaller, skinnier guys than me who have girlfriends... Maybe I’m a new species of human and can’t attract the females from this old species!.. I guess it’s just one of those things.*

This I thought, all the while being oblivious to my slouchy posture, my morose mouth and my eye-avoiding eyes. Oblivious to my shoulders crumpled up to my neck, my fumbling hands positioned in front of my tummy, and to my mumbling voice so shy no one could take it seriously. I simply assumed their aversion towards me at the meekest evidence, and then any courage just went to hell, and then the ruthless negative feedback loop was born.

But hey! At least I wasn’t as woeful as Bloomstein, who I examined now standing behind res mates as far away from the view of the present RCs as possible, being a nerdy McNerdington on his cell phone. His lonesomeness went unnoticed (or more likely ignored) by the res girls. I saw some of the res boys realised that they were being used as cover by the geeky van Geekerson and invited him to stand with them sociably, instead of creepily behind them, to which Bloomstein made some excuse, fidgeting his

head “no” and vacating that cover to find other cover – one which hopefully didn’t insist that he existed. This observing proved a very entertaining pantomime, and it gave me a warm, fuzzy reassurance that I, and my world, could be quite a bit worse.

Mind you, the supposedly more experienced Joe wasn’t having any luck with the girls this night either. He came up to us and said: ‘When the fuck can we leave these boring bitches so I can get me some Square action?!’

We first years were now allowed to go into bars and clubs since the hazing’s first phase was complete. JP and Joe and their little followers had utilized this privilege already. JP had gone to *Impala’s*, a bar right next to main campus with pool tables, and Joe to a nightclub called *Kay’s*. I had not yet had an opportunity to go anywhere, but was apprehensive to go to one of these Pretoria *kuier’s* I’d heard so much about – mostly from a judgemental source, detailing their sacrilegiousness.

On both these occasions, JP and Joe had said they would have preferred to go to the infamous *Hatfield Square* – known locally simply as the Square. This was a public square hosting almost exclusively bars and clubs where students had legendary episodes of debauchery. Semi-Lieutenants were forbidden to go there without permission from the RCs and supervision by a Geelhout member second year or up. General Cobus Smegma said we were to go there for a quick tour this night after the social.

Most of the guys were *fervent* to go, but my eagerness couldn’t develop: I’d heard too many a scary tale of this Square. For example, just a few weeks prior to this night, a Blue Bulls rugby player had gotten into a drunken brawl there with a man and *killed* him.

I kept my mouth shut near JP or Joe the rest of the social. When I wasn’t pretending to listen to a group’s conversation, I was admiring the dam and, eventually, the little forest at one segment of its shore. I couldn’t quite place the trees’ type, due to the limiting ocular fuel, but they seemed to all be of a single species. I was fairly sure they weren’t bluegums.

I felt a pang of sorrow, remembering *my* forest, now already a few weeks un-visited. Whatever the species, they were densely spaced, tall trees that were straight at the trunk. *I’d guess pines, but it’s too obscure in this light... Someone could tell me they’re candelabra trees, and I’d believe them.*

I found myself wishing I could go into that little forest, which was a feature I would have assumed would be rare in the city, to bask in its mystery and seclusion. But I knew that would almost definitely result in a skinny-dipping punishment, not to mention a branding as an immature, loner, elf-person.

*My nickname is already Treeman, for fuck sakes. That’ll probably turn it into Treechild. But why do I want to go there? Why doesn’t anyone else? Am I still a bit of a kid? Is it because I’m not yet as developed as the rest? I only recently began shaving, and most of these boys look as if they’ve been at it a while... But I swear I’m more “mature”... or am I just more morose? Do I have some kind of mental illness?!*

It was around 9 p.m. when I was having these muddled thoughts, right before the Kleinooi girls got back into their minibuses. We packed up the snacks and cooldrinks, and then Dirk produced two bottles of REALLY cheap vodka.

‘Alright, boys. If you want to go to Square, a shot of this is your pass.’

I didn’t want to drink rubbish vodka that came in plastic, and I didn’t want to go to that dodgy Square either.

The spirit burnt like a flaming snail as it went down my throat. After the walk back to res, we had another equally long walk to this land of delinquents – this disreputable Square...

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As we were walking out of the res gates, the RCs told us that the streets of Hatfield were dangerous at night with muggers, so we were advised to never walk in groups of less than three. I suddenly found myself gravitating towards the centre of our congregation. It was here, in this peloton of malodourous young men, that I remembered that I didn’t know what the night sky looked like in the city, so I had a gander upwards.

Pitiful – not the pure dark navy I had envisioned, but rather a handful of weak white dots in the murky veil, which was somehow even worse: it was as if the stars had put up a fight and these were the only ones left, awaiting their inevitable death, or the air and light pollution tag team had left a couple of star corpses as a warning to nature not to defy their anthropogenic wrath. I didn’t like the sight, so I stopped looking.

As we got close to the Square, I began to hear a dissonant concerto – a cocktail of club songs blasting from the several alcohol-licensed institutions. Once closer still, I heard the white hum of hundreds of young adults. I got nervous as my res mates got excited – yelping like animals. We got to an entrance at one of the corners where IDs were required. We all got ours out, except Charlie, who had forgotten his.

I thought to myself: *Yay, let’s go back to res, where no one will piss off a professional rugby player and get beat to death!* But our General casually bribed the guy with a R20 note. As we entered, we were greeted by a mass gathering of young adults. Most were in the bars, but many were in the middle of the Square itself, chatting and drinking.

‘Okay boys, first stop is *Cambridge Bar*,’ said Dirk. I’d learnt my lesson from the university: I knew that name did not mean this would be a smoky pub with chaps in tweed jackets, and I was correct. Cambridge Bar was a dirty, noisy club with inane beat music, a volcanic atmosphere, and epileptic strobe lights. It was the first time I’d ever been in a proper night club, so I mostly took it all in and observed rather than participated. I was pretty much forced to participate in the drinking, though: Dirk shoved a

fistful of brandy and coke into my hand, as he had for about seven other semi-Lieutenants, and said it was R30. I was a little nervous about alcohol still, having only been drunk once and tipsy twice. But I *did* like the way the crap vodka had made me feel, despite the initial blazing-slug-down-the-oesophagus sensation. A part of me wanted to amplify that careless, jovial feeling – I was now a student after all. So, I gave him the money, and sipped the ridiculously unhealthy beverage. I was also offered a cigarette by Charlie, but I refused. Besides, even if I did want a cigarette, smoke was already a significant constituent of the air.

I had taken about three sips of my drink when JP grabbed me by the shoulder and bet me he could down the rest of his faster than I could, and everyone began chanting: ‘Down, down, down...’

He beat me, but only by a few milliseconds. Then I felt woozy; fearing my communication skills were now woozy too, I stood in silence near the boys, listening and observing, until I heard Colonel Dirk yell: ‘Tequila!’

Frightened of the possible effects of *more* booze, I dashed away for the bathroom. This turned out to be an awful hideout choice: sticky floor, vomit residue in one toilet, gob droplet in one basin... I made sure not to let my bare skin touch anything.

When I headed back, I saw that most of the boys were on the dance floor. That area was one I was very confused by, so I wasn’t too interested in going to it, but Jan beckoned me closer, and I couldn’t possibly just stand on my *own*!

I tried to follow the example set by others on the dance floor: everyone just looked like they were being electrocuted by lazy lightning. I tried to let this lethargic electricity zap me, but I felt that this just made me resemble an intellectually gifted zombie.

I saw JP go chat to a ring of girls, but they were having none of his shagnanigans, it seemed – he was probably being too obvious. He left them, and made his subordinates, Jan included unfortunately, leave the dance floor by shouting: ‘Shots!’ I didn’t want a shooter of any kind, but I’d have done almost anything to stop looking like a scarecrow in an earthquake.

We had Jägermeister – my first time. *This is basically expensive cough syrup*, I decided. Once we had swallowed and either succeeded or failed in suppressing a grimace, JP said he thought it was time we went to a “proper club”: *The Drop Off*. This was also part of the Square, but unlike the others, it was on the first floor of one of the buildings – so that it could display its unhallowed supremacy to all. There was a precarious set of steel steps leading up to it, which was apparently quite the hazard to the more wasted of folk. He asked Dirk, who thought it was a splendid idea.

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The Drop Off was much like Cambridge Bar, except with the hedonism, loudness and dirtiness turned from 8 all the way up to 10. Amazingly though, The Drop Off had a lounge area, unlike Cambridge Bar. It was to this side section that I followed General Smegma – for safety. On a couch next to the pool tables the General said to us: ‘I’m ashamed to say I’ve caused some *kak* here in the past – stole a bottle of tequila. So I’m not going to stay long. There’s one bouncer that doesn’t like me much.’

I’d been tense the entire time at Square, despite the fact that my inexperienced blood had quite the dose of alcohol, so I decided I’d also leave with him. I asked him what time he’d like to leave, he said at 1:30 a.m. – 40 minutes from my asking. As he told me, I felt JP drag me off to the bar whilst saying something about “Stroh rum”. I’d had rum before and I liked it too: it was what I had decided to put into that hip flask a school “friend” of mine gave me for my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (though my partiality was not due to taste, but rather for the pirate factor). So, I decided a little shot of this “rum” could not be *such* a bad idea...

After a lengthy queue standing, I heard JP ask for Stroh 80, but graciously all they had was 60 – I still had no idea that the number was indicative of the alcohol percentage. I took my first tot of that Austrian atrocity, and gagged in surprise at its particularly intense sear on its way down the old gullet. After this, JP was promoting the dance floor once more. I couldn’t take another awful round of “dancing”, so I left. The rum was quickly taking effect as I half-stumbled my way back to the lounge. I flopped on the same couch as the good General. He laughed at my exclaiming to him that Stroh rum was “the devil’s work”.

I observed people playing pool in the lounge area for a bit. I didn’t understand why pool and bars were so bonded. *For surely booze reduces the accuracy of the cue?*

My attention drifted from the bar-goers and their pointy sticks, to the nearby fire escape. I could see through the window that it led to a metal staircase going up and down the exterior of the building. *I bet it goes all the way up to the roof!* I hypothesised. This scientific hunch conjured a desire within me to depart from this noisy, foggy cave of thump-songs, to the fresh, isolated roof. I wanted to hide there a bit, so that none of these people would know where I was, but I’d know where they were. *I’d be able to spy on them through the window...*

With a start I became aware that this was a most childish idea: I decided that it had to be the alcohol’s effect, evoking these immature desires to engage in espionage like James Bond.

*Fresh air would be nice though, and the view, I admitted, but the bouncers would probably get their bras in a knot and throw me out.*

I spied one of the burley louts who indeed had impressive man-boobs, and I cruelly tried to see if I could spot a bra-strap impression through his black T-shirt, until his nonchalant gaze threatened to come my way – I darted my attention elsewhere.

Elsewhere turned out to be Bloomstein's inelegant body, which was trying its best to get past the dense gathering in front of the bar. *Oh right, Bloomstein is here too!*

The poor fool bounced away from several brief openings just as they ceased to exist, without daring to touch anyone – everyone ignoring him all the while. His bespectacled face had a look of annoyance at this hindrance, but it was diluted with anxiety. Eventually he blitzed through a gap quick enough to make hardly any contact with another soul. He did brush past a girl, catching her attention: She gave his fleeing back a mean look.

*I'm an awkward human being, I acknowledged, but at least I'm not like him.*

To prove the thought this time, I decided I'd collect some empirical evidence: decided I'd have a go at traversing the person-wall he'd had such a struggle with. With my superior social skills, my performance would certainly prove less pitiful. I went up to a fissure in the flesh congregation, said a polite: 'Excuse me, just want to get through,' and wormed my way to the other side, lightly making contact where I needed to. *And if I also get a dirty look, I don't care, I tried to persuade myself.*

Trial complete, I concluded: *There, see? I'm not all that terrible with people!*

*Okay. Now what?* I thought stupidly on the other side, standing still as a fly in amber. Panicking, I looked around for a familiar face. I saw Joe, and circumstances meant it was a rare pleasure to see it. I went up and noticed that he was with two girls; a mixture of my drunkenness and the sense of pride I'd received from bettering Bloomstein meant I wasn't worried about talking to these strange girls.

Wet with liquid confidence, I took Joe by the shoulder. 'Hey Joe! *Howzit* going?' I looked at the girls, pretending to just now notice their presence. 'Well! You seem to be doing just fine.' I'd describe their expressions as amused yet slightly repulsed.

Joe said he was "Good, bra", but his tone of voice was one of irritation – I didn't care at the time, though. I asked the girls their names, and told them how cool Joe was, and they seemed rather bemused by my monologue. Our General leaving the lounge area caught my attention, so I left them without saying goodbye.

'General Cobus!' I called.

'Ja, come, drunk firstie, we're leaving,' he said as I shuffled in his direction. With him were just three other boys, including Bloomstein of course. When we got to the stairs going down from The Drop Off, I concentrated as hard as I could through my drunken haze to not make an idiot of myself. I can proudly say that I succeeded.

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I noticed, after my perilous stair descent, a commotion going on in the centre of the Square, and lots of onlookers obscuring what must have been a captivating anomaly. ‘Ah, a fight,’ said the General, half amused, half bored.

Then there was suddenly a rise in shouts and a dispersal of people away from the eye of the crowd. Once the shouts died down, they were replaced by an applause of coughing.

‘And there goes the tear gas,’ remarked the General. We walked closer to where the fight had been, and I felt my nostrils tingle and my throat gently burn. I held my breath as if it were DDT in the air, to prevent further symptoms – *namesake symptoms* – from sprouting until we were far from the *tear gas*.

When I finally allowed myself to gulp air, I was lightheaded. *Cities are insane*, I thought. I can’t remember much from the walk back, but I recall that it was so late that Imelela’s early morning shift at the gate had begun.

‘*Dronkgatte!*’ he japed at us as we came in. He and Cobus chatted a bit, I said hello too – he was glad to see me, as always.

We were soon at our building, and then the flights of stairs to my room made me feel pretty awful, so I just went to my room as quickly as I could and lay down. I have no idea how long I had been there when I realised that I had a brimming bladder on me, so I got up and went. On the way back I opened Jan’s door and saw no one. I got my phone out to message him. This was my first attempt:

**Ohwy bri arw tou okay?**

What was intended was: *Hey bro, are you okay?* I accidentally sent that spastic riddle, read it, and tried again.

**Heu bro are upu oatu?**

I didn’t send this time, after proof reading. ‘*Fuckit!*’ I hissed. I scrapped the attempt by executing a mean backspace hold, and carefully dialled in:

**Ey doos wer u?**

I got this reply a few minutes later:

**Bra I'm fukt. dirk is walklon home witb us**

Followed by the incomprehensible:

**Dyd srrc wgh food?**

And my:

**Hu?**

And thereafter radio silence.

I woke up at 7 a.m., and though I would have REALLY liked to snuggle in, I was debilitated by a headache – naturally.



*Water*, I thought, *I need water...* I looked at myself in the mirror before I entered the hallway – I was still in my two-tone and khaki shorts. I met JP coming out the bathroom – he looked tired but cheery.

‘Aren't you hung-over?’ I inquired whilst rubbing an eye.

He smiled and replied: ‘Treeman, I’m feeling *shiiiiit!*’ He seemed very proud of this. He was still wearing his previous night’s shirt. He offered me a cup of coffee, paracetamol and some vitamins, after I said I too felt rather “shiiiiit”.

While a few of us were being exhausted on the couches outside the corridor, discussing the night we had, waiting for our pain relievers to kick in and get rid of the kicking in our heads, some cruel second years came with two crates full of dishes.

‘Get washing, boys, we want them spotless before 9!’

We groaned and each grabbed a share of dishes. I knew the boys would become loud whilst washing to entertain themselves and mitigate the misery, and I, having a headache still, decided to not wash in the kitchen with them. I washed in the bathroom instead. I was about a third of the way done when Joe entered the bathroom. I glanced at him and said a simple “Morning”, and resumed my domestic duties. He didn’t return the greeting: instead he walked over to the toilets, halted as if recalling something, came to me and said in a furious whisper: ‘What the fuck, Treeman?’

I stared at him with bug eyes. I could tell he was very tired and very much not feeling well. He elaborated: ‘Why did you come talk to me when I was chatting up those two skanks?! I was going to go home with *both* of them, and then you came and turned them off with your drunken bullshit.’

*Are you kidding me?* I thought. *You weren’t even going to manage a kiss from either!*

But I was terrified of this chubby, Vince Vaughn lookalike, so I just said: ‘Sorry dude... I was drunk.’

He continued to chew me out, and I just took it. He told me how he knew I couldn’t “bag chicks” but that didn’t mean I had to “cock-block” him. I didn't make eye contact, I didn't protest. He wanted something pathetic to vent on, and I was the perfect cockroach at hand.

‘Don’t get in my way again,’ he finished. He walked away, rubbing his clearly aching head, letting out a deep sigh of pain. It was all too much for me: the hangover, the foreign environment, the responsibilities, the missing of my stupid home. I had to fight back the tears with all my might, and it *just* about worked. I rubbed my moist eyes with my smoke-flavoured shirt, took a deep breath and carried on cleaning the dishes with terrible posture.

## Chapter Two: Middle Larva

June – July 2013

Two fairly attractive girls were both touching the stomach muscles I'd worked so hard to gain in the first semester.

'He-he! Not bad!' the one said as the other giggled.

'Now can I touch your boobs?'

'No!' both said simultaneously – shocked but entertained.

'Why?! You touched something *lekker* of mine.'

'You can touch *my* stomach,' the one called Natalie said, '*that's* fair.'

'Fiiiine,' I said, feigning disappointment. I proceeded to gently put my hand on her stomach. 'Hmmm... Good thing I have a belly button fetish...' and bit my bottom lip. She wrenched away from the tummy groping, and the other one, named Tanya, burst out laughing. Then Natalie chuckled as well. I asked Tanya if I could have a turn on her "*magie*", and she said: 'No way!' and folded her arms around her middle.

'Oh, so now that you know I'll enjoy it, all of a sudden it's out of the question?! That's bullshit.'

'It's more that now we know you're going to be all creepy about it.'

I laughed. 'Aw man, you girls suck!' I was proud of my almost six-pack – hence the invitation to have it felt – but since I had stopped going to the gym around May's end, and had reduced my self-control when it came to drinking, I would soon lose most of it.

'Excuse me, ladies, I'm off to take a piss.'

'Enjoy your *pie-pie!*' Tanya called as I got going.

'I will!' I said with a wink, which made them laugh again.

On the wall at the sordid urinal, someone had written a message with a marker pen:

### **Things I Hate:**

- **Vandalism**
- **Lists**
- **Racism**
- **Chinese people**
- **Irony**
- **Repetition**
- **Irony**
- **Incomplete lists**
- **And**

I remembered seeing something like this on the internet before, but this guy had at least made the joke his own with some additions, like “**Repetition**”, and “**Chinese People**”, so I allowed myself to smile. Of course, some prick-wiggle had crudely written *POES* next to the **And** by scraping away some of the red paint: a dark crimson paint that was not limited to the men’s bathroom, but covered all the interior walls of Naglesse. This was my new place to hang out.

I went to the mirror, where I made sure my new, pitch-black hair, which had a tiny bit of gel inside to keep its meticulous messy form, was still looking good. One lock was out of place – promptly rectified. I was wearing my new red and black striped hoodie with tight black skinny jeans. When I had lifted my right hand to gently put the rogue setae back in place, it revealed an arm that had precisely five bangles decorating it. Leaving the bathroom, I decided it was time for another beer.

Naglesse was just outside the Square, across from Impala’s – a literal stone’s throw from the University. This was the joint that famously rebelled against the typical dance music found at clubs in the Square, and instead played rock music, primarily from the 90’s and the early 2000’s. The people visiting this establishment were diverse, but the frequenters were mostly “rockers” or “skaters”. Naglesse had a reputation for being rough because of the rough music, like the occasional heavy metal, but in truth there were far less fights here than at most clubs. The Drop Off nearby, for example, could pass for an MMA arena with the regularity of punches thrown there, whereas I’d never seen a brawl in Naglesse.

To me, the best part of this joint was its most infamous trait: in the main area, at peak visiting hours, people did not sit at the tables, like the old or disabled might, but instead stood on them, and “danced”, and “sang”, and enjoyed themselves. I couldn’t dance for shit in a club, but I could bob my head and tap my feet whilst sipping some beer on a table just fine.

Go there about three Thursday evenings in a row and by the fourth you’ll have heard basically their entire library of music: *Scotty Doesn’t Know*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Chop Suey!*, *Pour Some Sugar on Me* – that type of stuff. This was my fifth time. On my first visit, I was embarrassed by my lack of rock music knowledge. This night though, I recognised almost all the songs and could even sing along to some choruses. A chorus I knew was playing as I exited the men’s room – *All the Small Things* – so I chromatically recited the refrain, along with a good portion of my fellow bar-goers.

I began waiting in the queue at the bar. About two minutes in, a bearded, long haired man came up to me with an astonished frown on his face. This frown quickly morphed into a mad smile when his fuzzy mug was about ten centimetres from mine.

‘Duuuude! You look *a lot* like Pete Townshend!’ Surprisingly he didn’t sound (or smell) all that drunk.

‘Who’s that?’ My heart had started going slightly faster at the surprise of this unexpected engagement, but I was calm again, now that I knew this was a friendly stranger.

‘Oh, man, he’s one hell of a guitarist, for a band called *The Who*. You’ve heard of them, right?’

I imagine that five months prior to this I’d have lied and said “yes”, being too embarrassed to admit lack of knowledge.

‘Nope.’

‘Bro!’ he said shaking his head, ‘Okay, you must know *CSI*? The TV show?’

‘Ja?’ I turned to the bartender I’d reached, ‘Black Label, please.’

‘All their theme songs are songs by *The Who*,’ and he proceeded to sing songs that I indeed did know: *Who Are You*, *Won’t Get Fooled Again* and *Baba O’Riley*. He sang relatively well – better than me at least. He proceeded to google “Pete Townshend” on his phone as I handed the bartender the cost plus a tip with my left hand, also blessed with five bangles. He showed me the pictures; there was a strong resemblance.

‘Jez, my nose isn’t that big is it?’ I asked, grinning.

‘Ha-ha, naaa. It’s big, bro, but not quite Pete’s size.’

We chatted for about ten more minutes next to the bar, mostly him speaking energetically about music. I thought I liked music, but I was nothing compared to this “Ted” – we eventually exchanged names – who was like a hairy encyclopaedia. When our meeting conversation began losing momentum, said I was going to return to the tables (I’d just remembered that I had left two rather keen damsels there). I invited him to join – there were after all *two* gals – but he said: ‘Maybe later, *Frans Townshend*!’

The portion of wall his body had been obscuring held a no smoking sign, now revealed. I had never seen it before and had to laughed privately at its absurdity – at a glance I saw seven people smoking. *I guess they must have put that up when it first opened, but soon realised that the crowd they were attracting wouldn’t be deterred from indulging in their fiery vice.* I decided to add one to the at-least-seven rule-breakers; by now, I didn’t feel that cough-inducing burn with inhalation anymore, and the little moron-mitten that I was, I was quite proud of this.

In the excitement of a new acquaintance, I’d completely forgotten about my beer, and my first sip now was not a nice cold one, to my disappointment. I walked back to the table where I’d been conversing with (and gut probing) the girls. I was checking something on my phone as I was making my way there. I glanced and saw two pairs of legs that had to be theirs. So, when I got close, I put away my cell and mounted the table like a grasshopper – *whack!*

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‘Did ya miss m—’

My assumption had been wrong: the four limbs belonged to strangers – *very* attractive strangers at that – who were staring at me with faces contorted to looks that could be interpreted in a thousand ways, but none of them could be positive.

*Oh crap!* I thought with my eyes and mouth shaped to near identical circles. I realised, with horror, that I was definitely not drunk enough anymore to turn this extremely embarrassing situation into something other than just that. They were too attractive, and my last dose of alcohol had been too long ago.

The way this felt was very akin to how you might feel when you're at a store with a trolley full of items that have already been run through the till, and then realising you don't have your wallet on you. True to its name, Naglesse was not very liberal with its lighting, so my mistaking these legs was almost forgivable – though, I didn't forgive myself.

I forced out: 'S-sorry, I thought ... I mistook you for someone else...' Satisfied at clearly having induced crippling embarrassment in me, Not-Natalie and Isn't-Tanya proceeded to ignore me, like I indeed was a jumpy, green pest. I could have just left the table right there and then to go look for Natalie and Tanya, as I desired to, however my bizarre logic kept me in place: it suggested that if I left immediately it might appear to these pretty strangers that I didn't like the look of them, which would make them hate me even more.

And so, I stood dangerously near the edge of the table, to maximise out-of-the-way-ness, bobbing my head rhythmically to loud rock music and swaying as much as my stiff, nervous bones would allow. *Damn ever-increasing tolerance! Do I really need more drunkenness that quickly nowadays?!* It was obvious to me I needed more booze in the blood: I had become quite experienced in recognising when those anxiety genes of mine came back to life and needed to be doused with ethanol once more. My lukewarm beer was exhausted of its contents in a rapid sequence of mouthfuls. The administration was sufficient to raise the blood concentration to an effective level.

Woozy and well-off, I dismounted the table of humiliation and wandered the premises in search of my belly-girls. After a few unsuccessful minutes, I came to, and decided to rest at, the table my group of friends were sitting at – my relatively *new* group of friends.

It goes without saying that this table was not in the main room of the bar, else sitting at it would not be allowed unless you were maimed, or terminally ill. It was at the foosball section. Currently it seated nearly the entire group of dudes with whom I'd been hanging out with for the previous few weeks. Most people would have found that their appearance very snugly fit the "skater" stereotype. That's become a misleading term: the vast majority of individuals that dress that way, including this group of people, have little to no interest in skateboarding. Hell, these guys would probably have gotten asthmatic attacks at such tremendous physical exertion. Another few person-genres society might call them are "punks", or "metalheads", or even "emos" and "goths".

The clothes they wore – which I had starting wearing as well – were mostly dark in colour, and had a general aura of “I don’t give a damn what you think of me”, yet had a somewhat paradoxical attention to detail, what with all the ornaments like bracelets, necklaces, piercings, hair alterations and tattoos.

If you have a prejudice against this subculture, I feel I must tell you that they were, for the most part, really quite kind: they would readily buy you a drink, if they weren’t broke, as usual; they’d share their cigarettes, if their current pack was still fairly well stocked; and they would listen to you if you had problems, so long as you were willing to hear of theirs as well, of which there was always an abundance. It was also true, however, that they could quite possibly be the most cynical and morose beings in the solar system.

I thought they were just the *coolest*: I’d attached myself to a crowd that would have been braaied at the stake back home in Zastron, and this was REALLY liberating. These skaters/punks/goths indulged quite hard in drink, drugs and cigarettes. It was a way for them to cope with all their misery (most of that misery being self-expanded, or even self-created and self-inflicted, but I glossed over that).

By now, I was considered part of their circle – he new guy, but a part, nevertheless. I was closest to Christoff, who was the first of them that I’d met, and had been my introduction to the group. A fellow Geelhout inmate, he and I were the only ones in the group who could speak Afrikaans fluently. His documentation actually rivalled mine: it read “Gideon Christoffel Bouwer Schoonwinkle”. Stoff – this was the group’s pet-name for him – had a messy mane of brown hair, and, to compensate for this relative normality, he had a lip ring on his left side, and two smaller rings on the right eyebrow. In addition to these, Christoff was planning to get a nose ring too – he was working his way through the sensory-organs I suppose.

Then there was the guy I’d describe as the leader of the group, Phillip Boig, who was often called “Phlippy”. He had short, blond hair that he put wax into to make it ever so slightly spikey. On his left upper arm was a tattoo in honour of his deceased father: a large, complex jumble of Latin words, dates and curly lines. He had a metal necklace depicting a guitar around his neck at all times – apparently, he’d once been a fairly dexterous guitarist but had become lazy after school.

Julio Brúnn, whom we called “Jules”, was a sharp-faced, tan-skinned, short dude with a mighty Jewfro. He had tattoos that grew like moss; at 20 he already had four sprawling ones that would propagate every now and again. Like he did on this night, he would avoid long-sleeve shirts as much as possible to display these inky embellishments, despite cold weather. They were pretty tacky actually, was the opinion I’d come to, but obviously I’d never voiced this. I couldn’t really make out most of them, as they were quite dense and messy, but I knew they were of a morbid nature.

Then there was Grey Zlee, who was quiet, pale and bearded, with long, straight, black hair that reached past his shoulders. He wore about 12 bangles, but just the left arm was weighed down with

these. It was plain to me that he still didn't really like me much at this point. The group would call him *Mr Grey* in reference to that book that had recently come out: that one that most old ladies got off on in a tragic display of their stagnated lives, and most men felt obligated to passionately hate in an ignorant display of their misogyny.

The whole group, apart from myself, were either were, or would reach, 20 that year. There were two other members who were not present at Naglesse on this night. The one was Zenzele Insimbi – Zen for short. Zen was a dude who had pierced ears and braided hair, and was seriously into heavy metal. The other was Dylan De Dunkle, who was a bespectacled chap, and an alternative rock and video game enthusiast. I'd considered building rapport with him over *Skyrim*, but I never told him of the level 30 lightning mage I'd abandoned about five months before, since his hobby was mocked by the rest of the group. He strictly wore only black clothes, and his ornaments were a silver skull ring and a backwards cap – also black.

Everyone had roughly their own style, so I had to be original too when it came to adopting their pedantic fashion. That's why I decided to dye my hair pitch black; I felt very weird seeing myself in the mirror for about a week after doing it, and had quite the existential crisis, but I powered through it for the sake of fitting in to this fresh, glossy set of friends, and by now I was used to it.

My *plaas* attire had been removed from my wardrobe, folded, stuffed into my travel bag and ignored. I'd hoped that the peroxide that had decoloured my hair had also eaten away at the bars of my culture prison, and that the dye and new threads would ensure that no one would recognise this fugitive.

With us at this night was a girl who'd been christened Christine – not actually part of the group, just an occasional add-on. I'd not met her before this evening, this blue-haired emo girl whose cynicism was off the charts – perhaps even award worthy. I quite fancied her, due to her pretty face, but alas, my introduction at the start of the night was met with an air of un-interest.

Okay no, it was more like a gust of *don't-give-a-fuck*, or a cyclone of *couldn't-give-a-shit*. I naturally took this personally, even though I had a hunch this was her standard meeting-mode to any new acquaintance. Her insulting introduction (combined with my slight inebriation) resulted in me being a bit nasty to her, albeit in a joking manner. This caused her to become notably nicer to me, which confused me.

*What the hell? Do girls like it when you're a dick to them? Or is it like it is with a bro: they appreciate the humour of it? Maybe she's a serial killer who wants to lure me into a sense of deceitful security now that I've offended her! Probably not, right? Probably just one of those things... Should probably stop engaging with this blue troll-doll, just to be safe.*

I couldn't gather enough evidence for these opposing theories that night: I was not by any means a conversation creator in this troop. I'd only contribute short snippets to the topics of talk, which

primarily consisted of hatred or disapproval of some kind, or rock music, or some movie or series (usually dislike of said movies/series).

Just after I sat down, the conversation turned to the observation of an individual who either didn't know the unofficial dress code of Nagless, or blatantly ignored it. He was wearing fancy club clothes – something JP or Joe would wear.

'There's that *doofus-spoon* again,' Christoff alerted our attention. 'I haven't seen one in Naglesse in a while.'

Phillip observed him and concluded: 'That guy's such a jock, I bet he *eats* Deep Heat.'

The group had this sick, crazy sense of humour that would show up every now and then, and then quickly die down to their cool jadedness again. This was one of those times for Phillip, who was usually the one that this temporary insanity would envelop.

He stood from his seat and pretended to be a man-beast of some sort and pretended to be some beast munching handfuls of make-believe muscle ointment: 'OM NOM NOM NOM!'

Everyone laughed. He then took another handful of the same fantastical cream, and with a naughty face he rubbed it on his crotch region, to more laughter. It was rare for them to allow such a goofy display, so I relished the moment and heartily laughed along with them. He sat down, and all were soon morose again.

'I wonder if doofus-spoon is going to survive this place,' remarked Grey.

This abnormal insult – "doofus-spoon" – probably needs explaining. This group of metalheads/potheads/dickheads insulted *everyone*: people they didn't like, people they were neutral to, and of course close friends, including members of the group itself – at a tremendous frequency. When a group does that, regular insults, like "motherfucker" and "dumbass", lose their punch. Thus, they resorted to using strange, made-up insults by combining two words: usually a medium scorer on my Grandmother index, like "doofus", with a harmless noun, like "spoon", in this case. I loved these, and thus I readily adopted the practice. The group would chuckle in appreciation if someone came up with a clever one.

After a small while, I was ready to look for Tanya and Natalie again: 'I'm going to stand on the tables, anyone joining?'

I was disappointed when they all declined, but not surprised. They hardly ever actually did go onto the tables, and then, they usually complained that there wasn't enough "proper music". Each had his own particular definition of "proper music" so it was impossible to satisfy all of them. Fearing a repetition of the previous encounter with two girls, I went and quickly replenished my social skills with a shot of brandy before continuing my search.



*Dammit man, where are those gals?! I was getting worried that someone had taken them home before I could (try). Tanya, the slim blond, and Natalie, the voluptuous brunette, were friends of Phillip, and had made my acquaintance that very evening. I'd made a good first impression thanks to a generous serving of tequila just prior to them arriving, and I'd carried on that wave of successful socializing right up to the point where I suggested they feel my abs. And then you just had to go and take a piss, didn't you?*

They were also 19 years of age, and I found each just about attractive enough to pursue. *And now that the frost has been fragmented, I must make my move proper!* I'd scoured the profane premises to no success, so I changed tactic: I leaned against a corner in the main room, pretending to be busy on my phone, checking the tables periodically.

Finally, I saw them: they emerged from the ladies' room and got onto one of the makeshift dance floors.

'Hello, you naughty's!' I said after making my way there.

'Helloooo,' said Natalie.

'Hey, creepy stomach man!' said Tanya, and she gave me a cute smack on the arm. I liked this reaction, so I felt that I was in the clear to make good on my mission and ask Tanya for her number.

'Hey, Tanya,' I shouted over the Red Hot Chili Peppers song.

'Ja?'

'Can I –' I was muted by a realisation: *Won't it be awkward if I ask Tanya for her number and not Natalie?* It wasn't that I didn't want Natalie's digits as well, but if I asked one first, I was obviously showing favouritism, right? There was the possibility of asking both simultaneously, but my brain simply refused to accept that such a double-task had a viable probability of succeeding.

All this my frantic little noggin thought after gaining Tanya's attention – I had been staring at her with saucer eyes and a gaping mouth for about three whole seconds. I needed to think of something to say other than "... have your number", which was clearly an apocalyptic word choice.

' – ask you a serious question?'

'Sure!' she said, seeming a little unsettled by my apparent brisk stroke and miraculous recovery.

*Cool, saved me some time.* '... What ... is your favourite colour?' the poor noodle came up with.

'Ha-ha! Hmmm, green. What's yours?'

'Pink,' I lied, to more giggles. My heart had begun beating at the strange situation I'd conjured, despite having avoided catastrophe. I needed to find a way to get one alone to hit on and not hurt the other's feelings. It didn't matter which, but I needed them to be separated.

I had an idea soon: 'So, Natalie, do you like rock music?' I inquired.

'Ja! I love it! Do you?'

‘Sure, I like most music, really.’

She nodded and turned away to dance. *Shit*. I tapped her skinnier, flaxen comrade on the shoulder to regain her attention. ‘Do you like club music, Tanya?’

‘Hmm, if I feel like dancing, sure.’

‘Me too!’ I lied, ‘I’m getting a little bored of this rock... you feel like hitting The Drop Off with me?’

‘Hmm, no... I’m not in the mood for that place now. Sorry!’

‘Okay, that’s cool...’ They seemed to suddenly turn a bit cold toward me after this questioning. *What the hell just happened?! We were getting along swimmingly! And now the social lungs are fast filling with water... Was it my weird questioning? Have they realised my secret agenda and are now trying to deter me? Am I imagining all this? Did someone speak to them while I was away? Tell them that I’m a psycho!?*

I decided that I definitely needed more booze still. I was about to take my leave, but I then realised this could be my opportunity. ‘Hey girls, I’m off the bar, one of you want to join me?’

‘Do you want anything, dude?’ Tanya asked Natalie.

‘I’m good, thanks!’

‘Ja, me too, see you now-now!’

‘Okay!..’ *Christ...*

I descended the table alone. When I checked my wallet on the way to stand in the bar queue, however, I came to the realisation that I didn’t have sufficient credits of the Republic for another drink. I could have asked my cool new friends, but since I had joined their little group just a month or so prior, I didn’t think it was a good idea. I didn’t want to admit to the girls that I was broke, so I miserably went to the bathroom to waste time. I didn’t need to “go”, so I just stood in front of the corner urinal for a bit.

I zipped up as someone entered to actually make appropriate use of the facilities. I made my way back to the girls. To my disappointment, a really big guy was chatting to them. They seemed quite jovial in his presence. He was tall and barrel-chested, with a Maori tattoo on his beefy bicep. *Shit, who is this roid-ape?*

I stood at a distance and contemplated my situation. Since I could afford no more booze, had fumbled my flirtation attempt, and I didn’t want to see the girls get kissed by this oaf-lolly, who I didn’t see myself besting, I decided to call it quits with my *magie-meisies*.

I re-joined my emo/punk/junk friends and their table of nonchalance. When I got back, I saw none other than Ted, the furry music know-it-all, sitting at the table – it turned out he was friends with Grey.

‘Whaaat, look it’s Frans Townshend!’ he said.

Phillip’s face lit up. ‘Hey, he *does* look like Pete Townshend!’

Phillip was the only one at the table who knew old bands like The Who, so no one other than him knew what Pete Townshend looked like, but his leadership dictated that I was now to be referred to as “Townshend”. They called me Townshend for about an hour, and then at some point in the night, through the mutagen of drunken socializing, it would somehow become “F-Shend” – short for “Frans Townshend” I suppose. *F-Shend* sounded extremely corny to me, like some awful rap artist, but my friends seemed insistent that I be re-named this, so unfortunately it would stick beyond the evening. I was pretty bleak about the failure with Natalie and Tanya, so I didn’t feel like talking much. At this point in my nicotine career, I limited my smoking to three cigarettes a night out, but now that my prospects of a smooch were obliterated, I asked Christoff for a fourth, and then Jules for another.

*I wonder what happened. At least I had a short while of flirting with them though, and feeling each other’s tummies was fun – a peculiar triumph. Someone like Bloomstein wouldn’t have been able to achieve anything close to that.*

The day after this, I’d come to realise that the oaf-ape who had come along would have probably occupied one of the girls, isolating the other for me, and I would kick myself for having given in so easily. Thankfully, my defeated sulking was eventually alleviated by the arrival of Jules’s older sister, Anna. She was a beanie-wearing bundle of joy, who had warmed to me almost immediately. Her easy approval of me meant she was one of my new favourite people.

She gasped when she saw me. ‘You coloured your hair, Fransie!’

(‘You mean F-Shend,’ – Grey)

‘Aw, you noticed, dear!’ I said in a feminine voice.

‘Oooh! All it needs now is a few bright green tips in the front,’ she recommended whilst gently streaking her hand through my cosmetically altered mop.

‘Hmmm... that could look cool!’ I said, picturing the proposed modification. *No one in the group has hair like that...*

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A few days later I walked out the hairstylist with my new green frosted tips (and with a surprisingly reduced bank account). I was now a proper punk/rebel/delinquent. Christoff had come with me; I asked him how it looked, and he said it looked “pretty damn cool”, as enthusiastically as his jaded persona would allow. I was very self-conscious walking the streets with my new eye-magnet crown. It felt like every second person ogled me, and a part of me wanted to hide in humiliation.

‘Are you sure it looks fine? It’s not too much?’

‘Man, it’s never too much.’

‘Cool...’

As we were waking on the pavements, I did my best to avoid people's faces, as to not perceive their disapproval. I felt relief once I was in the Geelhout building. We made for Christoff's room, and on the way Joe saw me.

'Whoa, the new hair's looking sick, bro!'

I couldn't tell whether he was being serious or not, so I just smiled and said: 'Thanks, man.' I supposed his compliment was sincere, but only because, I thought: *that jerk has tacky taste anyway*. Once in his room, I looked in Christoff's full body mirror. I felt the exact same feeling that I'd felt after making the hair black: as if a stranger was looking at me. *It must be REALLY eye catching!* The shy little twerp in me, who wanted to hide from everyone, suggested I pull the plug on this skater endeavour, but the financial sacrifice I had made for it obligated me to stick with it.

*Besides, the only solution now would be a close shave of the scalp, and me being bald, teamed with my skinniness, would undoubtedly turn my appearance to that of a cancer patient, which would be even more eye-drawing.*

Two days after this, I had my next Physics Winter School class. This burden, which would last the whole of the morning, was a result of my getting a final mark of 46% for Physics. Because of it, I could not return to the farm for the mid-year holidays – I didn't know if this was a good thing or not. I hated having lectures in the holidays, when hardly anyone else did, but I wasn't exactly keen on going back to the Free State either – my cool new friends were all here! Added to this, I was virtually the only person present on my floor at res: Charlie, JP, Jan – they'd all gone home for the holidays, and this was great.

Imelela was not the one I greeted at the gate on my way to the campus as he was on leave (he'd made sure to inform me before he went, lest I assumed he'd gotten fired and had a mental breakdown). I didn't know the name of the new guard; he didn't have as many years' experience and didn't have his predecessor's chronic verbal diarrhoea, which meant I wasn't as fond of him, but we did greet one another with gestures each morning.

I abhorred the idea that I had to sacrifice my holidays, but if I was honest, these supplementary classes for all the forty-percenters were really not too bad. Everything covered was familiar, except now it made sense and I could actually do the calculations because the lessons were longer and more intimate and unburdened with other subjects (and res mates) draining my attention. At today's class, we were finishing off gas laws. As usual, during the half hour break I relaxed on the grass with Bes Nogi, a girl from the day res *Veritas* who I had befriended during the semester. She was attending the Winter School of one of her IT subjects.

I didn't talk to anyone during the classes, both because I wanted to prove my capabilities now that I had failed, but also because I had no one to talk to there anyway. But Bes and I chatted nicely during these breaks. This day, after noticing my new hair and stating approval thereof (of which I couldn't help but be sceptical) she told me that she was a little upset.

‘Why?’

‘So, my dad *is* going the conference in Paris, and he said I can go with –’

‘Good!’ I butted in, knowing her great love for Paris.

‘– But I thought it through and decided not to, because the money could be better spent on something *else*. Something I actually need...’

‘What?’ I thought it would be something like study money, or a new car, but no.

She whispered, making eye contact for a moment before nervously looking away: ‘A nose job...’

‘Oh!’ I had no clue how to respond to this. Her nose was a quite big, and that’s coming from me, with the weevil schnoz, but I didn’t see mutilation as quite necessary

‘Ja,’ she said, embarrassed. ‘I’m going to make this thing a bit less ugly,’ and pointed at the “thing”.

‘No man... it’s not ugly,’ I said awkwardly, ‘but I mean, go for it if you feel that’s the better thing to do!..’ We sat in uncomfortable silence. While I was contemplating this sacrifice, a skeletal Emily Hanter entered into my mind. *I suppose Emily couldn’t just get surgery to fix her body dissatisfaction. Wait! What about liposuction?! Or was that too expensive? Would Bes go as far as suicide if she couldn’t get that surgery?!*

In fear of this I wanted to tell Bes that I thought a rhinoplasty was a splendid idea, but then I realised this would imply that I thought her nose was gargantuan and horrific, and so I rather just kept my trap shut, and endured the bitter tang of awkward stillness instead.

She broke it by saying that she wanted to go have lunch at a café or something after our classes, and asked whether I would like to join her. I was low on pocket money but decided my craving for coffee and ice-cream was too great. We went to *Scent* by my suggestion: a selfish suggestion for they specialised in these two things, but it also had light meals for her. It was very busy. Bes got a club sandwich and I got hot and bitter filter coffee, with sweet, cold ice-cream. She took the onions off her sandwich, put them on her side plate and jokingly shoved them in my face. ‘Do you like onions? Here, you can have them!’

I recoiled in fear of their pungency and infamous effect, covering my nose. ‘No! No, thank you!’

‘What?’ she asked laughing, ‘Do you also not like their taste?’

‘Ja, can’t stand it,’ I lied.

After lunch she went back to her commune and I ran some errands at a nearby shopping centre. I bought some groceries, and also needed to get my phone fixed, thanks to some vaguely remembered events that broke said phone an earlier evening. Phone handed in at the shop, I made the journey back to res.

I chained my bike up in the Geelhout bike shed, and as I walked to the res building, I noticed an older man standing near the building entrance. I didn’t recognise him at first because the sun was bright,

but he turned around when my footsteps came into hearing range, and when he did so, this man's mouth went agape, as if to expel the tremendous well of surprise that was being produced within him.

*Hey, I know this guy, I thought to myself.*

*Oh shit... he's related to me!*

'...Pa?' I asked timidly.

'Frans? What the hell is going on with your hair? What the hell are you wearing, Boet!?'

What the hell I was wearing was a jumper with the Nirvana logo, with black jeans and sneakers. And let's not forget those offensive, expensive, artificial colours I'd added to my hair – I was definitely wearing those too. I stood still and silent for a few seconds and proceeded to answer: 'Oh, I uh, I decided to colour it.'

*Oh fuck, I didn't think this through properly.*

'Boet... you look like rubbish,' he said with a disgusted look fixed above my brow. His face kept its disgusted form as it shifted to look me in the eyes. 'Why the *fuck* haven't you answered any of my calls or messages? I've been trying to reach you for two days.'

'My phone broken on Friday night, Pa...' I informed him without making eye contact – my standard protocol when admitting to him that I'd messed up.

*'Ag donder, is jy dom gebliksem of iets terwyl jy hier was?'*

At this, I noticed that instead of the usual pure dread and remorse at his ire, I was actually feeling *annoyed* and *angry* as well. This was a totally new reaction to his chewing out – I decided I'd have a go at *acting* differently too.

I looked into his eyes and said: 'Do you think I *meant* for it to happen?! It wasn't my damn fault!' (That last part was a lie, but he wouldn't know.)

This novel attitude from a subject that he expected to be submissive surprised him into a red rage: '*KEN JOU PLEK, FRANS!*' he shouted, holding an imaginary grey belt in his right paw, above his head – a familiar stance that quickly purged all defiance from me.

'S-sorry, Pa...' I whimpered, having retreated from my having a go at blatant disrespect. He breathed heavily – fists on hips. My gaze was back on the floor.

'I sent you about *seven* messages yesterday saying I was coming to Pretoria and that I was going to stop by,' he said, more to himself, 'and today I tried phoning about seven times as well, wasting my bloody airtime on a fucked-up phone.' He glanced at my hair, 'Now I'm not so sure it was a good idea.'

*If you had any brains, you'd have assumed my phone was not in a working condition, you wart-spatula...*

'I didn't get any of those messages or calls, Pa... Sorry.'

'And this failing Physics?'

‘Ja, Pa...’ *I passed Chemistry though, which a ton of people failed!* ‘It was *moer* difficult. But I’m doing well at the Winter School!’

*That’s why I couldn’t come home for the holidays! That’s why I’m stuck here taking classes. Or didn’t you notice I wasn’t there?*

‘You’d better be, for the amount of money I had to shovel out for it.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said meekly.

His tone changed a bit: ‘I know what you res boys get up to here. I was once there, I understand. But I never *failed* anything. I also didn’t come back looking like a *zef moffie*.’ At this insult, he paused to bring himself under relative control.

‘Your mother suggested that res was the cause of your decline in academics, and now I have to admit that I agree. She suggested we get you into a commune close to campus instead.’

*Hell yeah, get me into a commune!* Fearing the tyrant would change his mind if I showed any positivity at this prospect, I feigned a subtle sadness, and said: ‘It is very hard to study with these maniacs.’

He looked off into the distance as if recollecting deep memories. ‘Ja, I know...’ He looked at his watch and said: ‘I have to get going, sort out your phone as soon as possible, you hear me?’

‘Ok, Pa.’

‘Cheers,’ he said and turned towards his car. ‘And sort out that disgusting hair while you’re at it, Boet!’ he said when we were a few meters apart.

‘Ja, *fokkit*, Knollies,’ I said without thinking. I hadn’t said it to his face, nor very loudly, but I said it with just enough volume for him to be able to hear, though he pretended not to and kept walking.

I felt a rush of pride after this gutsy farewell phrase that had gone unpunished. Then, I considered that he might be going to retrieve some makeshift grey belt from his car, and decided to quickly head for the safety of the res building – just in case.

As I entered through the doors, I recognised the drone of his Fortuner departing.

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The next Friday was Jules’s birthday party. For the sake of occasion, it was not to be held at the usual Naglesse, but a similar rock-music establishment called Amusement Empire – usually just referred to as “Empire”. This was to be my first time going to this joint, which was about 20 minutes from res. Zen lifted Christoff and myself, since we were on his way anyway. I sat in the back, wearing my thick white jersey that had a skull on it and purple chino trousers. Zen played his heavy metal – he told me it was a band called Trivium.

‘Sounds cool!’ I said, not really understanding it, but staying open-minded. Zen said they were “pretty sick” but sounded too much like Metallica.

‘Okay,’ I said. I had at least heard of the name “Metallica”.

Christoff said he thought this Trivium which was currently damaging our eardrums was actually superior to Metallica, to which Zen said: ‘That’s cute.’

When we got there at 19:30, Jules was already quite drunk, thanks to the birthday drinks from those present, which included big sis Anna. I eagerly presented her my new green hair tips, seeing as it was a product of her influence.

She loved it: ‘I told you it would look nice, Fransie! I’m glad you listened,’ she pointed to her own group of friends, ‘these idiots never take my advice.’ We sat at a table near the foosball tables. I hated foosball, almost definitely because I was so crap at it, so I didn’t participate in any of the matches. I rather sat at the table, steadily getting drunk, and steadily increasing my chances of lung cancer (the three cigs a night rule was once again forgotten due to it being a celebration). Nothing of particular interest happened until Phillip announced, in a whisper, that he had brought along some marijuana. Anna was very happy at this news: ‘Come, we can have it in my car!’

Phillip asked who would be assisting in hotboxing the vehicle; Dylan RSVP’d, as did one of Anna’s older friends. And me – I’d been eager to try pot ever since I saw *Pineapple Express*. Once in the backseat of the old Ford Fiesta, however, when I saw the crooked, white twig in Phillip’s hand, I got nervous. It was all very *real* suddenly – the great grey belt of the law threatened. I wanted to back out, but my pride couldn’t let that happen in front of these fearless friends of mine.

‘Hey, piss-nibble, you’ve used before, right?’ asked Dylan, who I suspect had noticed my apprehension.

‘...Sure, but only like twice,’ I lied.

‘Oh, okay,’ he said, with that casual-but-strained voice of someone right after *dagga* inhalation – the words said using as little of the precious, pale breath as possible. He handed me the joint, I took a small drag and inhaled. I didn’t cough, for which I was grateful; this was undoubtedly thanks to the few months of cigarette residue protecting the old gullet. It smelt funny, but familiar. I recognised it from occasions at Naglesse and other establishments – sweet, bushy smell. *So, that’s what it was! Not vegan hippy-flatulence, as I first thought.*

The novelty and the risk of incarceration was a bit much for me, so I decided that the single drag was all I’d be having – not so little that I’d be called a pansy, but little enough for my pansiness. I told my car-mates that it was “too damn stuffy”, and got out the car. I was quite certain that I wouldn’t get high from a single little drag, so decided I’d enjoy the rest of the evening with good old, reliable alcohol. I joined a group of Christine (yet to murder me), Jules and Zen, who were all waiting for a turn at the foosball table. Christine was telling a story about her zealous discontentment with the individuals she



worked with at some clothes store. Uninterested in this, I had a gander at my surroundings. I noticed they were... different. It was the same, but I perceived it... differently. Things were... funny... but it wasn't like being drunk. I also noted an inexplicable delight within me.

*Oooh, it did work!*

I was so relaxed! I wanted to amplify this feeling with more Mary Jane, but thought it better to simply be content with the way it was. The conversation had gone on a different tangent that I found very hard to follow, so I said as little as possible – I didn't trust myself under this new influence. Not wanting to waste this new experience on conversation I couldn't participate in, I took a seat alone and entertained myself with a cigarette. *From the bicycle back to the tricycle, I guess.*

The smoke billowing from my mouth now amazed me like never before. I recalled that as a kid, smoking looked super cool. Little me would think: *How awesome it must be to breathe out the smoke, as if you have some draconic superpower! But obviously I can't ever smoke. Pa would bliksem me... And I'd die!..*

I laughed that I was indeed smoking now, but Pa wasn't around to beat me up. And I was dying, but aren't we all? For younger me, I finally indulged in my make-believe power: I dragged deeply and ejected a stream of my "dragon-breath", as if attacking some invisible entity. My left hand soon became a *visible* entity to pretend attack – I scorched the sinister fiend with a gust of my fierce exhalation.

I was about to make the hand dramatically fall in defeat when a drunk and high Phillip laughed and said: 'Looks like the green hit you pretty hard, bra!' I couldn't help laughing too, but I was now *highly* self-conscious.

*This fucking demon herb! Look what it has reduced me to! A madman that pretends he's a smoke-dragon!* The bliss and calm were gone, and in their place was apprehension and embarrassment.

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Conversation seemed to have kept me in check before, so I went back over to Jules, Zen and Christine, who were still waiting for a foosball table open. We were just chatting, and I was calming down, when someone unfamiliar to me came to our little group. You may find it hard to believe, even if my cognitive abilities were not at their optimal state, but I had great difficulty pin-pointing this human being's gender. I know it seems ridiculous, but allow me to describe this creature: he or she had a curly bob of dark brown hair, a voice that would be a little squeaky for a guy, but slightly deep for a girl, and was wearing a black hoodie with jeans and sneakers, so most of the body shape was made indistinguishable by this gender-neutral clothing.

'Hey, twat-turnip! You made it!' Jules said to the genderless entity.

'Hey yourself, birthday boy!' the twat-turnip returned.

Forget all those common or garden insults like idiot or jerk, or even twat-turnip for that matter: if you really want to insult someone, just ask them whether they're a dude or a chick, with sincere confusion. I didn't do that – I wasn't quite *that* high. I decided to instead ask some probing questions: 'Hi, what's your name?' I politely inquired.

'Erin,' it said with friendly eyes.

*You're kidding me*, I thought.

'What's yours?' he-she asked while holding out a hand to be shook. I took it, and of course the grip was neutral – not really stiff or gentle, but just snug.

'Frans. Nice to meet you.'

Jules chatted to "Erin" and I observed this specimen for a gender study. *But does it matter? After all, gender is simply a person-subgenre... Who am I kidding, of course it matters: it's a genre you can never escape. I wish it weren't so, but if it indeed wasn't, I would be able to ask this epicene what's between those legs without issue, but I can't. Even in the unlikely case that this individual doesn't mind the inquiry, those around to witness my bewilderment would make her/him care by their nastiness.*

*Does that mean all person-genres are inescapable?*

Jules, Christine and Zen suddenly broke from the conversation because a foosball table had finally become available. Erin and I were left as a twosome.

*Just two blokes/just a dude and a chick!*

I thought of leaving, but I didn't want to leave a bro alone/abandon a lady! And my strange ambition encouraged me to try and decipher this puzzle of androgyny. I thought of another possible revealing question: 'So uh, where did you go to school?'

'Wow, straight to that question hey?' I went to Woodmound College.'

*A co-ed school... no help.*

'And you?' she-he politely returned the question.

'I come from a farm in Free State, so you wouldn't know the school.'

*Do you pee sitting up or down?* I almost inquired out of desperation. *No, no, that will certainly be the wrong wire to cut.* Instead, I ingeniously thought of this: 'What do you wear when you go for a swim?'

'WHAT!? Ha-ha!' the maybe-hermaphrodite laughed, 'Why are you asking me that?'

I smiled. 'Uhhh... Well, one can tell a lot about someone from what they wear to swim. For example: I'm a trunks man, as opposed to a speedo man, and that says something about me.'

'Okay, okay, fair enough, Mr Trunks man. So, what do you *guess* I wear?'

*Oh, you bitch/asshole...*

'You want me to guess?! Uhm... you... you strike me as a... skinny dipper!'

*Dodged that one.*

It laughed again. ‘Yup! That’s me!’

*Oh, come on!*

‘Ha-ha, but really, what do you wear when you can’t skinny dip?’

‘I *always* skinny dip,’ Erin no-sex said suggestively.

*Damn you, you androgynous thing! People are so confusing...*

I had to temporarily give up since Jules had come back. ‘I see you two are getting to know one another,’ he slurred.

‘Funny one, this one,’ said Erin, gesturing with his-or-her head to me.

*Is that the only head on that body?* Whatever Erin had around that confounded crotch region, (s)he seemed to have taken a liking to me.

‘I’ll take that as a compliment, *Erin*. Excuse me, I’m off to the bathroom quick.’

I made my way to Christoff and Phillip – the latter’s eyes were nice and red. I interrupted Christoff saying something to his highness Phillip about also wanting some highness.

‘Dude, what gender is that person there?’ I whispered to them and pointed at the sexless offender.

‘Who? *Erin*?! Ha-ha-ha!’ laughed Phillip.

‘What? I really don’t know!’

‘Dude, F-shend is so lit-up he doesn’t know whether Erin is a boy or a girl!’ Christoff giggled.

‘Shhhh!’ I hissed.

They laughed a lot. I waited for it to die down: ‘You’re not going to tell me, are you?’

‘Nope.’

‘Nuh-uh.’

‘Pfff, whatever.’

They were beaming at my stupidity. I enjoyed bringing them such entertainment, so I just went with it. The subject was returned to Christoff telling Phillip that he also wanted some weed. Phillip, who was pretty stoned, just told him they’d go later when he wanted some more.

‘Come on, Phlippy!’

‘We’ll go just now, Stoff. Promise.’

Not long after this, none other than Erin came to our little group. *Here we go again*, I thought. Phillip shook its hands as if it were boy, and Christoff gave it a hug as if it were a girl. Then they laughed. Erin was confused.

‘What’s so funny?’

‘This idiot here,’ said Christoff.

‘Oh, Mr Trunks man you mean!’

The other two stop laughing and grinned in confusion at this.

‘Seriously, Erin, what the fuck are you?’ I asked in comical desperation. The other two burst out laughing.

‘Hu? What do you mean? Do you still want to know what I wear when I swim?’ Erin asked, smiling yet confused. The other two started to *die* from laughter at this.

‘No like, you know like, what are you? Like, I don’t understand,’ I asked over the laughter of the others as I chuckled, glad to bring them such hysteria. Mr Miss was clearly finding my unkind questioning and the laughing of the other two hurtful. Unfortunately, I didn’t take it seriously, and I continued feeding my friends hilarity at Erin’s expense: ‘Like... you confuse me.’ I said, as I gestured to the whole baffling body with my hand.

*She* nodded *her* head, and with folded arms stared at me with an irritated expression. I don’t know why, maybe it was the aura of *her* reaction, maybe it was my antennae waking up and smelling her *female* pheromones, but all of a sudden, it was clear that she was, well, a she.

I mimicked the pissed-off way with which she was looking at me, but with a much stupider face, which caused yet another wave of laughter from Christoff and Phillip, which cause me to burst out laughing too.

Miss She-Girl the woman-lady left.

‘Dude, Erin is a *chick*, you stoned spit-scissors!’ said Phillip.

‘Duuuh! Seriously, F-shend,’ said Christoff.

‘Yip,’ I said stupidly, staring at the floor.

Her leaving put a stop to the performance, and my ruthless joking too, as a result. And then I became fully aware of what a dick I’d been. She was just a flat-chested, husky-voiced, non-makeup-wearing tomboy – and a cool one at that.

And now she was gone.

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I didn’t want to stay at the bar with someone who now hated me, so I left unannounced. I couldn’t go home, since I was at the liberty of Zen’s lift back, but Amusement Empire was located right next to a large shopping mall called Orchard Mall. I waltzed into it at around 9 p.m., lighting the way with a cigarette-torch. Zen had mentioned that he planned to leave around midnight, so I had a good while to wander the centre feeling like a jerk. The narcotics in my hemolymph were at least diminishing.

Naturally, most stores were closed: the only thing the mall had to offer visitors at that hour were restaurants, movies and an ice-skating rink, though those would soon close too. The rink was near to the entrance I’d used. I walked up to its glass wall to have a look at the people, mostly younger than I, sliding anti-clockwise. I’d never even seen one in real life, let alone skated myself. I first noticed the

graceful ones speeding around, spinning and skidding so majestically. Then I paid attention to the newbies who clearly couldn't skate – clinging to the side railing like arctic toddlers. The gliding swirl of people seemed to be having a lot of fun, even the ice-babies (despite their occasional terror as the railing was let go of), but I didn't see how I'd ever be able to join. I would be too embarrassed to stumble around in front of everyone long enough to learn.

*Besides, it's clearly more a teenage thing – too late for old me.* This depressed me, so I carried on walking. Past the rink was an open roof courtyard with several restaurants. In the centre were some trees which had each been draped with fairy lights – I thought they looked quite beautiful. I wanted to admire them, and there was even an open bench nearby to do so. The restaurants were still busy though, and I wasn't in the mood for strangers staring at me, especially since I thought my eyes might be red. At this thought, I decided to go to a bathroom and examine my eyes, just in case. No bathroom was in sight, but I supposed that a restaurant would have one. *And I am in the mood for something sweet...*

I went to a bistro that wasn't very busy. I asked for a table in the smokers. I ordered a draught and some custard, and then asked where their toilets were. This bathroom was significantly cleaner than the one at Empire. It was white and pristine, and so were my eyes, to my relief. I decided to wash my hands with soap, splash my face and rinse my mouth, in case that bushy smell was lingering. My fellow bathroom goers included a very uninteresting middle-aged man, and a cap-wearing teenager. The former went into a cubicle and played a solo on his defecation trumpet, and I was reminded that this "clean" bathroom was a dirty lie.

When I got back, my beer was waiting. The custard, or *Crème brûlée* to be specific (and posh), was good, but too little. Had it kept my attention longer, my thoughts may have not wondered to Erin and my stupid display of selfish comedy, but they did. I felt ashamed of how I must have made her feel, and I imagined what would have occurred had I stayed, and things got worse. A plump, uninvited Emily Hanter joined the thought sequence: she was now being laughed at by Stoff and Phlippy for her chubbiness. I got a rush of adrenaline as I thought of Erin also following a calamitous path in response to the laughter.

In my vision, Erin began crying, plastering her face with foundation and lipstick and mascara to the point of impairment – to the point of suffocation. My friends all shook their disappointed heads at me. With these sulking fantasies, my feelings ran away from me, and before I knew it, I felt tears on the way.

*No, stop it, you baby!* I reprimanded myself. I took a deep breath, clenched my fists and halted the waterworks. I paid for my satisfying, albeit imperfect snack, and left to explore the Mall, lest more vivid imaginings came.

*I'm not using cannabis again*, I told myself as I left the restaurant. *The immature fantasising, the unkindness, the vivid imagination – no, that's not acceptable.*

After the handsome courtyard was more indoor mall – all shops closed. The only exception was the cinema, which was to the right at the first intersection, according to a sign. I decided to go have a look.

Observing closed stores while meandering, I eventually saw the escalators going up to the movies in the distance. I could see a kid through the railing of the floor above me. He was playing enthusiastically, making impressive shooting sounds with his mouth, shaking a toy gun about. A particularly vigorous shake sent the fake-firearm flying over the railing, and it fell down to the ground floor, not far from me. It didn't break, and was modelled after a revolver, I saw as I got close. I picked it up, intending to take it up to its owner.

'Sorry!' the kid shouted to me as I picked it up and looked at him. His parents were a bit behind him; I could hear them scorning his behaviour in Afrikaans.

'No man, Christiaan!' 'You're naughty!' the voices said.

I replied to Christiaan: 'It's fine. I'll bring it to you.' And I proceeded up the escalator. Walking with the toy in my hand, I noticed it was exactly what I had wanted at one point when I was a kid, but could not get since at 10 I was already "too old for toys", according to Sis and Pa. It felt nice in my hand – I felt like a badass. I had an urge to keep it for myself.

The boy came to me running. 'Sorry, mister!' Just before I handed it back, I couldn't resist pointing it at him and going "Pew!" He smiled at my onomatopoeic joke.

'Thank you! Bye.'

I chuckled as he ran back, and then I smiled at his parents as a gesture of goodwill. It was not returned – they didn't say anything to me. The dad was frowning and looked away, the mom looked at me with a mixture of disgust and fear for a second, and then spoke to her child meanly.

At this, I remembered that my hair looked like some poisonous frog. When I had committed to the skater/punk/rebel look, I'd forgotten that some people see them as heathens/atheists/Satanists, especially judgmental Afrikaners, like these.

The movies were not far from this revealing incident's location. I sat down on a bench outside the separate theatre entrances. Since the last screenings had long ago begun, there was no one to judge me as I sat, and deeply inhaled the extremely nostalgic scent of popcorn. Back then, I'd been to the movies no more than five times, the most recent being at 16, in Bloemfontein. I had watched *Inception* – I had nearly understood all if it. My gaze naturally wandered to what movies were showing: the poster for a film called *Olympus Has Fallen* displayed a man holding a handgun. It took my thoughts back to the miniature cowboy I had encountered.

*Maybe I should go and buy me a toy gun, now that I get decent pocket money,* I thought. I quickly squished it for its silliness (*damn weed*), especially at the idea of how embarrassing it would be to walk into a toy shop alone as a grown-up. I sat for a while, just fondly recalling the few movie experiences I'd had, keeping at bay the negativity of Erin, until one of the theatre's movies ended and its audience migrated out – I fled.

I soon came to an entrance homologous to the one I had entered with. I made use of it and exited to bask in the crisp night air. There were some stars to be seen, but as always in the city, only a few. My thick jersey exoskeleton was quite warm, but I decided I needed to make a fire too, to combat the icy night. So, I made a tiny one and inhaled the nicotinic smoke it made.

Examining these plumes as a crude form of caveman-like entertainment eventually wore thin; a sign of a shop in the distance whose light passed through the pungent vapour intercepted my attention. It was hard to tell, but about three or more letters were not illuminated. The store wasn't a well-known franchise, so I couldn't decipher the fragmented name without the missing pieces. What I had to guess with was: **SPI E O SE**

The possibilities I came up with were: *Spice Onset? Spider Obsession? Spine Loosener? Spies Op See?!*

I was eventually quite cold, but I lingered for a while: maybe it was my self-sentencing for behaving like a jerk to a newly met person, who was actually very nice. Soon, however, the uncomfortable hypothermia was a bit too much, so I granted myself parole and went back inside. I checked the time on my phone as I was retracing my steps – 11 p.m. I decided that it was time to head back. I considered taking a different route through the mall this time, but decided against it for fear of getting lost. *And then they have to call my mommy on the intercom...*

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When I got back to Amusement Empire, I was surprised to find it busier than when I had left. The premier foosball had ended, and the group were all at a table. Erin-girl-undercover was not with them, so I joined. No one enquired as to where I'd been the past two hours. *Did no one miss me?*

I tentatively asked where Erin was as I re-entered the night's proceedings: they told me she had left at around 22:30, which put me at ease. I asked Christoff if she was really mad at me, or if she was hurt, but he laughed and assured me that she was in good spirits when she left. This was a relief.

'Why's it so busy all of a sudden?' was my next question, looking around at the drastically increased number of customers.

‘Duuude!’ said Zen with a bright face, ‘Didn’t you hear? Hangman's Ecstasy is playing a surprise gig here tonight! Free entrance! They only announced it on Facebook last night. They start at 12. Obviously, we're staying for that.’

I yearned for some more alone time back at res, so this wasn’t the best news. Zen informed me, without my asking, that they were a “deathcore” band – I wasn’t even sure if this was English. Zen had told me on a previous occasion, after I had told him that I didn’t really get the appeal of heavy-metal music, that the best way to experience and get into metal “is through live performance”. So, since I’d never had the opportunity, I guessed it might be good to experience this novelty.

We all assumed a spot four or five meters from the stage at around 10 to 12. I guessed there were about 60 people in the small venue. The band was already onstage, fidgeting with instruments and speakers and the cables connecting these. All were dressed in black, some had tattoos, and some had spikey bracelets. I was daydreaming – starting to feel bad about Erin again – when they abruptly started – this deathcore band.

It just sounded like REALLY intense metal to me: drums like a scrambler engine using sandy petrol, guitars like bricks in a blender, and vocals like an emergency siren, if a siren could get a vicious strain of tuberculosis.

“What about bass?” I hear all you long-fingered bass enthusiasts asking. Sorry, I couldn’t really hear that with my uncultured, treble-loving ears.

This explosive, deafening display of rage was pretty damn exciting, if somewhat unsettling to inexperienced little me. But the most unsettling part was to come, when a lumbering, deeper, vocal-less part of the first song came – the “breakdown” I’d later come to learn it’s called. With this opening breakdown part, a bundle of people just in front of where we were standing evolved from a head-banging, largely sessile entity, into a chaotic bustle of bodies smashing into one another within a matter of seconds.

‘Fuck yeah!’ shouted Zen as he joined the scuffle. He was subjected to the turbulence in this “mosh pit” – I now remembered the name from somewhere.

*So, this is how these crazy things start...*

I tried to pay attention to my friend, who had endangered himself so. I only saw him again once the song ended, the anomaly disappeared too, leaving a person-less hole in the audience. He seemed not only fine, but elated. The next song began seconds later, and it was indistinguishable from the previous to my ears – more sandy-scramblers, brick-blenders and terminal-sirens (and bass, somewhere, I guess). This time, as a loud part came, the mosh reignited, and Zen made fuel of himself once more.

I was at the very edge: a body link in the human chain encapsulating all the furious energy. A few times, a stray body found its way to us less courageous spectators – we simply shoved these bodies back



in or let them leave the pit. It was slightly annoying. Witnessing this completely foreign warlike spectacle baffled me: it was like they were circling vultures, but there was no carcass, so instead they tried to make carcasses of one another.

*Does it not hurt? Or is it a rush like a roller coaster? Or is it just the joy of hurting others, and now it's acceptable because you get hurt as well? Is metal really Satanistic and this is its ungodly influence? Is this some cult sacrifice!?*

To distract myself from this terrifying possibility, I consciously drifted my thoughts to Erin as a sedative of sorts: how I had once again failed at making a connection, and had offended someone. I soon felt like a villain again. I felt like nothing was precious to me, not even my own limbs anymore. And the vicious music started to make some sense. I saw the singer's face, hideously contorted with rage, bending over with a vocal note roaring out his belly, and I wanted to do the same. I felt his fury. I was no longer afraid of the possibility of sinister intentions. The pit of people-particles smashing around now beckoned me to enter: become one with its kinetics, and give life to all my frustration, so that it might smash against some other high momentum frustratee and be destroyed.

*Maybe I should join this nest of incomprehension...*

I leapt shoulder first into the whirl of chaos.

Obscure visions of floor, roof, limbs and light danced before my eyes as my skin felt significant pressure all round, from foreign skin. The most powerful of these dominated and sent me tumbling in its direction until its vigour was depleted and another came to send me elsewhere. All the while, my primal instinct reacted to this archaic stimulus and produced a command to my arms to create a defensive force of their own and push away whatever life was in the immediate vicinity.

It was glorious.

I emerged by authority of a particularly powerful shove into the encapsulating ring of people, of which I had been a member mere seconds before. I gently thudded into some bystanders and apologised. The strangers were sympathetic, asking: 'You okay?'

'Yes!' I said brightly.

I breathed aside, revelling in the surprise, the adrenaline rush, and at my survival. Then I marvelled at how the whole phenomenon – which I was once again observing, but with new eyes – had virtually been without pain of any considerable magnitude. The current song had reached a lull, but you could hear it was building to an explosion. I eagerly awaited it, and when the burst came, I re-entered the newly forming torrent, along with a score of others, and was met again with the mosh pit bliss.

In here, I somehow made out the form of Zen on all fours – I helped him to his feet. He joyously laughed at seeing me in the vortex with him. We held each other tight by the shoulders and braved the flesh tide together for a bit.

‘Whooh! I need a piss,’ said Zen after the song. When he went to the bathroom, I went to the rest of the group, who were still a few paces from where the pit had spawned.

‘Aren’t you knob-monkeys going to join the mosh!?’ I loudly inquired, adrenaline still high.

‘Na, bra. Moshes are for douche-canoes,’ said Phillip. The group expressed a similar feeling.

‘Looks like you’re as fuck-witted as Zen,’ said Grey meanly. I was full of testosterone, so it took a lot of restraint to not kick this long-haired ass in the teeth then and there.

I couldn’t believe it: out of the whole group, only one of them enjoyed what I now considered to be the most amazing activity in the world of the rocker/skater/jock-hater. And that one was Zen, to whom I was not even that close. For the first time since meeting them, they had disappointed me. I now really did think they were knob-monkeys. I left them and re-joined the primitive delight.

After another three songs, my energy stores had depleted considerably, and I sensed that the vigorous display of kinetics was gaining people and growing in rage. To avoid injury, I felt it best to terminate the primordial dance – satisfied with its influence.

Standing once again in the human-cordon surrounding the mosh, I felt no serious wounds or bruises – I just felt like I had done a session of intense cardio.

I saw Zen also emerge out of the trench, stumbling from a debilitating shove. I helped him up. ‘Duuude! This is amazing!’ and I pointed at the crowd-ditch of anarchy.

‘Right?!’

‘Why the *hell* don't the others do it?!’

He winced a little as we hobbled our exhausted asses to the quieter back. ‘It's too exciting for them, man,’ he paused to chuckle, ‘and it messes their fashion up.’ I noted that his tough braids had been slightly disturbed. I felt my producted hair and of course it was a mess too – I felt satisfaction at this evidence of the chaos that I had braved.

‘Why don't you get new friends who mosh as well?’

He laughed strangely: ‘Man... this place, these people, our group, this is *my* scene! But I struggle to connect with anyone in this scene, ‘cause you know... do you see anyone else here like me?’ He pointed with one hand to the dark skin on the other.

I didn't.

‘The group is all I've got. I mean, I've been asked to *leave* moshes before... by people who didn't want to touch me, I guess...’

I felt *awful* when he said this. I also felt proud that I had stood by his side and we had braved the chaos together, but most of all I felt guilty. Guilty for coming from a *plaas*, for coming from a very right-wing high school, and for cumming from the nutsack of a racist. I wanted to show him more camaraderie, but I knew from experience that I would now overdo it – I'd not be a comrade anymore, but a grovelling, apologetic maggot. So, I simply said: ‘I understand, man. I'm sorry,’ and gave him a man-hug.

‘Why are *you* sorry?’

‘...’

A new song began, and he got excited: ‘We going to go back into the fray, dude?!’

‘Na... I need to get a little fresh air, bro,’ I said as warmly as possible.

He gave me a thumbs up: ‘Enjoy it!’ he said as he returned to relish a mosh pit that hadn’t rejected him.

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I sat outside at a table that was empty; there were many free tables, because inside was warmth and a popular band. Sitting here, I thought back to that momentous rugby game when I was 13 years old. It was the first time in a while, thanks to Zen.

Actually, I thought more about its repercussions. After it, I was friendless for a while: those lost were not *real* friends, but I’d never had a really good buddy, so I didn’t know any different. I’d just become temporarily estranged from the people I would chat with at breaktime, and those who would come over to our farm on the weekend every now and again. I didn’t mind – I could now see their villainhood. Naturally, I thought it best to try make new friends with the opposing team – the good guys. An obvious first target was the son of our only live-in worker, who lived on a shack on the outskirts of our farm. He – Kamohelo – was born the same year as me, so we’d played together a handful of times when we were very young, but we hardly ever saw each other now that we were teenagers.

He wasn’t in school anymore – he’d begun working in town – but he’d be at the farm over the weekend to help his dad. One Saturday, I saw him alone, pouring feed into the troughs for one of our flocks. I noticed that he was much bigger than me: puberty was not wasting time in his case as it was with mine. I offered to help, and he was grateful. We chatted while we laboured; he spoke Afrikaans as well as I did, albeit with a different accent, and I’d picked up some Sotho that I could throw around for humour. When the job was done, I invited him to drink a soda with me in the bluegum forest. He said sure – he seemed excited at the prospect.

When we got to the house, he suggested we drink *two* sodas each: ‘We deserve it,’ he said. I said that I didn’t want two – fearing Pa’s wrath at my fizzy gluttony – but he said he was *very* thirsty – that he had worked long before I’d come to help.

With our three drinks, we set off to the trees. He quickly drank his first before we got there, and opened the second with me in the shade of the invasives and cheers’d me. I was busy telling him a funny school story, but before I was even a quarter into it, he’d drained his Fanta, belched and interrupted me by saying that he had to get going: ‘My dad needs me to do something for him.’

Kamohelo threw the empty cans on my forest floor and began jogging back to his dad's. With the two exhausted soft drinks bulging in my khaki shorts' pockets, I set off after him a few minutes later. I snuck up till their shack was in sight, where I saw him greet his dad, who was sitting at a campfire busy cooking a pot of pap. He had a quart of beer in his hand. He greeted his son merrily and handed him a brewski too. I spied on them for about twenty minutes – they consumed two quarts each in that time, laughing all the while, becoming ever louder – after which I'd seen enough.

When I came home, Pa asked me why I had been bothering a worker. (He didn't actually use the word "worker"). I could tell that he knew that I'd been up to something else.

This incident, and a couple of similar attempts after it with different individuals, showed me that I would not be accepted by "the good guys". They either didn't want anything to do with Afrikaners, or I was too awkward around them. And to make matters worse, I was pissed off at Kamohelo and the others because of this! They clearly didn't want my friendship – some spoiled, son-of-a-Boer – and I couldn't help but feel *hate* toward them because of it. For all my scorn of my own people for *their* faults, it turned out that *I* was basically no better: I was a bloody racist too. So, I decided to simply be alone in a creedless nowhere.

And that's the answer the Zenzele's question – that's why I was sorry.

*Is Zen like Kamohelo? Will he also mock my attempts at friendship? I don't think he will – he's unique. Hell, he's basically just like me! A fellow person-genre refuser. But I know that I wouldn't be myself around him. I'd be on my tiptoes the whole time. It wouldn't work.*

*And I don't want to start hating him too...*

'Hey there, Fransie!' said Anna joining me at my table, frightening me out of my trance. She was clearly a bit intoxicated. Her beanie was in her hands and not on her head for once, revealing her relatively short, brown hair.

'Your hair's all messy, Frans!' she slurred, and put her cotton helm on my head.

'Ja!' It's from the mosh pit. Have you ever moshed?'

'Yup, once or twice in my crazy first year.'

'Well, I was just in the most awesome one I've ever been in.' I decided that I'd not say it was my first time, to not discredit my insistence that it was particularly great.

'Oh?' she said, trying her best to seem interested in my story. Her friend then joined us as I was telling her about it – he introduced himself as Aaron. They talked for a bit, while I rested with still vocal cords. Most of their conversation has left memory, save the last part.

'Your brother and his friends dress quite excessively, hey?' remarked Aaron. He probably didn't yet know I was the newest entry into the group, and my excessively modified hair had Anna's beanie covering it.

It must have been from the booze, but Anna spoke about the group as if I wasn't there: 'Ja, it's a bit tragic... I mean, don't get me wrong, I like the whole "skater" look, but they wear all that shit *every* day. Jules blow-dries his hair for like, five minutes *every* morning. And all those freaking bangles and necklaces and tattoos!'

Aaron was a Psychology Honours student, so I imagine he had made a habit of analysing people as he now proceeded to do: 'They're just insecure. That's why they do it. You might think it takes guts to dress so showy in public all the time, but it doesn't – it's armour. It's a means to say: "I'm not a normal person, and I don't care what you think", but in reality, they *do* care, that's *why* they wear it. It would take much more guts for them to wear normal clothes.'

'Uh huh,' agreed Anna. I didn't think her drunk ass had really been listening, but then she said: 'It's just self-esteem really. They want to look cool because they don't think their regular selves are good enough. Like me: I used to put on so much makeup every day when I was in first year, and I'd spend like, 20 minutes doing it! I got over that, though. At some point I just decided: If you don't like me 'cause of the way I naturally look, get lost.' I noticed for the first time that she never wore makeup.

'Exactly!' said Aaron.

'Can we go home?' asked Anna tiredly, soon after this.

'Yeah, sure.'

'Can you guys please drop me at res?' I pleaded. Aaron said it was no problem.

Once in bed, I became very annoyed by my bangles' feeling, so I took them off for the first time in weeks and threw them on the floor. I thought about what Aaron and Anna had said, and it didn't *not* make sense – like pretty much everything anyone said, it confused me. A deep, well-earned sleep engulfed me as I was reliving that amazing mosh pit.

Pa phoned the following day and said he'd found a commune for me to move into, but that we'd have to go check it out before he committed the necessary funds. He told me he'd arrange with the commune owner for us to have a look at it. I desperately wanted to tell him that I wanted to switch courses in addition to living space, but I couldn't: I didn't know which I liked yet, and I was already in the shit with my broken cellphone, and my devil-black and venom-green hair. So, I just said goodbye and went about my day.

## Chapter Three: Early Larva

March – May 2013

So, what was I up to before that whole transformation into a black and green haired philistine? Well, with the hazing over, the firsties – or rather *semi-Lieutenants* – had an air of accomplishment about them, what with the few morsels more respect we received from Captains and higher. I was REALLY glad it was over: it meant I could follow a routine a little more akin to that of normal human being, so now I was only very fatigued, as opposed to basically having sickle cell anaemia, like before.

Our new freedom naturally meant partying increased dramatically. I tagged along to the clubs, bars and socials in the hope of making more friends and meeting girls. Unlike my res mates, I didn't really want to get drunk all the time, not at first at least. Alas, my peers' influence was difficult to repel.

Inevitably, alcohol's teeth began to grip into my flesh. It was only skin deep, and penetrating slowly, but a bite mark would remain regardless. Soon, I went out primarily to soothe a yearning within me – one that was blissful at the prospect of getting smashed. I noticed this was happening too: by March's later half I realised I was going overboard – I'd missed a good few classes due to the hangovers.

I decided that I needed to distract myself from drinking whilst out. My genial solution was tobacco, the idea being that half indulging in two vices was better than fully indulging in one. Besides, I figured that since the bars and clubs already had their own *atmospheres* of second-hand smoke, it would be no big deal to make the transition to the first-hand version. I went from taking a puff, to a drag or two from res mates, to eventually smoking an entire one myself per night out.

These self-control compromises were at the usual joints close to res. To these drinking organizations, I wore my standard *plaas* attire for a while. However, since I'd realised that this garb signified my person-genre – condemned me to a particular place in onlookers' minds – I'd become uncomfortably aware of glances and stares hurled my way. I didn't like their thud, but for a time, I couldn't bring myself to go and get a wardrobe change: I may not have wanted to be associated with *plaas* anymore, but taking off its uniform was a frightening prospect – after ecdysis, the creature is delicate.

But I knew it had to be done eventually: I knew that I needed to if I was to liberate myself – apolysis had occurred long ago. So, I went and bought myself what most of my fellows at res wore: "jock" clothes. The shirts didn't say anything retarded like **WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT?**, or **NO I'M NOT ON STEROIDS, BUT THANKS FOR ASKING**, but they were V-necked and slim-fit T-shirts, and a few even had *pictures* – my favourite had a picture of a bikini girl done in pointillism, which reminded me of Miss August (RIP). With these, I wore worn jeans and shoes that I would have had to reserve for church back at Zastron. I also got some chino shorts for hot nights and the daytime.

I was a little shaken by the alteration, but also quite thrilled – I thought I looked pretty damn good! I felt release as a few of the shackles of my birth culture were removed, and relief at the apparent lack of disaster from my pushing away from those confines. At res I was more outgoing, and I was noticeably less nervous at clubs and bars: my shaking about on the dance floor wasn't so unbearably awkward, and people didn't seem to stare at me as much. When res mates commented on my wardrobe change, I simply told them: '*Plaas* clothes are for the *plaas*,' and this seemed good enough.

Naturally, Jan was the first of these commenters: he seemed surprised but tried to be kind about it all. Not long after my transformation, bless him, he shyly asked me to help him get some similar garments for himself. I think Jan came to the decision to join my style adjustment one night after a drunken stranger laughed at him, remarking: 'Look at the *boerseuntjie*! Going to milk some cows after this?'

The two of us went together to a mall in Brooklyn to buy his new threads. While I'd bought enough clothes to satiate the appetite of several thousand giant silverfish, Jan told me he didn't want to spend a lot on this mini makeover because he was saving up for an expensive fishing rod. I knew Jan was an avid fisher – he'd told me that fishing was how he spent most of his free time on the farm, and even did it competitively – but that day, I realised that it was his great passion. With all the new clothes in just two shopping bags, we went to the mall's camping store and he giddily showed me the rod that he wanted to get. It was very expensive indeed, but he claimed that he'd saved up half of the amount already.

Unlike me, Jan did not adjust well to the fashion change: he was not himself in these outfits, and they didn't look great on him. He only wore them to clubs, and stuck to his comfortable Boer clothing at res and class.

We hadn't been entirely alone in our khaki and two-tones when we used to wear them though. Jan and I observed people dressed like they were about to plough some fields who were clearly city folk. Jan told me they were "wannabes". This all confused me.

*So, they made effort not to fit in with the crowd, despite the risk of getting mocked? I guess it's the same as me and my genre-jail and escape attempt, but will I dare wear these jock clothes when I go back to the farm? What will Pa say?! I really didn't know. I decided I'd traverse that torrent when I got to it.*

After hazing, Lieutenants of Geelhout still had a few ridiculous rules that weren't compulsory, but if followed, veteranship would be assured along with its privileges. I didn't want to stick to these rules, but the group I had fallen into hanging out with all wanted to, so I just sort of did.

That group was the one that held JP as leader. By the end of hazing, Jan was quickly solidifying his place as a JP subordinate. I didn't want to be one of JP's betas; I didn't like him much, since he was just another flavour of Joe, and Joe was a lemon-flavoured pile of shit.

JP reminded me of one of my pseudo-friends at school: the über *plaas*-boy Gunter, who was particularly insistent on the importance of person-genres, i.e. racist, sexist and homophobic. He was the strongest, loudest and most affluent pupil in our grade, with the admiration of most of the other pupils. I didn't like the arrogant *doos* at all, and yet, whenever he gave me some form of a compliment – say it was an invite to his braai – I was chuffed with myself. I didn't like this and always tried to suppress this joy. It was a similar story with JP.

*Am I in denial? Do I actually want to be their friend? Maybe it's the fact that others admire them, and that a part of me thinks I should like them too. Or do they simply exude some sort of hypnotic chemical? It's probably just one of those things...*

Regardless of my feelings toward JP, when we were all hanging out as a group, it was nice to revel in the brotherhood, so I yielded to the bond. I certainly wasn't going to be in the group of Joe, which seemed my only other choice (well, I guess Bloomstein's "tactic" was another "choice"). So, I was stuck doing ludicrous tasks to attain a status I had no interest in.

One of the veteranship rules was that if you came back sloshed after a night out, and a higher ranking res member caught you, you had to "sober up-up" which required you to drink a litre of salty lukewarm water. It was impossible to prevent an episode of wholehearted vomiting after that sip-of-the-sea. This ordeal was put to our group a few times, and not too surprisingly, a vomit competition was held early one morning. It was simple: the one who could send his projectile heave the furthest was the winner. I came in third place, behind Carl and JP – always the bridesmaid, hey?

Another requirement was to steal a "notter", the straw hat first years from the girls' res Dameduur had to wear. If they lost their notter it was quite disgraceful, unless there were witnesses to testify to a serious attempt on their part to retrieve from, and/or inflict punishment on, the scoundrel who stole.

*This* scoundrel thought he saw a perfect opportunity to snatch a notter when a head boasting one passed on the other side of a railing. I was on the higher paving, and she was on the grass a little below. Over the railing I grabbed it – she screamed as I bolted the opposite direction to a chorus of "Whooo" by onlookers. I was under the impression I'd make a perfect escape, but then my eyes were given the unfortunate task of informing my brain of the conglomeration of people blocking the way through the corridor I wanted to use.

As I came to the conclusion that this way was no good, the rightful owner of the notter caught up and gave my right thigh a vicious smack with her stick (they all carried sticks for this purpose). "Ssssss" went the onlookers in sympathy. My thigh nerves had the even less fortunate job of telling my brain that some malevolent force had caused considerable damage to that area, but once they did, I ran another way to safety.



And hoo-fucking-ray, I had the stupid damned notter. I *still* have it: I've kept it, not for pride, but for the reminder of the price I paid for something that I really had no interest in. Later, when my thigh nerves had time to generate a more thorough report of the whack's effect, my brain had no choice but to teach itself a lesson by cranking up the pain knobs. It was excruciating.

Another veteranship requirement was to attend the Geelhout Boys Only (the GBO) social in our clubhouse. We all knew what happened at this social: at about 8 p.m. older boys locked the doors of the clubhouse, and you had to stay in there until sunrise. That one was particular hell for me. I didn't want anything to do with any human being by 1 a.m., so, drunk on many millilitres of tequila, I crept into an uncomfortable kitchen cupboard without anyone's knowledge. I fell asleep and awoke at 4 with tremendous back and neck cramps. Emerging cautiously, I made sure no one saw that I'd hidden like some bug, and reprimanded myself for such infantile behaviour. *It's okay – it was just the tequila.*

And of course, you had to steal random shit. I can't quite remember how much we needed to purloin exactly, but I never burglarized anything – I was much too afraid of a weekend at a maximum-security guest house. JP had a three-metre-tall banner belonging to the university at one point which he had to hang out his window to fit in his room. One morning, walking to class, I saw a traffic light head proudly displayed in our building's walkway, which one of Joe's subordinates claimed as his trophy.

Anyway, as soon as hazing was over, and I was somewhat adjusted to the new surroundings, I could finally send brain function to places other than survival and adaptation – namely prosperity. I started to observe my more successful contemporaries, and how I differed from them. I was extremely confused by my observations, and could come to no clear conclusion as to what I was doing wrong and they right.

*I seem more youthful, but I also seem more like a grumpy old man... I seem to have less intuition, but I know I'm more intelligent at the same time... I seem to have less sex-appeal, yet I seem more handsome... people seem to think I'm great, but they're also put off by me. It's all very baffling.*

Jan was in the same boat as me – the dinghy of low social status – and he seemed to address this issue by associating himself with JP and his crowd, as if their essence would rub off on him. But me? I knew that my demeanour and behaviour were that of a pathetic little wimp, but I believed, as I always had, that there was something within me, very deep perhaps, that was greater than any of them could ever hope to attain, but it required unlocking. How to unlock it was now the question I wanted to answer.

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At a varsity cup match where the Tuks rugby team played against the University of the KwaZulu-Natal, I made the realisation that a temporary unlocking was by means of alcohol. The group, sat on the

grass surrounding the field, and not the grandstand, to avoid the sadistic Geelhout Captains and Majors, who got a bit rowdy on drink and varsity pride.

Naturally, I had developed a bit of complex against rugby: the sport of the Boer, the pastime of my captors, the primary torment of my school years, and the pageant that showcased my inability to fit into my person-genre of birth. But varsity rugby was at least much more bearable, what with its mostly being an excuse to party and my not having to play. Mind you, I still hated going to matches, and the thugs on the turf could never get a grip on my slippery attention.

Apart from Jan and myself, the guys I have referred to as JP's "subordinates" in the past were all city boys. Each fit the jock stereotype, though none as well as JP. There was Darren Deporte, a quiet individual who had a lean, athletic build. He was in the Tuks track and field team – 400 meters if I recall correctly. Unsurprisingly, he studied Sport Science.

Then there was Deon Toony, who studied Botany. He was my height but had bone structure that actually complemented this. He was a massive sports fan, especially "Premiership Football" as he called it. Deon's buddy from school, Hope Latola, aka DJ Hope, was also a soccer fan, and apparently could play well himself, but not quite good enough to make any respected team. He was studying IT.

Then there was JP's closest friend: Carl Hart, the aforementioned vomit champion (boy, his mother must be proud of that title). He went to school with JP, and pretty much everywhere else thereafter too. He came across as being borderline mentally challenged – I've absolutely no idea how he got into university. I suppose he was studying one of the most, if not *the* most lenient of courses: BA Own Choice. He'd tell people he was studying BA *Kuier*. He was basically JP's lackey – JP's object of contrast against which he would seem of superior intelligence. Hell, superior in most ways, apart from build – Carl was pretty damn beefy. Due to his oafishness, I didn't find him pleasant at all in the beginning, but eventually I'd got to know him, and so at this point I merely disliked him.

JP and his goon weren't my favourites, but the rest were A-Okay in my opinion. *If only they weren't disciples of that jerk.*

My eyes wandered to the people around us on the lawn. Mostly they were students, and under this category the majority were first years who had not yet lost varsity pride. There were, however, strange older beings, who must have been long out of university. These were sad, drunk things who, for me at least, begged the question: *don't you have some better form of entertainment? Haven't you grown out of this phase?*

The group of first years to our right-rear particularly caught my attention, because – you guessed it – it was comprised of four pretty girls. I eventually got bored of examining my fellow lawners, and the tiny people on the stands were observed next. Their detail had been diminished by distance, so I paid less attention to them and more to the boards some had made. Obviously, most were unimaginative variations of **GO TUKKIES** or **TUKS OF NIKS**. But since the match was actually televised, the more

creative students took the opportunity to write something funny, like **WHAT IS THE DRUNK? I'M SCORE**, and **MA STUUR GELD, DOP IS DUUR**.

One of the pretty gals behind us sneezed in a loud squeak, making a few of us turn around. Their good looks were acknowledged by JP, who turned to face us and gestured at them with his eyes. The spectators then had a marked spike in volume when an offensive play by Tuks nearly resulted in a try. One of our ruffians managed to plant the ball past the all-important white line, but the pass made to him was clearly a forward one: I may have not cared for the game, but somehow I had developed a good eye for it – some form of Stockholm Syndrome probably. One of the girls of interest asked: ‘Come on! Why wasn’t that a try?’ thereby exhibiting the blinding effect of bias.

‘Because this ref is a *doos!*’ said JP loudly to them. The girls rotated their comely heads to look at him and giggled in appreciation of his comment. JP proceeded to casually ask them their names. He said his and then recited each of their names.

Carl introduced himself after JP: ‘Hay leidies, eye’m Karr!’ (This is how I’ve decided to convey his idiocy).

The rest of us politely threw in our names after these two. *How did he do that?* I wondered as I said “Frans” and gracelessly waved a hand. *How did he see that opportunity and take it so well? Is his brain more in tune to that stuff than mine? Why can’t I do that, or at least think of it?*

While I thought this, Carl blabbed at them in his deep, oafish inflection: ‘Watt dew yew girlrs studee?’ They were two lawyers, a microbiologist and an English teacher to be – possibly. We told them our prospective careers, and of course Carl made his joke about him studying “BeeAy kayir”. Deon made the far more tasteful joke that he was learning how to grow his own marijuana, but that his registration said “Botany”.

The opposition then got close to scoring, but of course, some infringement occurred making the ref’s panties very upset, resulting in a scrum near the try-line. This event attracted the attention of the girls away from us, so a halt was cast upon our interaction. My attention was brought to a group directly in front of us. They weren't very familiar with the jargon of rugby, and so in reference to the scrum that was occurring, one girl said: ‘Oh look! They're doing that weird thing where the men all hold one another and wiggle about!’

*They're having an orgy?* I almost said to them, but I swallowed the potential conversation initiator, uncertain whether it would be successful or not. The wish to speak lingered like an itch in my throat.

*See, I do think of witty things to say! Even more so! But why didn't I say it? I just saw this dumbass Jock-Pee here do basically the same thing to great results!*

Half-time came and it was decided that we needed to go get beers. JP took this fact and sculpted it into a means to re-establish verbal transaction with the foursome behind us: ‘We’re gonna go grab a few beers. Would you ladies care to join us?’

The girls communicated and came to a verdict purely through facial expressions and head movements towards one another, then one said: ‘Thanks, but we don’t want to lose this spot. Sorry!’

I would have taken a rejection like this very personally, but JP was apparently totally fine with it: ‘Oh good, then you can keep our spot for us!’

‘Ja, sure!’

*JP is not intelligent. He barely got into university, and just by associating with him I can tell he’s not destined for an academic life. So then how can he know how to handle precarious situations such as this one so well? Do some people just have a knack for it? Is it that he’s very good looking? Or is it that these pretty girls are just as moronic as he is, and type matches type? Is there no reason and this is just one of those things?*

*I was one of the highest achievers in my school every year – I never struggled academically unless I was lazy. Does that mean I’m doomed to marry the female equivalent of Bloomstein?! No, have mercy...*

These were my thoughts as we walked to the stadium bar. Our pace was brisk in anticipation of the protracted queue we’d have to stand in, which was no doubt gaining segments with each second. The briskness was deemed insufficient by Hope and Deon – the big sports fans – who said they were going to run ahead.

JP turned to me and said: ‘Treeman, you look as bored as I do. What do you say we get hammered to ease this match along?’ They were still addressing me as “Treeman” here, but it seemed to be being used less often – a terminal practice I’d not hesitate to pull the plug on.

‘I don’t see why not!’ said the burgeoning little alcoholic in me.

‘Eish,’ said Darren, ‘I’ve got serious training tomorrow morning, bra...’

‘Ag, man, you’ll sober up-up and go to bed early,’ said Jan, who was also in a get-hammered mood, it seemed. JP decided we’d all get some tequila with our beer.

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There was indeed a large queue at the bar: it snaked between the railings, and moved with longitudinal waves of squishing and spacing human-components. I was averse to join the sultry tube, but thankfully we saw Hope and Deon were virtually at the front when we got there.

‘Buy us shots too!’ shouted JP to them. ‘Tequila!’

‘Okay,’ said Hope.

When handed a shot, Darren protested, saying he didn’t want any, but it was a futile endeavour. We all took the Mexican spirit and soothed its tingle with a gulp or two of draught. We began the walk back to our seats.

A couple of those sad, older audience members were in front of us at one point; one quite drunk man from this group asked a member of Dameduur if he could see her stick. She gave it to him, and then he put on the shades that were on his head and proceeded to impersonate a blind man – tapping the stick on the floor and pointing his head towards the sky. His spectacle made its way over to us: he went right up to a bewildered Jan, and softly bumped into him.

‘Oh sorry, sorry, I’m blind, excuse me,’ he said as he started to feel up Jan’s pecs as if they were breasts. ‘Oh, my bad, sorry.’

We all chuckled as Jan giggled shyly and tried to politely stave off this prankster.

To Jan’s molester I said: ‘Hey, man, can the poor ref please borrow that stick, since he’s clearly blind too?’

My friends and his friends all laughed heartily at my joke. I grinned. The laughing performer removed his shades and said to me: ‘That dumb-fuck! I think I’ll rather *moer* him with it instead!’ I returned the laughter, and we all went our separate ways, still smiling.

*This time, there was no swallowing it down! I just said it without hesitation! Why?! It dawned on me as I was taking a sip of beer: Alcohol must have made me able to say it! I guess I just need to drink a little to be able to talk to strangers successfully!*

I then considered why this – the umptieth time I’d been tipsy since coming to university – was the first time that I realised that ethanol elevated my socialization abilities. *If I compare my drunk self now to drunk me when I first came here, I’m much more relaxed. Back then, I felt like I was being naughty, but I guess now I’m finally used to it, and can ease into the feeling and let the liquor do its thing! I can reap the benefits of booze!*

‘Those bitches didn’t save our place,’ said JP, looking off into the distance at our former location.

‘!Slutz!’ interjected Carl.

We decided we’d walk on to an open spot of grass not far from the original seats. On the way we passed close to the “bitches” and “slutz”. When we did, to my amazement, JP japed at them: ‘You guys had one simple job, and failed it,’ shaking his smiling mug.

‘What?’ they said, as if not recognising him.

‘You’ve lost our spot!’ he announced confidently, but not unkindly.

‘Oh!’, ‘Oops!’, ‘Sorry.’

The fake sincerity with which they said this made my epidermis creep. We walked on. I couldn’t believe that JP was completely unfazed by the girls so affronting him – their opinions and their actions were seemingly nothing to him. *A swing and a miss, I suppose?* I wasn’t even the direct recipient of their disrespect, and yet I was hurt.

*I guess I need a little more liquor than I’ve had tonight to be able to not get offended by insults like this. I wonder, does alcohol just temporarily make you dumber? Am I now almost as dumb as JP is*

*sober? Is this how he sees the world always? I'd definitely do worse in any test now. Jeez, how much of what vile potion would I need to consume to see whatever the fuck Carl sees?!*

I wanted to experiment with my newfound confidence-key, so I drank my draught balance in a matter of seconds.

*Nope: I'm still offended by those mean girls.*

Tuks then scored a try, and everyone cheered. *Are we winning?* I thought as I stridulated with my hands. I tried to read the scoreboard, but my draught of the draught a few minutes prior gave the separate digits shaky movements, and that, combined with their far distance and the angle, rendered the quantities hard to read.

*There's no way we're losing 26 to 73!* I didn't want to admit my inability by asking one of my friends. Besides, I didn't actually care. For the rest of the game, I just contemplated my discovery of the power of intoxication. I was excited to experiment with this new organic key I'd found. I never found out the score, but we won, so my guess had definitely been completely wrong.

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Often during this time, the group would be hanging out at res when the clock would reach a certain time – dependent on the day of the week – and then JP and Carl would abandon the chill session and go off to the gymnasium. Having become their peer, learnt their colloquialisms and bought their clothes, I decided that hobbies were next on the list of things to fit in. Besides, I was eager to address the near non-existence of my muscles. I asked JP and Carl if Jan and I could join in a “gym sesh” – I'd convinced Jan to join, since I couldn't bear the idea of spending time with just those two apes. Our personal trainers were delighted by our new interest in something so up the jock alley.

The Saturday morning following my proposal, Jan and I accompanied them to the LC De Villiers Gym to “pump some iron”. Jan and I, not being members, paid a small entrance fee, and once we did we were cleared to pass into a strange world: one with splotchy mirrors on the walls; a grippy sponge-like material on the floor; well-worn machines with sweaty seats sprouting out this surface like trees; lights on the ceiling that pierced the eye if looked into directly; and beat music in the air that gave an energetic ambience.

As we walked into the changeroom, our unofficial greeting party included a shameless, stark-naked man with a large gut that made the tic-tac between his legs appear smaller, an athletic looking individual applying some pungent muscle ointment to his ankle, and a man wearing blue jeans and one of JP's shiny club shirts. The latter was busy using a blow-drier in front of a mirror.

‘What the hell?’ I quietly questioned JP, head-gesturing to this inappropriately attired individual.

‘He didn’t lift weights in that,’ said JP once we were out of hearing range, ‘some people gym, then shower here and put on fancy clothes for lunch or whatever.’

*Why on earth would you shower here – in a den of disease and exposed dong – if you can at home instead?*

We got to a locker, and out of his bag, JP took and handed Jan and me each a pair of gloves: Jan’s were green and mine were orange and black. They were very bulky – almost like gauntlets. I put them on and felt stronger – like my fists were now weapons. I liked the feeling. They reminded me of Sauron’s badass gauntlets from the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring* film.

We made our way to the weights section. I hadn’t really imagined going to this place beforehand; only when we got to the main room did I start to feel very out of place. My skinny ass, coming to this mirror-bordered cave of heavy metallic objects moved around aimlessly by beastly men with limbs like elephant trunks, seemed preposterous.

I now observed these serious-faced creatures of the gymnasium up close: their skin – altered by the excessive bulk underneath – resembled some fleshy metal to me, as if were made of bronze. I found myself staring at these flesh-sculptures with an embarrassing level of longing. I made a mental note that if I were to ever attain such muscleage, that I should never act like these bronze demi-gods, with their already large limbs trying to take up as much space as possible. I involuntarily added a mental asterisk to this note: *Who are you kidding? You’ll never look anything like them, you scrawny desert locust.*

‘We’ll start with biceps today,’ announced JP, who was certainly not a bronze gladiator, but could get there with a couple of years of good manual labour. Carl would need less labour time, but could do with a touch of cardio as well. I was glad we were doing biceps, since they’re probably the number one of the body parts observed to determine a male’s physical condition. We all went to an open bench to do bicep curls. JP brought his 16 kg dumbbells and told me and Jan to go get the ones we thought we’d be able to manage about ten reps of. I slowly walked over to the weights, doing some impressive calculations in my head to try get the perfect weight: *not too heavy so that I can’t actually lift them, but not too light as to seem a weakling.* I walked back with 10-kilogram dumbbells in hand, all the while trying not to look one of the bronze vein-monsters in the eye or, even worse, get in their way. Jan must have plagiarized my mental arithmetic, because he’s also taken a pair of 10s.

When we got back, JP had already begun – his arms rhythmically alternating in up-down movement at the elbow hinge. I guess he thought his face muscles were integral to this endeavour, since they contorted in hideous expressions all the while. His last rep was accompanied by a loud *woosh* from his mouth. Carl was next. His pageant was similar, except his hideous face distortions included this off-putting phenomenon where his tongue appeared to be trying to escape its mouthy cage.



Next was me. I sat down and was obliged to look at my full body reflection: a sad sight of possible malnourishment or possibly even some genetic muscle disorder, especially with all those bronze barbarians to be contrasted to.

It was pitiful to see my woeful arms struggle with the relatively light weights. I made sure not to pull any idiotic faces though, which must have had some diminishing effect on my power, considering their popularity. After the three sets of bicep curls, we still had “Z-bar, straight bar and rope machine” to do – I hadn’t a clue what any of these were. At some point during these, I became aware of my parched throat, so went off to have a quenching sip. When I was at the fountain in the corner, before I could realise what I was doing, I did a quick little jab-jab-hook with my awesome gauntleted hands. As I did it, Jan made his presence behind me known: ‘Look at Mr Tyson over here!’

*Shit!* I thought with embarrassment, *Stop being so childish!* I ignored him and his comment, hid my red face in the fountain.

After biceps, JP decided it was time for pectorals. I groaned inside at the idea that we were only halfway through our frantic battle against gravity, but once we were done with the opening pectoral exercise and I felt its burn I was glad: I felt like I was making progress in the curing of my *slimminitus*.

Trial over, we exited the looking-glass cavern and its sinewy inhabitants. As we left, I saw a bronze Spartan doing stomach crunches with a large weight on his chest. He got up after a sweaty set and lifted up his shirt to behold his work. The sight of his chiselled belly was glorious to behold – I was suddenly very motivated to work on my contour-poor tum-tum.

We returned to the bathrooms. JP opened the locker and retrieved his bag, and then a crunchy *zzzip* came as he divorced the velcro hooks from their beloved fuzz. This sound was a sad one to me: it announced that I too had to separate from my orange and black cestus. *Ask if you can keep them*, I thought to myself. I didn’t give life to this rogue thought that had clearly come from some stupid, vestigial part of my brain. When we were exiting the bathroom, trying our best to avoid any sight of visible man-meat, JP made a proposition above the up-beat music: ‘Right, I’m definitely going to get me a protein shake, what do you say, bros?’

‘Sounds like a plan!’ said Jan.

‘Four shure!!’

We each got the peanut butter protein shake by recommendation of JP and Carl. It was quite expensive, and when I drank it, I recognised it as nearly identical to the concoction my mother would make for me as a kid before “important” sport events. Its ingredients were no doubt little more than cheap peanut butter, banana, milk, syrup, and chocolate, though this gym variant probably added expensive whey protein as well.

We sat at one of the tables, expending great suction exertion through our straws to consume the thick rip-off juice. For a while, little was said, for the drink was good, despite its *scammy* aftertaste, but



eventually JP had the urge to say something, and not surprisingly it was with a theme of girls. ‘I don’t know what your guys’ ideal chick is, but that piece on the treadmill over there is perfection in my eyes. My God...’

I disengaged from the straw to look at this pointed-out person. There, to be beheld, was a blond with possibly implanted breasts, probably a push-up bra and definitely a spray tan. She was quite muscular for a girl – not ridiculously buff, but she plainly lifted weights now and again. She was also sporting quite a bit of make-up.

‘She’s a bit... *strong*-looking for my taste,’ I said cautiously.

‘Bro, that’s just ‘cause you’re still not buff enough yourself. Don’t worry, we’ll get you there.’ He added a cheeky wink at the end. I wondered whether any amount of bronzification would make me attracted to such fit females.

‘Butt watt aboutt hur pursonalitie, Jay Pee??’ asked Carl with an attempt at sarcasm.

‘Ag, man, she must just be Afrikaans, that’s all. I don’t know hey, English chicks are a bit weird to me.’

Jan chuckled to himself.

‘Watts sow funni?’ asked Carl.

‘I have a funny story about an English girl.’

‘Let’s hear it then,’ demanded JP.

Jan obeyed: ‘Well, my older *boet* Piet took an English girl out for a date once.’ I could see Jan getting a little excited at the opportunity to tell this story. ‘She was a real cherry this one. Her parents owned a Backpackers near our farm. We knew the family quite well, but it took old Piet a good four months before he got the nerve to ask her out. I think he was 17 and she about 16. Now, her Afrikaans was very poor, so he had to speak his bad English with her, which had some Afrikaans mixed in. He picked her up in his car, and at the first T-junction, Piet looked his way and wanted to know if her side of the road had cars coming, but he couldn’t remember the word *side*, so he asked her: “Is your *kant* clean?”’

We all gave a hearty laugh, which clearly made Jan feel good about himself. He continued: ‘She just said: “*What?!*” and looked at him, shocked. He then realised what he’d said and went blood red!’

To my surprise, Jan proceeded to enthusiastically mimic his brother: “‘No, no, no! I mean uh, what’s the word? Um... SIDE! *Kant* means side, I just forgot that word! Is your *side* clean? Are there any cars?!” I was surprised at his confident storytelling and mimicking. *He’s also getting more comfortable with the city. We’re both changing.*

Soon our peanut butter bullshits were finished and we headed back to res. Later that day Jan told me a few more *plaas* stories. He said that he was really missing his family. He wore a two-tone out that night for a quick beer at Kingsley’s with the group.

Jan and I got student memberships at the gym after that first visit, and we made a habit of going with JP and his henchman. One day, after about two weeks of going with the other three, I decided to have a go at going alone; I knew what I was doing now, and had become annoyed at how long the visits took when I had to wait for three other sets between my own. I went at 8:30 p.m. on a weekday – a much less popular time – so it was a lot quieter. I much preferred this solo exercising where I was in charge, and so I started going alone most of the time. I was very motivated in my fight against weakness. It became a bit of an obsession, and I became somewhat addicted to the feeling of stiff limbs: if at least one muscle wasn't sore at any given time, I was unhappy with myself. I also forced myself to eat more than what I was comfortable with. This new investment paid dividends after about a month of virtually daily gym visits, when Deon saw me come out of the shower: 'Treeman! You're really looking much more toned from all the gymming, bru!'

At one of my unaccompanied sessions, Joe and some of his lackeys – Charlie included – also paid a visit to the hall of reflected flexes. I gave Bloomstein a break as my comfort-comparison by observing the tinier-than-me Charlie's pitiful attempt at "bending-iron". I had to commend his earnest effort, though. When he got back to our room at res, he seemed euphoric, chatting to me about this hobby he said he was also going to take up. His elation would be dampened soon at dinner though, when Joe spoke about his group's gymnasium stopover.

'Ja, I decided Charlie here needs to put some meat on those *poes* skinny bones of his.'

Charlie smiled faintly, but it was clear to me that he was deeply insulted by his leader's opinion. He started going alone as well – very frequently.

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By mid-April I had a four-and-a-half pack brewing around my navel. I noticed this first on a Friday morning: I was changing from my PJs, and the orange light from the rising sun fell off my no-longer imaginary abs in an accentuating way. *Oh, wow! Look at that!*

Coolness threatened outside, so I put on a sporty jumper. Charlie was still asleep, even though I knew he had class very soon. But I honoured his slumber by minimising the volume of my rusk eating.

'*Sjoe!* It's getting cold, neh?' remarked Imelesa at the boom-gate.

'Ja!' I said as if the weather was being an asshole. 'Have a *lekker* day, Imelesa!'

After the refreshing fresh ride to campus, I stashed my bike at a railing and made my way to my Maths class. The group all took a different lecture stream, so alone I sat, looking at the numerous confused people in front of me. I saw Prettiest-girl-in-BSc was in class – a relatively rare occurrence. For a good while I examined her chocolate locks, and her calm, almost lazy demeanour, distracting me from

the Slovakian, who was raping English, as usual – telling us about “*proh-bah-bee-luh-tee und stah-tiz-teeks*”.

After this, I had an uneventful Chemistry lecture, and then Physics. While I was waiting outside the lecture hall for class to begin, a professor in his 50’s came out of the lecture hall across from ours. He was chatting to older students – third years was my guess. They could be classified as those bronze beings that roamed the gym. They were quite friendly with their lecturer

‘—Well, body building is fine and all, but remember that there’s such a thing as *bigorexia*. So, if one of you strong boys starts to obsess over your body, or considers using nasty growth hormones, stop it! And be on the lookout for your friends: tell them if you’re worried that they’re going overboard. You may think those big guys with their big egos aren’t insecure, but arrogance is almost always just overcompensation – an act to hide low self-esteem.’

The gym-enthusiasts were laughing and looked a bit shocked by this lecturer’s speech. ‘Wow! Sir, you’re making me scared to go to the Virgin Active tonight!’ one commented, rubbing the back of his head with a meaty paw.

The lecturer smiled. ‘Sorry lads, but I see it in a lot of men, it’s quite serious.’ They left my field of hearing.

*Wait, wait, wait*, I thought in bewilderment after this eavesdropping, *first of all: can someone with a big ego really be insecure? Isn’t the whole definition of having a massive ego having a great self-image!? Why else does someone stare at themselves in the mirror all the time, like JP and Joe? And secondly: “bigorexia”?! This triggered a reserve of mental images of Emily Hanter which ran through my mind. Naively, I assumed that this was gaining muscle to a point of health impairment – a product of my naiveté with regards to Emily’s bane. Do I have that?! Am I delusional? Am I already a bronze beast but I can’t see it because of this mental condition!?*

I looked at my arms, which looked pretty skinny still: I waited to see if this was an illusion – if my biceps suddenly swelled to twice their size.

Then I remembered: *Frans, for goodness sake, you still weigh about as much as a wet scarecrow... it’s okay, I can keep on exercising, I must just keep an eye out for this bastard-cousin of anorexia...*

Our lecturer then came: a strange tattooed creature who seemed like a motorcycle gang member who got REALLY stoned and accidentally wandered into the university. I tried my best to keep up with this the smart biker’s explaining of the electrical circuits, but it was to little avail. Due to fatigue, information had been sporadically absorbed in bits and pieces during the introductory lecture. Thus, this chapter’s work was an incoherent scramble, and it was futile to try understand these more advance concepts with such a disjointed background knowledge.

‘Are you as lost as me?’ I asked Deon, hopeful that he was in as bad a place.

‘Bro, I’m not even sure I he’s speaking English anymore.’

Finally, I had my Biology prac. It was scheduled to go until 5:20, which was a problem: JP had made arrangements that the group would all go on a very special bar-crawl this evening, starting at 6 p.m. already, meaning we'd have to leave at 5:30. JP suggested I fake a doctor's note ('I've gotten away with it!'), but I got too nervous at the prospect of risking an encounter with the university's grey belt equivalent. I decided I'd race through the worksheet and leave early.

At 5 o'clock, I handed in a sparsely answered quiz that had high promise to yield a fail, and was on my way to res.

The outfit I had selected for the presumed debaucherous night was white jeans, fancy black loafers and a blue, V-necked T-shirt, though I had to add a purple long-sleeved shirt, thanks to the weather. I'd also been having a go at adding wax to my hair, like JP and Deon often did. I made a mess of it the first time – and not a good mess – but by now I had a better idea of how much to use and how to sculpt the old blonde mop into something decent. Pa would always point out men with product in their hair and scoff at them, so it was quite the rebellious thrill to do it.

The rest of the gang were all ready and waiting for me in JP's room – JP, Carl and Darren were in wife-beaters. We went in two cars – Deon's and JP's. The place we were going to was somewhere I had never been: a spiritual equivalent of Hatfield Square. It was in the suburb of Garsfontein, about 15 minutes away without traffic, but our congested journey took closer to half an hour. Unofficially it was referred to as *The Balcony*: it was a collection of four alcohol-licenced institutions located on the first and top storey of an L-shaped building, with the entrance to each being on a balcony. Naturally each of these four establishments had tables out on the balcony, and each filled a different niche of the night-life ecosystem.

First there was *Del Toro*, which filled the restaurant niche. Then there was the sports bar *Champions*, which catered to the creatures that wanted to play pool, foosball and beer-pong. *Paradys*, which played *sokkie* music, was the habitat of the Afrikaners. Like most dancing, I hated *sokkie*, but most of the girls of my teen years *loved* it, so I'd been reluctantly participative. And then finally, the batshit-crazy-get-hammered niche was filled by the infamous club *In Tense*: if the Drop Out was a 10 out of 10, then this place went up to 11.

It was quite pricey as standard, but it had crazy specials. Friday night had the "In Sane" special: pay R200 and drink for free for the remainder of the evening – this was our primary reason for going this evening. JP wanted us to hit each of these waterholes, starting at Del Toro. I'd not yet had a good opportunity to test just how well alcohol could unlock my abilities until this night, so I was eager to see what I could achieve with a hefty dose...

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We had a dinner of cheap burgers at Del Toro, and washed these down with plenty of beer, and to make sure our breath was fresh we each had a shot of mint liqueur. This was my first taste of this green atrocity – “fermented toothpaste” is how I described it. At 7:30 we hopped over to Champions to catch some European soccer game at 8 which Hope and Deon wanted to see. When I walked into the sports bar, I was naturally greeted with an array of sport clutter: flags, posters, signed balls, jerseys, etc... There were a lot of older gentlemen, who seemed to be part of the décor, they fit so well, what with their own sports jerseys.

‘Right boys, beer just isn’t going to cut it anymore,’ announced JP rather seriously. *Oh shit*, I worried with excitement. Everyone got a round of double brandies, which quenched our thirst as we played a couple games of pool. Smoking was allowed in here, so JP, Carl and Hope took advantage of this. I saw Jan take a drag from Carl and then later from Hope – I predicted he’d soon catch up to my level of indulgence. I didn’t feel like any nicotine yet, though.

It was definitely due to the fact that I’d had access to a table at home for most of my childhood, but I was the best pool player in the group, and the boys were impressed with my sinking abilities. When the soccer game ended at around 9:45, so did our interest in Champions.

Paradys, our next stop, was infamous for the fact that a good fat slice of the frequenter pie chart was *tannies* who had no shame hitting on young men. We all found this a topic of great humour.

‘Remember bros, no naughty-forty here is going to want buy us drinks unless we *gooi* some Afrikaans around,’ said JP as he led our entrance into this blue-lit, white-furnished dump. The tables were all positioned around a large open area that got bombarded by cringeworthy Afrikaans pop and *sokkie*-dancing feet. We got some more drinks and claimed a table. I inspected the dance floor: a nasty little reminder of home here in the city, albeit much more flashy and deluxe. Had I not abandoned my *plaas* wear, I’d have fitted in perfectly with the crowd here, where a good few of those present were clad in khaki and/or two-tones and/or John Deere caps. Jan, who was in his new jock clothes like me, looked giddy at the sight of this place – I guessed that he was regretting his outfit choice.

The table to our right boasted a bachelorette party: the age average was around 35 by my estimate – *tannie*-hood fast approaching. These ladies that starting to show delicate signs of deterioration were all wearing party hats, so if not for the helium-filled balloon on their table that read “BACHELORETTE”, I would have assumed this was a birthday party. Soon after we sat down, a few occupants of the table to our left went to go dance, and only three people remained: a boy and girl in a relationship, and a relatively attractive girl who was not talking to anyone. JP once again proved a greater social visionary than I, and took the opportunity to ask her to dance, after having informed her of his noticing her seclusion; she shyly accepted his proposal, and off they went. I was in no mood to dance (I never was) but was eager to prove to myself that I could also be so brave.

I looked around and saw a few girls who were similarly not talking to anyone, and therefore also ripe to ask for a dance. It was like there were straps that pinned me in place though, preventing me from getting up and going to ask any of them – straps that somehow also increased my heart rate too.

*Guess I've not collected enough ethanol to break that lock yet...*

When JP and the shy gal stopped the Boer-boogying, she thanked him and sat back down. The unfit buffoon grabbed his brandy and rapidly finished off the remaining quarter of it and went to the bar to replace it. I went with to gather some more liquid key. JP was greeted by someone there – a grubby guy. He seemed on edge, despite the nearly empty drink in his hand.

'This is Frans,' JP informed the unkempt man.

'Hi bru, I'm Liam,' said the intense and messy-looking individual, who was quite short and small in stature. His handshake was unnecessarily hard.

'He was in my high school, two years ahead of us,' I was told once Liam had left. JP shook his head, 'Pretty fucked in the head that guy.'

'Let's get a shot, bra,' I suggested, knowing he wouldn't refuse: I wanted to find out how much I needed before I could ask a girl to dance. With the shooter shot down and chased with an unnecessary amount of beer, the idea of asking a girl for a dance wasn't quite so petrifying anymore, but I decided that finishing the beer would be safer. While I was draining my bottle, I scoped the area for girls that satisfied two requirements: first, they needed to be pretty enough to be proud of, but not *too* pretty so that I'd not have a chance, and second, they needed to not be talking to anyone.

There was a decent selection to choose from, but I couldn't help but choose a tall, awkward-looking girl: she was not the prettiest, but she was the one I felt most comfortable approaching.

In short, and in truth, she looked like Ma. And when I saw her, I suddenly felt all the miss for my mom that had been accumulating, unfelt, up until now. This made me want to dance with this lookalike, I suppose.

I was nice and drunk, so was relatively numb on the walk there. She was possibly the first stranger to whom I started talking to in Afrikaans since coming to Pretoria: 'Hi, excuse me, I saw you sitting alone and was thinking... would you like to dance?'

It was a relatively smooth performance, though it had better bloody been, considering I'd recited it about nine times on the drunken walk to her.

Surprise-eyed she accepted with a "Sure!", to my relief – I'd not recited any rejection reactions. I walked in front, and halfway to the dancefloor I stupidly looked back at her to see if she was still behind me. We awkwardly assumed the *langarm* stance, and proceeded to dance quite easily. Like rugby, I didn't like this crap, but it had been forced down my figurative throat so much that I knew a thing or two about it. Obviously, we didn't make eye contact – standard protocol, at least in my dances – but I

couldn't help but take in sneaky looks at her face up close. She really could have been a long-lost cousin of my old lady.

My feelings toward Ma were funny: she'd always been my source of comfort and safety, especially against Pa and his belt of justice, but since that rugby game and the subsequent disillusionment, it had become far more complex. She still mitigated my predicament, but her effect was tarnished by the fact that I now saw that she was a *part* of the predicament. She didn't protest the villainy – she even partook now and again. And she didn't have the guts to get us away from her Knollies. I felt myself getting angry at Ma, as I often did at home – sometimes the anger would get close to the rage I felt at Pa...

I stepped on young Roelien's foot.

'Owch!'

'Shit, sorry!'

'No, no, it's okay!'

'You sure?'

'Really, it's fine.'

The remorse for my dancing booboo had dissolved my irritation. I felt a bit livelier from the shame-induced adrenalin, so I did a twirl with this girl, which aroused a nice smile from her. I decided to end the interaction on this high. A minute later, when Mnr Hofmeyr's song ended, I said: 'That was very nice, thank you!'

I saw her coming to grips with the fact that I was ending our dancing, 'Oh! Uh, yes, thank you... as well!'

I wanted to give her a hug, so I just went for it. She gave me a nice squeeze back, and we parted ways. I proceeded to once again not think about Ma for a few months.

JP happily announced at my return: 'Nice one, Treemannetjie! But you can do a bit better than her, bro,' and gave his trademark wink.

*You really think I can do better? / Hey, fuck you, man, my mom's pretty!*

JP must have not wanted me to miss out on any *tannie* action, because as I soon as I'd sat down, he nudged Carl and said: 'Where's our manners? We should congratulate the bride to be!'

'Oukei,' obeyed his dog.

They went over and we chuckled as they did. JP told the ladies that he'd noticed this was a bachelorette party, and wished to treat the "lucky girl" to a shot. The one boasting the marriage-pledge bling told them her preferred liquor, they left to go buy. When they brought the shots, one said: 'Here come our cute boys with our shooters!'

After drinking, they chatted nonsense for a bit, and then one of the women asked: 'Shame, are your other friends a bit shy to speak to us?' in an obnoxious loud whisper we were supposed to hear. She was sporting passionate cleavage.

*Ag, fok*, I thought abysmally. We were obligatorily introduced to the almost-*tannies*. Once close, I smelt, and quickly became nauseous from their blend of cloying perfumes – maybe it was bug repellent. Jan looked sad to the girls, who were unaware of the fact that his neutral face was a little droopy, so they put one of their party hats on his head and told him to cheer up.

‘Can I please also have a party hat? Oh! And a party-horn!’ asked JP.

‘*Ag skat*, you can *sommer* have this big confetti popper too,’ and one with a pearl necklace handed him a bright orange and purple stick that almost certainly came with a fat warning sticker or two. ‘We were too scared to shoot it anyway, ha-ha!’

‘Sweet!’ the receiver of the festive-blunderbuss exclaimed. There was a star-like glint in his eye at the possibilities this celebration-dynamite held back at res. I was a little inebriated, but not quite smashed enough to hang out with these older women, who clearly didn’t find me very interesting (I was left hatless by the way). So, I chilled at the table, enjoying the pride of having asked a stranger to dance. I was considering whether I should ask another, less-motherly girl. Before I could muster up the courage to do this, the group decide to go to In Tense, as a means of escaping the ladies who had grown far too fond of us. At 12:30 we headed over to the alpha male of The Balcony establishments, with hustled party stuff in hand, on head, or in mouth.

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This In Tense, which had the reputation as a truly hectic joint, didn’t disappoint with its first impression. Even now, at the wee-est hours of the morning, it was positively viscous with human life. While surprised at the throng of people, I wasn’t too uneasy, thanks to my new-found ethanol-key having been utilized. The style of the place was nothing special: traditional hedonistic-club decorations in a room with black walls, and with plenty of spotlights scattering a variety of colours like a mobile rash. Neither was the simplistic, bombastic music: it was nothing different to what I was used to from other clubs like The Drop Off. But the plague of people that were there seemed out of their minds: I saw girls in bikinis tripping on the dance floor; a guy in a pink onesies funnelling drink into his guts; a wet-shirted girl pole dancing to a crowd of rowdy men; a shirtless dude passed out on a couch with swear words written on his skin with marker pens... And plenty of hooking up, naturally. It was quite clear the bouncers here were only there to stop fights, not ensure decency.

As we stood in the lengthy queue to take advantage of the senseless drink special, I recognised some fellow BSc students who had seemed perfectly decent and well behaved on campus, but were now acting completely out of character: downing drinks, falling over, smoking and making out with strangers. The smell of cigarettes was ubiquitous, and made me want one, so I decided it was time to have my *gwaai* of the evening.



When we got to the front of the bar, I got out the R200 JP had told us to reserve for the In Sane special. This was a hefty sum of money for booze, so one had to REALLY drink to make it worthwhile, which explained all the stumbling and the face sucking. Jan was reluctant: 'I think I'm good, guys... I've had plenty and I'm trying to save my money...'

JP was taken aback: 'What!? This is why we came, bro! You're a student, Jan, not a *plaasjapie* anymore, so drink up, *poes!*'

So he did. Once we got our precious wristbands in exchange for our cash, we each got two drinks and a shot – this was the limit per person per bar visit. I got a beer, a rum and coke and a whisky shot.

There were no open sitting places at the lounge or bar, so we took our drinks outside. In Tense was located at the corner of the building, so it had the largest balcony area to escape the antics inside. But this too was no hallowed gathering: here we stood becoming one with the slush of youth, and no one spoke much, for we observed our surroundings: guys picking fights with one another and being subsequently thrown out by the battalion of enormous, veteran bouncers; two girls kissing to the cheering of their male audience; someone draining his stomach into a potted plant, which seemed to be thriving – *Vomit must be good fertiliser*. Even JP looked a bit shaken by the sights.

I'd been drinking since 6, so who knows why I took advantage of this special that was only worth it if you REALLY wanted to drink. I realised my folly as my rum concoction was halfway finished and my beer still full, but my alcohol thirst thoroughly quenched. I would, however, have been fatally dosed before I would allow my money to go to waste! I forced down the rum and beer, and then on the second visit to the bar, I got two whiskies of the most expensive on offer and a shot of the same. These were all chucked into one glass.

JP was now getting quite drunk, despite his highly adept tolerance. He asked the group: 'Don't those girls study with us?' He pointed to one of the groups of people I had recognised as acting out of character.

'Ja,' slurred Deon.

'Cool,' and he went off to them. As he embarked, he bid his hound to accompany him with a flick of the head. The rest of us stayed where we were.

'Is he just going to start talking to them?' I wondered aloud.

'Guess so,' said Hope uninterestedly. I watched to observe the consequence of JP's bold action. He and Carl were soon merrily chatting with the four girls, two of whom were first year BSc. *I need to learn how to just approach strangers like that!* I thought, and decided a baby-step was joining JP now. Jan and I went over to them.

'Hey, fuckface,' I said to JP by way of announcing our arrival.

'Do you recognise these beasts from BSc too?' he asked the girls.

‘Ja!’ the one said – super drunk. Us “beasts” chatted to them a bit, our verbal skills smoothed with oily alcohol. They said they were going to go dance and JP said we would join. As we followed these girls, I couldn’t resist interrogating JP: ‘What did you say to them, bro?’

‘Huh?’

‘How did you start talking to them?’

‘I just said “Hey, you girls study with us! I’m JP.” That’s all.’

*How did he know he could say that and it would work? What if they had just laughed at him?* We got onto the smoky, humid dance floor to be greeted by a rainbow of flashing lights. Then with that booming, deafening and disgusting music, they all began shaking about like they had Parkinson’s. I was sipping my whiskey still, not feeling like Parkinson’s participating. I felt like doing what JP did, once again. I realised that he had become my tutor of sorts: if alcohol was my key, JP and others like him showed me where the bloody lock was in the first place.

I was certainly boozed enough now to mimic his performance, so I left the dancefloor in search of fellow BSc students. I saw a group of four girls containing two that I recognised from my classes – they were fairly attractive, and they were wearing the I’m-going-to-get-wasted-jewellery – *Perfect*. My scotch was nearly done, so I had an excuse to go stand next to them at the bar.

I took a deep breath – and a deep sip of single-malt – and went up to them. The two from BSc were chatting to one another when I plonked myself right in front of them, pointed with an index finger to their faces, made *my* face have an expression of curiosity, and said: ‘Do I recognise you girls from my BSc classes?!’

‘Huh!?’ the dark-blond one shouted over the music, looking at me not unkindly.

I felt my mission threatening collapse, but I committed: ‘I said, you gals study BSc with me at Tuks, don’t you!?’

‘Oh! Yes, I recognise you too!’ the light-blond said – it was now her turn to point at my mug.

And so, the mission was a success! We chatted nicely, while we all got our drinks. I learnt that the other two girls studied IT, so I told them: ‘My friend Hope is also doing Computer Science first year, you should come meet him!’

‘Okay!’ I saw that all my fellow jocks were now on the dancefloor, so I told the newly-mets to follow me.

‘Hey, bros! Meet my new friends!’ Their expressions at my providing new female company was a mixture of respect and gratitude. I recited the girls’ names correctly, except the IT girl with the big nose, who corrected me: ‘No, it’s *Bes*!’.

‘Ag, yes, sorry... *Bes*, this is Hope.’

‘Ja! I’ve seen you in my classes!’

When they were meeting one another, I met with JP’s face, which gave me a proud wink.

‘Dude!’ I drunkenly took my human-template by the shoulder, ‘You were right: I just said to them that I recognise them from class, and we started talking!’ JP loved bromance like this, so he was ecstatically holding me by the shoulder too.

‘Hell yeah, bra! Use *any* fuckin’ excuse to start chatting up the bitches!’ He was REALLY drunk now. A good song (allegedly) started and everyone began dancing in a circle. I was so happy with my accomplishment (and smashed) that I *actually* danced for once, not caring whether or not I looked stupid. And when the drop came, and the boys started fist-pumping with the beat, I fist-pumped with them, and in that moment, I forgot about the farm, and Pa and Gunter, and completely let myself be one of them. We all laughed out our delight when the song ended. I decided that I too thought that the song was good, whatever its name was.

After our boxing match with the air, I saw that the dark-blond-from-BSc and Bes-from-IT were looking at me, gossiping presumably, so I went over to them. ‘*Wat skinder julle twee?*’ I asked with a smirk.

They giggled, and Miss BSc answered: ‘I was just telling Bes that I’m glad to see you can get out of your shell every now and again! You seem very shy in class.’

Instead of finding some offence at this comment, I laughed and said: ‘I only do it with cool people!’ loud as a cicada.

To this both went “awww!” and gave me a hug.

Bes then asked the dark blonde: ‘It’s really stuffy in here... do you want to go get some fresh air quick?’

‘But this song is so amazing!’

‘I could use some freshness,’ I said.

‘Great!’

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I can’t quite remember the details, but Bes and I shared a sweet little drunken conversation on the balcony. And she didn’t look half bad either... Well, that’s what my beer-blinded eyes thought at least. I asked this Bes Nogi questions about herself, and she started talking passionately about her love of Paris. She said that her dad, who also adored the French capital, had said they were to maybe go there for vacation in the July, depending on whether or not he got a slot as a speaker for a conference there.

When outside’s freshness had turned into coldness, and Bes suggested we go back inside, I boldly asked for her number without giving myself chance to hesitate. She gave it, and then I made a joke about how I was going to message her “all the time”, to which she laughed.

On our short walk back to our amalgamated groups, an older individual caught my attention: ‘That guy looks like *Strider!*’ I said, pointing at a man who had shoulder length black hair, a stubby beard and a heroic build.

‘*Strider?*’ she asked.

In my anti-sober state, I could only think of the name nickname “*Strider*”. ‘Ja! From *Lord of the Rings!*?’

‘Haven’t seen it,’ she said.

‘What?! You’ve wasted your life,’ I said, shaking my head.

‘Ag, shut up!’ the uneducated girl retorted, giving my chest a gentle backhand, ‘I wasn’t allowed to when I was young, okay? And now I’m too old and too busy to sit through nine hours of kid’s movies!’

*It’s not a kid’s movie! Wait, is it? I guess it is kinda childish, being fantasy and all... does that mean I won’t be able to watch it again?!*

My allies and my accomplishments were still on the dancefloor: JP was grinding with the dark blonde I had provided – his hands on her waist. I turned to hear something Bes was saying, and when I returned my attention to JP, I saw him kissing the girl.

*One step forward, and another, harder step reveals itself! How on Earth has he made that happen!? And so quickly! What did he say? How did he act? How did he know he could go for it? Did he make her go for it? Is there some incantation I’m not aware of?*

*...How does it feel?*

‘Your friend is smooching my friend!’ Bes laughed.

‘Uh-huh...’

‘Let’s go to the bar instead.’

*Maybe I can try kiss Bes,* I thought as she led me by the hand away from our face-sucking friends. *But how?!*

While we were in the queue, an older, drunk guy next to us, wearing clothes akin to JP’s attire, introduced himself to an older girl. They shook hands and said things into each other’s ears which I couldn’t hear. We then got to the front, so my focus switched to trying to attract the attention of one of the glorified bottle openers. When I eventually got one, and Bes and I had placed our orders, my attention toward the two to our left was revived: I heard the girl say “Nu-uh” in an annoyed way. I glanced to them: the prick had his face real close to hers, going for a kiss. She had turned away, and can you believe it, he went over to that side and tried to kiss again! She wrenched away once more, and he followed her lips *again*, like an animal. The girl backed away from the bar and stormed off. He just walked away in the other direction, with an amused smirk on his face.

The scene had made me feel queasy and livid. I wanted to go to the guy and give him a good *klap*, but I didn't. Nogi and I left the bar with our drinks – I definitely wouldn't dare make a move on Bes now, in fear of re-enacting that horrific scene.

Bes's friends were still dancing, but my buds weren't with them anymore. I told Bes I was going to look for them, so we greeted with a hug. She said: 'Nice to meet you, Frans!'

My buddies were lazing at the lounge area, suffering from the toll of alcohol. Jan was enjoying his smoke of the evening, and I couldn't resist a second – 'Hey, *jou bliksem!*'

'Ag, Jan, stop being such a mamma's boy,' said JP. Jan laughed his awkward laugh. These booze-zombies were no fun, so I entertained myself by watching the people. I saw Bes on the dance floor: some drunk jock was trying to chat her up – I got nervous and jealous. To my relief, she humoured him, but when he put his arm around her, she left. *Good girl!*

I was soon being asphyxiated by all the second-hand air in the room, so decided to go to the balcony once more – Darren said he'd join. As soon as we got outside, Darren said he needed the toilet, so I suggested he rather use the one in Paradys. A small while after he'd gone, I recognised that friend of JP, Liam, stalking the outside area. He still looked angry, but now very drunk too. His beady eyes seemed to recognise me from a distance, I looked away. The same mug materialised in my face few seconds later.

'Bra, what did you say to me there?'

'I... huh? I didn't say anything to you...'

'Back there... at the... bar,' he garbled.

'I haven't been to the bar in like –' I broke eye contact when turned to look at the Strider look-alike again passing by, '–half an hour–' and WHACK, something struck my cheek.

I was very confused and so I bent over, instinctively covering my head with my arms. Then I felt something protectively cover my body, and heard a lot of commotion.

I don't know why, perhaps it was shock, but I don't remember anything from the moment I was hit and a bouncer stepping in, to the moment I was sitting with JP by my side, with a vivid showcase of his teeth, asking me if I was okay, saying: 'Here's ice to put on your cheek,' and Darren saying: 'Did you see how that one bouncer slapped that *poes* like a little bitch before he threw him out?' and, of course, Deon saying: 'Want some medication, Treeman!? I prescribe brandy!'

Surprise and confusion subsiding, I comprehended that I'd been assaulted. Much like the pretend violence the res RCs provided for us on the first day of hazing, this *real* violence conducted within me a *plaas* feeling I'd experienced a few times before: the feeling I always felt just after a grey belt kneading. I'd be terrified of Pa, but also furious at my maltreatment, especially when I thought it had been unjustified, and I'd cry tears infused with fear and rage.

*Don't you fucking dare cry, I told myself, sensing their threat, don't you give him that! Don't you do it to yourself!*

I rubbed the area that had taken the hit, but covered my eyes too, lest the bitter beverage leaked out.

*Why did he want to hit me? What about me made him so quick to conclude I was his offender? Was he really just wasted and I just unlucky? Or do I just have a hit-me-in-the-face face?*

When I was certain my cheekbones would remain arid, I lifted my head and asked: 'Wadde fok?' The spectators all laughed. I couldn't help but smile a smidge, which hurt a tad more than a smidge, so I frowned a bit.

'Luke att tha nise marc eet lehft,' said Carl, holding up his phone, which had its front camera on. A blue-black smudge was on my cheek.

'Yup,' I said, slugging back the brandy and coke Jan had handed me. By then, even In Tense was nearing its slumber time, so it was deemed that we should start heading home. When we meandered toward the cars at around 3 a.m., even the car-guards had gone to bed, or whatever it is they do after work.

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Darren had not made much use of the In Sane special, so was good to drive Deon's car. Thankfully the blind-drunk JP would not drive me back, but rather Carl, who had sobered up as much as possible with virgin cokes and water during the final hour of our excursion – he was certainly still arrestable, though. With me in the probable death-mobile was JP in the front seat and the sleeping corpse of Jan kept me company in the back. Not long into our voyage home, JP zapped Deon in the car next to us. The zap-receiver's arm was resting on the open-windowed door: he made a V with two fingers and stuck his tongue through it to JP. Seconds later when we came to a standstill at the next robot, JP blared to Carl to roll down his window. While Carl obeyed, JP retrieved the *tannies'* confetti cannon from the floor.

My instincts protested: *Bad idea!* as JP aimed the party projectile at Deon, who wasn't looking. My instinct's alarm only managed to influence my voice enough to make a squeak though, while Carl just starting giggling like a naughty teen when the rainbow-coloured rod hovered over his lap. Luckily this giggling grabbed Deon's attention: he glanced over at us, saw himself being targeted, and ducked just as JP pulled the trigger string.

BANG!

This time my instinct assumed a more authoritative action and caused my eyes to shut. When I dared to look to see how much blood had been splattered, I instead saw a little poof of grey smoke, and a Kia Rio interior peppered with bright, reflective shards of paper and foil. Two of the passengers in our

vehicle were in hysterics, one was experiencing intense stress, and the last was still passed out. I noticed the traffic light for the other direction had just turned orange, then, to my horror, I saw a police car crossing the intersection; the cop who was not driving was looking around the general area, no-doubt trying to determine the source of the loud bang.

‘Cops,’ I said, sounding surprisingly calm – a side effect of shock, perhaps.

‘!O fuq, Kopz!’ acknowledged Carl. Both our vehicles slowly crossed the smoky street. I looked back to see if the cop car – and our possible doom – was coming.

*I will not be incarcerated by the law! I will tell them that it was JP that maimed and/or killed Deon, fuck that, I had nothing to do with it, no way!..*

At the next robot, I saw a mercifully healthy Deon (well apart from his liver probably), smiling at us and disapprovingly shaking his head, which was ornamented with a few glittery specks. Darren was giggling. The cops hadn’t followed it seemed, so I assumed we were off the hook. I breathed slowly to calm my shot nerves.

At res, the sparkly victims demanded Carl and JP to help them clean up. They said they would, but it would have to “wait until tomorrow”. I was given the unfortunate task of reviving Jan for the trek to his room. Luckily, he was up and about as soon as I roughly shook his shoulder. We stumbled our way to our building from the parking area. I was using my phone’s light to illuminate the way, and JP decided it’d be hilarious to grab my 21<sup>st</sup> century torch and bolt. ‘I’m a *tsotsi!*’ he shouted.

I ran after: ‘Come back, you thief-fuck!’

His boozy blood made him an inefficient runner; my blood was no virgin cocktail, but I think I was better off, since I quickly caught up to him and snatched my phone back. We both laughed.

*That was REALLY fun... like tag was!.. Maybe we should all play tag! NO! No, that’s silly, stop being silly. Your tag days are over.*

Our random running had placed us behind the building. The others came chortling at our moronic two-man phone-rugby match. When they got to us, JP exclaimed: ‘Look, his light is on!’ pointing to the right corner base of the Geelhout building – the very best room, apparently.

‘Whose?’ I asked.

‘Res Pope’s! I didn’t think he’d be up this late?’

‘Maybe he’s taking a waz,’ suggested Hope.

‘His holiness doesn’t need to excrete,’ said Deon, to our laughter.

‘Letz gow hav uh piek insaide?!?’ suggested you-know-who.

We all started jogging to the radiance. Once close, we switched to stealth mode. When we were a few metres from the glowing room, however, its illumination abruptly ceased, to the hushed disappointment of the group. Carl was so curious that he went to the black windows: ‘Eye cann sea fuk-aal.’

‘So that’s where the Pope guy lives?’ I asked.

‘Ja, I’ve *never* seen him,’ said JP.

‘We saw him once quickly going into the building, and Colonel Dirk pointed him out to us. He said it was rare to see him, and that he wasn’t in the building all that much.’

‘What does he look like?’ I inquired.

‘I heard that he mostly wears plain buttoned shirts.’

‘When we saw him, he was wearing a shirt like that!’

‘He had a bushy moustache too.’

‘But he had stubble all over his face.’

‘Ja, but the mustachio hairs were the longest by far, so I think he’ll shave every now and then and leave the *snor*.’

‘Can you imagine, *seven* years? And this is his eighth!’ said Hope, ‘He’s been here longer than our current House Father.’

‘Dirk told us he used to be one crazy mofo.’

‘Apparently he punched his res Father when he was in first year.’

‘No way!’ exclaimed Jan.

‘Did he punch him or tell him to go fuck himself?’

‘Both. But then, to avoid getting expelled he needed to wear a frilly bikini and perform a 2000-word apology speech in front of a large audience, including a girl res.’

‘I heard he did cocaine for a while,’ said JP.

This was the most in-depth scrutinization I had ever heard from these Neanderthals, besides tits vs. ass of course. I really wanted to see him as well, for some reason.

‘Should we wait a bit? We know he’s in there now, maybe the light will go back on again?’

‘I’m tired, bro... In the morning we’ll sit in the courtyard and try see him leave.’

We all slept until past 10, by which time the res Pope would have long ago been on his way. My hangover felt terminal though, so even if I believed I could spot this legendary Pokémon of a man, I wouldn’t have tried.

*So... I managed to ask a random girl to dance, and I introduced myself to a group of girls I didn’t know – all thanks to the unlocking abilities of alcohol. But, I could not bring myself to kiss a girl, even with that tremendous amount of last night, which is now absolutely killing me, I’m sure of it...*

*I don’t know if I can physically drink enough to make a move on a girl! I don’t think I can afford the price either – both monetary and morning after...*

I considered the possibility that the lock on my greatness was just too damn secure to be opened by the key I’d found. I drank a dangerous amount of headache medicine, plus some vitamins, and plenty of water, and lazed about until four, when I felt semi-decent again.



‘Why *Pope*?’ I asked the boys at dinner, my first meal of the day, where I was hungry as a hungry-caterpillar. ‘I mean, that’s not a military rank.’

Captain Tom, who was sitting near us, answered: ‘It’s because they change the ranking system every couple of years. His time, it was clergy ranks. I guess Geelhout was more religious back then. So, there were deacons, priests, bishops, cardinals, and of course, the Pope. I think “Pope” had a ring to it, so it stuck even when they changed to military ranks.’ He took a bite as if the information session was complete, but then he remembered a detail with a start, and added with a filled mouth: ‘Oh! And I think the number seven being religiously significant also has something to do with it.’

I decided to make use of this resource while I could. ‘What does he study even?’

He swallowed, ‘He studied Engineering – Mechanical, I think. He fucked around like crazy for 2 years studying architecture, then switched over and changed his deranged ways. So, he did another four years undergrad and then he started his Master’s. He’s now in his second year for that. So, that makes this his eighth year here.’

‘Master’s hey? So, he’s quite smart?’ asked Jan.

‘Ja, bro, he was apparently a top achiever for Engineering in his final undergrad year.’ Tom got up and left the table as he was saying this. We continued our meal.

A few days passed. I thought a lot about the Balcony: about the “fight” I’d been in, and about my inability to break the friend boundaries with a girl. My pride didn’t want to ask JP for advice, but I felt I needed to – I had no clue what I was doing. The opportunity presented itself about a week after the Balcony night: JP asked the group who wanted to gym. Carl was a bit ill so couldn’t, and Jan had to study for a prac test, so it was just us two.

‘So, that was a fairly good-looking chick you scored at In Tense, hey?’ I asked a while into our gymming.

‘Oh ja... What was her name again? Ha-ha.’

‘No idea... I just remember Bes – she was vibing me, and I got her number... but I don’t know, man, I guess I still need practice... I couldn’t go for the kiss... I’ve never kissed a girl I wasn’t dating.’ (This wasn’t *not* true...)

‘Hmm,’ he went knowingly, ‘bra, you just go for it. You see she’s slightly interested, you dance a little with her, look her in the eye and you go for it. Who cares if she doesn’t want to?’

I remembered the disgusting lip-rape attempt I’d seen at the bar. ‘I don’t want to fucking force myself on a girl!’ I was getting angry at JP now, who I suspected from these words was a kiss-forcer too.

‘No, no,’ he assured me, sensing my rage, ‘you like, you go for the smooch slow enough for her to deny you... and if she really doesn’t want to, then definitely don’t force yourself on her... *Christ!* What I mean by “she doesn’t want to”, is that some girls want to kiss you, but they also *don’t* want to seem

slutty, so they don't want to kiss you... those girls, you can kiss even though they don't want to... because they do as well. You feel me, bro?'

I did not "feel" this bro – I was tremendously confused. *How can you understand this unfathomable nonsense, yet I need to explain chemistry to you?!*

I had another question I was hoping to get a clearer answer on: 'Okay, so how do you reliably get a girl to be interested in you?'

'Confidence, man. Chicks dig confidence.'

I'd heard this before. 'But what *is* that exactly? How do you be "confident"?''

JP seemed confused by the question, as if it were common sense: 'You know... It means you're a bit of an asshole. It means you see yourself as a cool, good-looking motherfucker who doesn't care about people who don't like him.'

He started his set of shoulder presses, ending our conversation. I was hoping he'd give me some magical equation to use, or some dietary alteration, but instead I got basically the same bullshit my mom told me the first day of school: "*Glo net in jouself, my kind*".

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'There's that scruffy guy with the shit in his face,' JP whispered a week or so later, pointing stealthily at an individual exiting the Geelhout building and coming our way. It was as if JP had seen some peculiar animal in a game reserve that he didn't want to scare away. "Shit" in this case were piercings – three to be exact – none of which were in his ears.

Deon said: 'Man, I know his name... he's in second year... uh...'

While he was still trying to designate him, the "scruffy" guy came over to us. 'He's a second year you say?' JP made sure.

'Yes.'

'Morning, Captain!' JP greeted him brightly.

'Sup, dudes. Forget that title crap with me please.'

He didn't look scruffy to me: he looked like he didn't give a damn about rules, and I liked it.

'Listen, guys, I've got to run to class soon, but I'm dying for a smoke, could you bum me one?'

He had addressed the question mainly to JP, because JP had actually talked to him. JP said: 'Well, we're all already bumming from Deon over here.'

The metal-clad Captain looked at Deon. Before he could ask, Deon said: 'No problem, here you go,' and handed him two.

'Ah, shot!' I could tell he was very happy to receive *two*. The second year lit up and asked us how we were finding res life. We told him it was insane but fun, to which he laughed and said: 'It gets a bit

calmer later... but first year is crazy!’ He took a drag and checked his phone, then asked us: ‘Have you sludge-muffins done your smoking licences yet?’

We looked at each other – confused. Carl asked: ‘Hour smokeeng lisenze?’

‘Yeah! It’s really simple, you just do this...’ The madman stuck his tongue out and snuffed the nearly finished cigarette on it.

Tssssss, it went on his saliva. It was soft, yet a tremendous racket at the same time. We all went: ‘Whoa!’ except Carl, who obviously went: ‘!!!Wuuoaphz!!!’

The maniac gathered the ash-spit soup with his tongue and palate, and ejected it from his mouth onto the floor between us – it was black and bubbly.

‘And then you’re officially allowed to smoke!’ he said merrily.

‘Holy shit, bro!’ said JP, astonished.

‘Cheers, dudes. And thanks for the gwaais!’

JP waited for him to be out of range to say: ‘That bra is insane.’

‘I think his name is Christoff,’ Deon now told us. He was correct.

I saw Christoff again the following day from my room’s window. He was smoking at the outside tables with someone not in Geelhout. I quickly checked my jock attire. *Which is “scruffiest”?* I put on my blackest shirt and a pair of plain jeans, and made my hair a little messy; it was far from Christoff’s style but it was different from my new usual. I walked away from the mirror. Then paused, and then returned to the mirror.

*Man, I pull off this scoundrel look!* I left to go to Christoff, but then I decided I needed a little “unlocking” and took a swig of some brandy.

‘Hey, Captain Christoff!’ I greeted, trying not to sound eager.

‘Ha-ha, hey dude, I told you, you don’t need to call me that!’ His smile put me at ease.

‘But it’s got such a poetic ring to it!’

‘True,’ he said taking a drag and shrugging, ‘alliteration or some shit. What’s your name, dude? I don’t think I ever got it.’

‘It’s Frans.’

‘Alright, sup Frans. This is Dylan, by the way,’ and I met the bespectacled, backwards-cap-wearing friend.

‘How do you know my name is Christoff? I can’t remember telling you.’

‘Oh, my mate told me.’

‘His name isn’t *really* Christoff though,’ Dylan butted in.

‘Well, no. My “real” name is Gideon Christoffel Bouwer Schoonwinkle.’ He’d enunciated his name in a most Boer-laced accent, and chuckled. It astounded me that this “scruffy guy” was not hindered or

embarrassed by his marathonic name. And it astounded me even more that he adorned himself with clothes that were totally incompatible with such a designation.

I wanted to find out more about this strange creature: ‘Mind if I enjoy a smoke with you guys?’

‘Go for it, man.’

I took out my 10-pack of Lucky Strikes (I bought a different brand each time), and went for it. ‘So, “Gideon Christoffel Bouwer Schoonwinkle”... That’s a very Afrikaans name hey?’

‘Ja, I lived on a farm in the Northern Cape until I was 13, then came to Pretoria.’

*Amazing*, I thought as I observed this fellow escapee. I told him I was from a farm too, and he asked me a bit about it, but didn’t seem very interested - *Excellent*. He and Dylan then continued their conversation about a previous evening’s antics at Naglesse: a place I’d heard of but not yet been to because of the sinister rumours yoked to it. I mostly listened, but made effort to give comments and opinions here and there. We were getting along nicely.

The conversation mutated, as they do, from one topic to another, and eventually Christoff stumbled into the subject of his gradually increasing aloofness from res and its members: ‘—like, I hardly ever hang out with anyone in res anymore. I mean, we’ve been through some good times, and we’re okay, but these days I really only hang out with the group,’ he said in reference to Dylan and the others, yet unknown to me.

‘Ja man, I know what you mean,’ I butted in, ‘I myself am not all that keen on res life anymore... I’m a bit sick of hanging with my fellow firsties these days.’ This last part was said softly in case some unintended overhearing occurred. The two listeners chuckled at my bluntness.

‘And most second years avoid our company. I think this is the first time I’ve ever had a normal conversation with one.’

‘Yeah, it’s stupid, bro. Now you’re just a worthless “Semi-Lieutenant”, next year when you’re Captains and they’re Majors, you’ll all be super close and partying together and shit.’

I took my opportunity: ‘If you know of any cool, non-res parties to go to, I’m keen.’ Then after a second or two I added: ‘If you’re okay with hanging with a lame little Lieutenant, of course!’ and I added a jaded pull of my cigarette for style afterwards.

‘Sure, man!’ and he turned to his friend, ‘This dude could get an invite to Vera’s house party, hey?’

‘Don’t see why not,’ said Dylan.

In a teenage girl’s voice I said: *‘I promise to be the coolest thing evaaar!’*

They both laughed. And so, I was invited to the house party. Our conversation continued for another half an hour or so. Christoff must have grown fond of me, because he invited me to check out how he’d personalized his res room after Dylan left. It was full of posters of alternative and punk and metal bands and clutter he was partial to, like bongos and depleted bottles of liquor.

After that day, we were mates: we'd always stop and chat if we met in the building or around campus, usually leading to a smoke break. I apologised to my lungs for the increase intake of nicotine, but I felt I needed to learn from this more advanced ex-Boer.

The party was on a Saturday, a few days after my invitation. I treated it as a bit of a dress up party, going alone to a cheap clothes store and getting some nice scoundrel-like clothes: a navy jacket, a pair of black skinny jeans and sneakers – all stuff I could see Christoff or Dylan wearing. I took way more of the wax from my jock transformation than I had ever before to make my hair spikey. I felt this wasn't enough though, so I went to my new buddy's room a floor below me. I asked: 'You said you wore fake lip-rings before you got the real piercings, right?'

'Yup.'

'Do you have them here? Could I maybe wear them tonight?'

'Sure, dude, they're here somewhere...' It took about half an hour of languid searching for him to find one. When he did, I put it on, looked at my reflection and felt the same rush of excitement I had when I first tried on the jock clothes, just more so. We were to drive together to the house in his car.

'We're possibly gonna sleep over,' he warned, 'we'll see how the night goes.'

I had made sure to go with plenty of cigarettes to be charitable with, and my own booze to be unlocked with.

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The venue of the party, nearby in Brooklyn, belonged to a girl name Vera, who was in her final year of high school – a piece of trivia that surprised me. Her parents were away, but she apparently did have permission to hold a party. Christoff told me this as we walked to his car. At about three minutes into our short journey, we stopped at a robot behind a police vehicle.

'Look at this fucking pig. *Oink, oink!*' Christoff said loudly. I couldn't help but notice that his window was down. To add to his audacity, he took a beer from the backseat, opened it and donated the cop-car his middle finger as he took a gradual sip of the currently illegal beverage. The law enforcement unit took no notice of the delinquent behind them and drove on. I was stunned yet captivated by Christoff's fearlessness.

The house was humming alternative-rock music as we walked to the front gate. We were let inside by a friend of Vera. Christoff greeted his group of friends, and introduced me to these skaters as the "coolest fucker in res", apart from himself "of course". They greeted me with hints of scepticism, apart from Grey, who eyed me rudely. *Maybe this was a bad idea... maybe they won't like me...*

I noticed that they were each in the same fashion as Christoff – the fashion I found so alluring and intimidating at the same time. I was glad of my messy hair, dark clothes and (fake) piercings (*shhhh*) – I

thought it would help in their accepting me. I tried to join in the conversation, but I wasn't working so well.

'Shall we go get some drinkage, dude!?' I asked Christoff once the greeting dialogue with his group was over.

'Absolutely!' I was eager to apply my Popeye-spinach equivalent to be a more successful imposter to Christoff's friends.

'Well, hello, ladies,' Christoff said to a pair of short girls, who were also in the kitchen laughing and making a mess of some liquid gastronomy.

'Hey, Stoff!' said one of the two: she had a larger build than the other, though it should be noted that her body still fell into what I'd call the "slim" category, and that the other one was just very, very skinny. *If I were a girl not even I'd have such a case of slimminitus.* I learnt that the less thin of the two was Vera, the hostess, and the other, more emaciated being, was her best friend Millie Verjapes. This Millie was indeed extremely petite, but since she was also about five-foot fuck-all, I didn't find the skinniness unattractive, like I imagine other men might. Fortunately, it didn't seem like her build, or lack thereof, was from psychological causes, like Emily's had been, but she still reminded me of old Miss Hanter, may she rest in peace. Millie had a mousy, pretty face with auburn hair. She was also quite drunk.

This time, my introduction was met with a more positive result: with hugs and questions about myself. I answered them as I organised myself a drink. I convinced Christoff and the girls to take a shot with me, to calm my nerves. Christoff said: 'Absolutely, but it's going to have to be this ungodly bile,' and he got out his bottle of Stroh 80.

*Oh no*, I excitedly worried. We took it, and the near pure-alcohol's cinder down my throat and its thud to my trachea brought tears to my eyes; I immediately lifted my face upward to let them sink back where they came from – where they belonged – before they could discharge. Luckily the other three were too busy having little seizures from the vile singe-syrup to notice.

We continued chatting about arbitrary things. The shot and beer had yet to take proper effect, so I was being my usual awkward 19-year-old self. But Millie, the 17-year-old piece of wafer, seemed quite keen on me – *Probably because I'm older.* As we made our way back to the group. I kept on chatting to Vera and Millie, who were delightful and talkative. Especially Millie.

I guess their approval of me helped the group of skaters to get more comfortable with me, and soon Phillip made one of his mad jokes at me: 'Ja, dude, we're actually a cult of sadists. We're going to sacrifice you for our blood orgy.' Everyone laughed.

'Christ, Phillip!' exclaimed Millie, who was standing close at my side, 'That's not going to happen, Frans, promise,' and she squeezed my arm affectionately.

‘Yeah, no, why would we tell you what we’re going to do with you?’ he said to more laughter. I made sure to laugh as well, to show (or feign) my “coolness”. Had my blood not been fortified, however, I’m sure I’d have been a bit alarmed at his jest’s possible seriousness.

Eventually, once I’d begun enjoying myself, I went over to get another one of my beers. While opening it, I heard: ‘Hey! Frans!’ yelled by someone at my rear. It was Vera who was responsible for this summoning. Next to her was a giggling Millie. Vera herself wasn’t laughing, only smiling mischievously.

‘Millie has something to say to you.’

Millie seemed a bit embarrassed, but mostly drunk. ‘Okay?’ I said, confused, looking at Millie.

‘You’re sexy...’ she said through her giggling, and poked my stiff abdomen with an intoxicated finger.

‘She thinks you’re sexy,’ Vera clarified. Millie laughed.

‘You should kiss her!’ Vera said as if it was obvious. I just smiled awkwardly. I wanted to go for it, but I couldn’t: it was such a big deal. The best I could do was to turn and suggestively look at Millie with a raised eyebrow.

This was good enough: she grabbed me by the collar with her toothpick fingers, and somehow generated enough torque with these to wrench my mug toward hers. Her pouted lips and anticipating tongue cushioned our colliding heads, and her dripping wet tongue invaded my dry, surprised mouth and proceeded to very enthusiastically rummage and writhe around in there, as if it was looking for something – perhaps approval.

My mind, despite being a blur from the novel stimulus, somehow thought of the fake lip-ring: I hoped that it wasn’t hurting her, and that it wouldn’t slip off from all the lick-delving and reveal its (and my) phony status.

I was afraid things would be awkward after this dirty deed, but they were so drunk that there was no opportunity for that. They just laughed like little girls and within seconds were talking nonsense as before. While maintaining a jaded face, I was beaming within from this momentous breakthrough – *At fucking last!*

I talked to Christoff’s friends better with this new pride within me and they seemed to like me more too – they had seen it happen. I also didn’t pay attention to how much I drank anymore and was soon very drunk. After a another shot with Millie and Vera, the former kissed me again, out of nowhere. At some point in the not so clearly remembered festivities, I was standing with Christoff and Jules, and spotted Millie a few metres away. The scanty state of her physique reminded me once again of Emily, and now I began to think of her more deeply. I began feeling that strange, almost put-on, sadness you can only feel when drunk. I sincerely wanted to apologise to Emily, somehow, and tell her that I never thought she was ugly! Tell her that I just made out with an anorexia candidate, and that I liked it!

I wanted to kiss Millie now, not just *let* her kiss me, to show Emily, if she was watching me, which I now considered a serious possibility. But, in my mind, it was still a very difficult head movement to commit to.

*Just go for it, man!* I psyched myself up in a bathroom visit, *stop being a pussy! You know she wants to kiss you – she already has!*

I found her with Vera; I gently tapped her on her M&M-sized shoulder, fearing I'd crack it. She turned to face me, and I just went for it. Again that ridiculously energized tongue frantically probing my orifice, though this time it was especially lively, as if trying to show appreciation for me making the move this time. I pulled away, and her eyes remained shut as if she was savouring the moment. She opened them and smiled at me. She looked very cute.

*JP was right. Just go for it!*

Some school friends of the two girls then joined our gathering. This group eventually diminished to just myself, Millie and one of her guy friends. He got distracted by someone, and Millie whispered in my ear: 'Let's go away from this guy, he's creepy and he kisses badly!' and she made effort to pull me away using her chicken-leg arms.

'Oh, when did you kiss him?' I asked, walking in the direction that the undetectable force she was producing must have been pointed.

'Like, 7 o'clock. I think.'

*Yuck.*

'So... I'm a better kisser, you say?' I said, not knowing what else to say, suddenly feeling strange towards her.

'Much!'

I didn't want to kiss her anymore. Hell – I didn't even want to be *around* her. How many people had she kissed this evening? Who else was she going to kiss? What were the chances I was going catch some mouth ailment?! I had been thinking of maybe making her my squeeze before this creepy-guy information, but now there was no way. I wasn't upset though: I was just REALLY glad to have finally had my first episode of smoochery. But I didn't want to upset Millie the stick person either, so I made my escape by slipping away as she started chatting to a girlfriend of hers. I went to sit with the Christoff group and hid away in there. 'If Millie comes, hide me from her, please.'

They found this amusing. 'Don't you want to face-suck her some more, you slut-onion?'

'Been there, done that, over it!' This amused them even more, and improved my standing in the group. We all conversed greatly after this: they made jokes like 'Watch out, here comes your little stalker,' and 'Frans, just tell her the truth: tell her you prefer man-meat!' and they loved my replies, such as 'I wanted to squeeze her little bum, but I was afraid it would pop!'



Not long into my hiding, Jules said his big sister was coming to pick him up soon. I didn't want to sleep over anymore, lest that skinny polyamorist begged me to statutorily rape her, so I politely asked Jules if I could be dropped off at res, since us two were now getting along nicely.

'Sure, man!' Talking seemed difficult with all that ethanol wafting in his windpipe. The answer was positive, but this delivery dampened its validity – he was quite wasted and may have been talking nonsense. In my experience, older sisters were mean and cynical bitches, and what could be done to a mood when it was obligated to pick up a little brother at 12 p.m!? I decided I'd just ask her nicely and hope for the best.

At one point I heard Millie slur: 'Where's Frans?' nearby. The group I was quickly adhering to hid me under the table in hysterics.

'Think he's inside, Millie-willy!' She passed from our sight and we burst out laughing. A few minutes later, I spied Millie and Vera passionately making out across the yard. I laughed and pointed this out to Christoff, who nodded as if this had happened before.

*Jeez, my first kiss has probably kissed more girls than me!*

As I had this thought, a bubbly voice said to our group: 'Wassup tit-chisels?'. I turned to find its creator, which was a beanie-wearing girl, whose entrance was met with "Hello Anna" and variations thereof.

Anna came and greeted everyone, then asked: 'So I see my dumbass brother still can't handle his big-boy juice.' Jules was asleep in his seat. I introduced myself, which was met with a nice hug and a: 'Nice to meet you!'

Her amiability made asking her for a lift much easier, though I was still sure to be very apologetic about it. She said it would be "no problem" and added: 'You can help carry this fatso to the car!' We didn't carry him: we shook him awake, and he came, aggrievedly. He was corralled into the back seat where he lay down.

'So, Frans,' Anna said as soon as we were driving, 'I hope you always wash your hands after you greet my brother – wouldn't want to catch his moronitus!'

'Ah, screw you,' Jules mumbled.

'Ha-ha! Are you sure it's not *idiotiphilis*?'

She laughed. I asked her what she did besides chauffeur her brother at midnight. She told me she was busy with her Honours in Microbiology. She was glad to hear that I was a "fellow BSc sufferer".

'And you, Jules?' the big sister asked, 'What academic endeavours take up your time?' He'd passed out again. She went "*tut-tut*" at him. 'Hey Jules, do you mind if I tell Frans here that you slept in our parents' room until you were nine?' No response, obviously. She turned to me, 'Sorry, Frans, I can't get permission from my little brother right now to tell you that he slept in our parents' room until he was nine years old.' My drunken ass found this hilarious.

‘So, do you also party, or does Honours take up all your time?’ I asked as we got in sight of the res gate.

‘I party, but not like this stupid fuckup here!’ she said, stretching over to her comatose brother and ruffling his hair. He expressed his discomfort and indignation with a groan. ‘Hey Jules... Julsie-woolsie!’ He ignored her.

‘Cheers, Jules!’ I said to him.

‘Cheers, new dude!’ was his muffled reply from his face buried in the seat.

Anna got out to greet me with a hug. ‘You’re really cool, *Fransie*! Thanks for keeping me company while my Down Syndrome brother was snoring.’

*“Fransie” – that’s a much better nickname than “Treeman”! Still pretty lame though.*

‘It was a pleasure! Thanks again for the lift!’

*Successful night*, I mused happily as I cut through the icy air towards the building. I’d finally managed to connect my lips to a girl’s; now my comfort-comparison mantra altered into something like: *At least I’ve kissed a girl, unlike Bloomstein*. My first indulgence in this was this very evening, while I sat on the bench outside the building, too excited to sleep yet. I replayed the night’s highlights in my head. *That Millie was cute! It’s a shame she’s so promiscuous.*

Like clockwork, thoughts of Millie led to thoughts of Emily yet again: *I, a 19-year-old, have only now kissed a girl. Emily died at 17. Did she get the chance to snog? Maybe she felt she’d snag no boy’s lips, being chubby, so stopped eating and just went too far. I dunno. Just one of those things, probably.*

I then got a warm rush of shame: *wait a sec... You kissed skinny Millie as a homage to Emily, but Emily became skinny because she was chubby, you drunk fuckwit! If you really want to pay tribute to Hanter, you would have to smooch a fat chick.*

I didn’t like this idea so much. *Maybe if she’s got a great pair of knockers?.. Ag, I’m such a poes...* My high had been dampened by my own accursed thoughts, but now I could go to bed at least.

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Christoff invited me to my first Naglesse visit with the group after this successful night. The JP group obviously took note of my befriending a Captain, and their reaction to it was confused: most of them seemed somewhat impressed, regardless of old Stoff’s weirdness, but they also seemed a little offended. Jan made absolutely no mention of it – as if nothing happened. I didn’t want to hang out with these bland, old friends anymore – I had brand-new buddies! But I was afraid of what they would do if I skipped too many of their outings. The group still had it uses at least: they were my company in classes, as well as compulsory socials. One such social came a week or so later, with the day-“resses” Veritas Ladies and Veritas Men, to be held on Main campus.

To this social I wore jock clothes to not cause a scene with the boys, but I couldn't resist throwing on some black bangles and styling my hair to be a bit messy. The venue was at the large Aula lawn – I loved the enormous trees surrounding this field, even now that they had lost all their green. The group was keen to get tipsy to get the night moving faster, so our first stop was the punch dispenser. As we made our way, I heard a girl behind us say: 'Go spank him!'

To my surprise, I felt a smack on my rear, revealing thus that I was the "him" to receive the buttocks strike. I turned to see who my ass-assaulter was. It was Bes Nogi from the night at the Balcony! Without the extra high-index beer goggles now, I saw she wasn't as pretty as I first thought – her big nose was quite the feature that I'd managed to overlook. She was with the other IT girl we had also met at In Tense. They were both members of Veritas. We joined them and their friends around one of the fires to warm up against the chilly May evening. First thing I remember us talking about was a girl attending the social who had Vitiligo. JP quietly asked the girls what was "up with that badass leopard girl over there".

The girls laughed and said they couldn't remember the name of her condition, but that she was fine. JP said he was relieved to hear it wasn't "anything contagious", which got some shocked laughter. He must have felt bad, because he clarified: 'I'm only joking!.. I'm glad she's healthy.'

'Ag, almost everyone has some strange body features,' said Darren.

JP said: 'Ja, like I have a huge, hairy mole on my back!' to more laughter.

'And I have a really big nose...' said Bes.

'Ja, if Bes breathes too deeply with that thing, we'll all suffocate,' the plumpest of all Bes's friends teased. Us boys didn't want to be rude, but the girls all laughed. Bes didn't seem to mind, but she did get embarrassed and smothered her face in her hands. Smiling and crimson, she removed it and said: 'I'm sorry... I want to make it smaller...'

'I'm just pulling your leg, Bessie,' said the fat one affectionately, 'I love you and your *bees-neus*.'

Conversation continued and veered into other directions, and eventually Bes and her study-buddy in Computer Science asked Hope: 'Do you know that guy in our classes who does super well? I saw him wearing a Geelhout shirt.'

'Oh, you mean Bloomstein!' said Hope.

'No one knows him', butted in JP, 'he's a fucking recluse... Shit, he didn't hear me, did he?'

'I haven't seen him,' said Hope.

'So you're not really friends with him?' asked Bes's friend.

'He's like, impossible to talk to,' said Deon.

'Okay, so that explains how he got flippin' 96% for his semester test,' said Bes, 'he doesn't have friends.'

'Nein tea siks purr cent?!' exclaimed Carl, to whom such a mark must have seemed like a unicorn.

‘How the hell? He doesn’t go to class much,’ said Darren, his roommate, ‘he’s almost always at res, on his laptop.’

‘Ja! He’s hardly ever in class! Only in the compulsory practicals,’ said Bes. ‘My friend and I had a discussion about him.’

‘Wot dd u discuss?’

‘Well, I mean,’ she started embarrassedly, ‘smart is super sexy! But it comes to nothing if you’re shy and mopey. And, this Bloomstein – that’s his name right? – this Bloomstein is quite cute, but he has absolutely no confidence, and that just ruins it.’

‘Can I see a picture of him? Anyone of you have one?’

‘I have him on my phone,’ said Hope, and he showed Bloomstein’s Facebook profile picture: a terrible image of him on holiday in London in front of Big Ben – no doubt taken by his mother. The girls passed the phone around.

‘He *is* cute!’ one exclaimed.

‘Right?!’ said Bes.

‘Ag, I hope he learns to not be shy, and he’ll get a nice girl.’

‘What high school was he in?’ asked Bes, who was now clearly interested in learning what she could about the spaz.

‘He was in Norford Academy.’

‘So his parents must be loaded.’

‘No, I think he had a scholarship.’

‘Isn’t he here tonight? I mean, he should be – this is kind of compulsory,’ remarked Deon.

‘Ag, he probably made sure one of the RCs saw him and went back to his laptop,’ said JP, who had just finished his first big glass of punch. Though I hadn’t been involved in this conversation, I had taken in all the words. It confused me, but also angered me a bit – this tarnishing of my reliable old comfort-comparison. I decided the girls were just being silly and girly, and that they didn’t *actually* think that Bloomstein was attractive. I told myself that they just felt sorry for the poor bastard, whose intellect intrigued them, and that their pity for him manifested into the illusion that they thought he was “cute”. I was sure they’d never date him or anything like that.

Bes had just begun to talk about how Bloomstein would always be the first to finish their three-hour prac exercise, when I went off to pee the punch away – I’d heard enough nonsense. The closest toilet was just to the side of the field, next to the cafeteria. It was strange seeing the campus at night like this, so I had a gaze at the scenery as I was making my way. I noticed that on a bench next to one of those massive trees, sat a figure – a figure out of sight of the social. I walked a little skew to get closer and better make out who it was.

It was Bloomstein! Sitting alone in the dark.

*The fucker must've heard the whole conversation about him!* He had a peculiar look on his mug that I'd never seen him wear before: he was simply staring out in front of him as if in deep thought, which must have rendered his four-eyes in temporary disuse, since he made no sign of noticing me whatsoever.

When I returned from my lavatorial chore, that deeply analytical face was still there. I just found it funny that he'd had such a brilliant eavesdropping opportunity, and I was glad that I hadn't said a word about him. I decided that those who had spoken of him didn't need to know that he'd heard their gossiping. What was he going to do, anyway? Tell his mom?

When I got back, only the girls were at the chairs – the boys had gone for a refill. I'd already gotten to a comfortable level, and I didn't feel like drinking myself silly with anyone other than my new friends. I stayed and chatted with Bes – I still found her good company now that we were more sober.

A couple of dudes from Veritas Men soon came to the girls, with whom they were already acquainted. Bes introduced us, and I thought they seemed like perfectly acceptable members of *H. sapiens*. I'd been sitting for a few minutes when I saw JP, standing with his cronies at the punch, beckon me to come to them. Annoyed by this summoning, I asked him: "Why?" by turning up my palms. He responded: "Just come, please!" by beckoning more vigorously. I reluctantly obeyed. As I made my way there, my caller downed a glass of punch.

'Okay, Treeman is here. Listen, boys, I'm going to use the fact that those *bliksems* took our seats now to bring up a serious subject. I told Dirk about Frans here getting punched at In Tense, and he wasn't happy that the bouncers took care of the *poes*. He said he was disappointed in us, and I must say, I am as well. He said he would have annihilated Liam.' Then he whispered: 'Dirk said that if something like this happens again, we might be unable to become veterans.'

Everyone was quiet. Our silencer continued: 'So I say we go and politely but firmly get our seats back from those day res jerks.'

'They're... those "jerks" are decent guys, bro...' I tried to stop this raging retard.

'They may well be, but I'm going to go get our seats back. Come on,' And off he went. Everyone awkwardly followed, except for me – I couldn't. With a racing heart I watched as JP proceeded to cause *kak*: he sounded quite amiable when he started speaking to them: 'Hey bras, howzit going? My name's JP. Listen, you can ask these lovely girls, these are actually our seats you're sitting on – we just went to go get punch quickly.'

'Oh, no problem,' said a passive looking one, getting up, however, another, heavier built guy said: 'I didn't know you could reserve seats at this social? Where can I put my name down for a permanent chair?'

‘Listen, bro,’ said JP, now starting to sound more truly how he was feeling, ‘I think you saw us sitting here for a while and quite disrespectfully snatched up these chairs as soon as you saw us go to get refills.’

‘What?’ he laughed, ‘What makes you think I was watching you? How the hell must I know who’s sitting where? If I see open seats, I’m allowed to take them. You’re drunk, buddy, go home.’

*Oh fok*, I thought as JP passionately began telling his opponent that he was not going anywhere. I didn’t want to watch – I had to leave. It may have resulted in me losing veteranship, but I couldn’t care anymore. I took the dangerous solo bike trip to res, which was thankfully nothing but a lovely moonlit ride for me that night.

The next morning, I wanted to know what eventually happened, so I messaged Bes. She messaged back saying that a fight started, and she put distance between herself and the rivals. It was only JP and Carl against the big guy and some and other Veritas boys trying to diffuse the situation. JP got a bleeding nose, the other guy got a black eye, and Carl chipped his front left tooth. *Good – he’ll look like the bum he is for the next while.*

I asked what the rest of my “friends” did. Apparently, they just stood there. *Honourless mutts, I’ve always known!* She asked what happened to me, and I said I couldn’t stay and be a part of JP’s ridiculous behaviour, to which she replied: **Good. Fuck JP.**

This incident was the sign I took to finally divorce myself from the jock group and focus on Christoff and his buddies. I mostly stayed in my room, studying for the upcoming exams, and just shrugged off any invites to go out with the jocks. JP quickly ignored me – I was not important to him – and the other losers just followed their lord’s example. He and Carl were mocked by some older res boys for not performing well in the fight about two days after their brawl. JP seemed furious and ashamed. I told Jan in private that I didn’t want to be JP’s friend anymore. Jan seemed like he was okay with this, and still wanted to hang out with both me and the boys, but I was pissed at him for still being an associate of that oaf, so I wasn’t a good friend back. Volschenk took the hint quickly, and thus the two *plaas* boys’ friendship was reduced to nothing more than half-friendly greetings in passing.

## Chapter Four: Late Larva

July – October 2013

My feelings toward the group of Phillip and his delinquents had grown steadily colder during the winter holidays. Their cynicism and general lack of interest in anything joyful frustrated me more and more, until I decided to cut them off completely at particular event.

We were at Park Reverb: a concert held the last Sunday of every month, where several music acts played at the amphitheatre of Fort Schanskop at the Voortrekker monument. We were attending July's event. It was my first time at one of these, as it was for most of the group except Dylan and Jules, who went to June's and found it satisfactory ('I mean, where else can you get wasted on a Sunday?') even though the music had been a little too relaxed for their sadistic liking.

We sat beneath the tree quite near the stage drinking and smoking, mostly treating the bands as background music. Eventually the second to last act came up. Bad Luck Bru was their name: an indie band that had comical and happy soft-rock tunes. They naturally had a bit of a following already, being the penultimate act, and thus many more of the audience members got up from their seats and went to stand at the stage.

I was sitting at the edge of our group's huddle, closest to the band. I listened to them happily until their first song was complete, and turned to face my comrades to vocally express my liking of them. As I turned to do so, however, I noted a look of disgust on my friends' faces, and deduced that my opinion was antagonistic to theirs – *Big surprise there...*

Proof instantly came when Phillip said: 'They sound so fucking lame. I hate it.'

'Ja, real weak,' Christoff agreed. My opinion didn't change as their judgment was revealed to me, rather I finally asked myself: *Why do I still pretend these people are my people?* Everyone around me looked happy, except *my* friends – they looked so damn "cool". I made the very rebellious decision after the second blissful song, that sitting there just watching the people at the stage enjoying themselves was not going to cut it, so I pretended to go to the bathroom, but instead found a gap in the little crowd at the stage and disappeared into it.

I picked up a few choruses to sing, and swayed, and even said a word or two to my fellow happy crowdlings. When I returned to the morose gang after Bad Luck Bru's set, Christoff asked: 'Hey, F-shend, where have you been?'

'Bathroom,' I said, without looking at him.

'This whole time?'

I turned to face him: 'Then I went to jam in at the stage,' with fierce defiance.

'Oh shit, F-shend has pop-music virus, guys,' said Phillip.

'You want us to drop you off at the loony bin after this?' asked Grey.

‘I’ll have to re-educate you, dude,’ said Zen.

I didn’t acknowledge them as they said these things to me, but I was livid. The final band had begun playing: they weren’t as good as the previous in my opinion (evidenced by the fact that their name escapes me), but similar in style, so they too made me want to sway drunkenly in the merry vanguard. Without a word to my now officially ex-friends, I got up and went back to the stage. They said nothing.

On my way there, I noticed that the prettiest BSc girl was also an attendee at the concert – her curly brown tresses had a flower in them. I wanted to go up to her and use JP’s excuse of “You study with me, right?” but I couldn’t muster the courage – I wasn’t intoxicated enough for her petrifying prettiness. In the crowd, some mid-twenties people chatted to me a bit and gave me some of their sweet white wine. Like the band, I can’t remember their names either, but it was good fun.

Christoff had been my lift there so I had to drive back with him; he asked why I was pissed off when it was time to leave. I told him I had a migraine and wanted to be quiet.

I’d not been away from Pretoria at all in the mid-year break, thanks to my failing Physics and having to do the Winter School – it had still been January when last I’d been at the farm. Luckily the extra classes were not for nought: I came out with a 70% for Physics. Pa came beginning August to help me move my stuff from res to my new commune (which included several kilograms of jock and plaas clothes unworn for months). Before he came, I made sure to eviscerate the green and black threads of malevolence from my scalp with a very close haircut. I didn’t just do it because he had expressed his disgust with it: I also did it because it was a physical gesture that I thought would help in committing to stop hanging out with the Christoff group, even though they were all I had. I needed to try and rustle-up some new pals. I sure as hell wasn’t going to return to JP and his mutts.

The commune was at 31 Richard street, Hatfield – still walking distance from campus. It was near res, but it was completely different: here was no intrinsic hierarchy, my room was my own, and I had no compulsory activities chosen by other people. *And there might be girls...* It was more expensive though – Pa made sure I knew this fact.

I hoped that the commune people would help fill the now gaping hole in my friendless social situation. They just had to be sort of decent: not arrogant, trigger-happy jocks, and not morose, too-cool-for-school skaters either. *And not plaasjapies, for fuck sakes...*

I moved in three days before the onset of the second semester. Pa brought the Fortuner and we packed everything in there. When I got into that car for the first time since January and smelt its oh-so-familiar smell, it hit me that I’d had a whole other life that I’d left behind. The nostalgia of my old life nearly brought me to tears for some reason, but I kept them at bay: the dictator of my old life was there



to witness, and I could see a black belt, and possible substitute for the grey, wrapped below his gut that he'd not hesitate to use for a ruthless facial-tissue.

The commune was a clay brick house. We were let in by the owner: a short old man who was kind. 'Got the whole house to yourself for the next few days!' he said when we arrived. My room was decently sized, though it was a bit lived in. I immediately changed all the sheets to my own, and put my belongings, none of which were ornamental, around the room as makeshift decorations – marking my territory I suppose. It was a joy having my own private sanctuary, albeit a bit boring at times. And the prospect of there not only being boys living with me now was also a welcomed alteration. *Maybe the girls will get family-like and walk naked from bathroom to bedroom after their showers!*

The first time I heard another life-form in the house was the night before class was to resume: I was in my room playing *Skyrim* (I'd decided I was bored enough to permit such immature indulgence) when the creaky front door tickled my eardrums and announced an arrival. It frightened me at first, but then I decided it wasn't a burglar because I'd heard keys rattling to unlock the door – unless this was a master housebreaker who had made a key somehow. I was too unused to human interaction to go meet whoever this was, so I just kept quiet and carried on trying to kill a frost troll with my new *Khajit* character.

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Since I'd had enough of Christoff and company, I had been wearing a mishmash of comfortable pyjama items, some inconspicuous *plaas* and jock attire – avoiding the skater threads. Even when I had to go out for errands, I wore ill-matched clothes, but I didn't really care.

This morning – the first day of the second semester – I did care though. It wasn't a mere grocery shopping I was going out to: thousands of my contemporaries would be there. I carefully selected skater garb that wasn't too overtly in that forsaken person-genre, which included black jeans and a plain white hoodie. Without the bangles and the matrix-hair, it looked pretty normal. I didn't love it because it was a bit bland – a bit *Bloomstein*, dare I say – but it would do. I did something I knew could be considered quite paranoid, or untrusting of my yet unmet fellow commune mates: I locked my bedroom. I didn't think this was necessary but still, I felt calmer with it so.

I went to the kettle and made myself some coffee, and at some point during this culinary endeavour, I glimpsed my commune mate (or it could still have been an A-grade burglar) through the glass sliding-doors leading to the back yard. He – an olive skinned, curly haired guy – was sipping a steaming beverage and sucking a smouldering stick. I still didn't go out to meet-n-greet. In fact, I quickly got out of sight and drank my coffee in my room.

My cycle path to campus from the commune was very different, and about two minutes longer than the res one. There had been one solitary biology subject in the first semester; in the second, however, we had Genetics, Botany, Zoology and Microbiology – the subject of this first lecture. Walking to this class, I was suddenly faced with a predicament that was new in my short university experience: I really didn't know if there was anyone I could sit next to. From day one I sat next to my fellow res people, but I shunned the jocks about a week before the exams, and then just sat with Charlie or different res members.

I went through a side door of the venue and quickly sat alone at the edge of a bench near the back, like some pariah. I saw Phineas from Geelhout sitting on his own and had a desire to go to him. I knew that sitting with him, while comfortable, would hinder me finding new mates, but I couldn't yet take the full plunge into the fierce waters of isolation. *Just for now I'll swim in those rapids with water wings...*

He wasn't shunned by me, but this did not mean it wouldn't be awkward – him being a most peculiar soul. As usual, when I greeted Phineas with a smile and a handshake, his response was this weird quarter smile: one that made it seem as if he was forcing a smile to hide his loathing of you, and his eyes simply refused to cooperate in this deception. I ignored this for the sake of not sitting alone. 'How was your holiday, dude?' The skaters had utterly infected me with their practice of calling everyone "dude".

'Good,' he said somehow shyly and arrogantly.

'That's nice. So... did you notice that I've left res?'

'Oh, you've left?' he smiled his ghost smile, 'I just got back last night, so no, didn't.' He took out his book, and then he *hmmmed* in his manner. 'So, you and Bloomstein have both left us.'

'Bloomstein's also gone?' This didn't really surprise me, since Bloomstein wasn't exactly a paragon res boy, but Phineas's elaboration did.

'Yes, but I heard that he's also completely dropped out of university too.'

'What?! Wasn't he top of his class?'

Phineas nodded in shared disbelief. Apparently no one knew why he'd left. Bloomstein wasn't very important to me, not outside a conceptual form at least, so this delicious gossip parcel, while savoured at this moment, wouldn't be a topic of thought I'd return to later. While waiting for class to begin, I guessed that he'd simply gotten a scholarship at a more esteemed university, probably overseas, where he could be his supremely awkward and unattractive self in a more prestigious setting. Bloomstein remained my guilty comfort-comparison person – the fact that I had no idea where he was made no difference.

The class began, and like the majority of introductory classes, general information regarding the course's format was given, but not much else. Phineas's marginally less callous friend Nigel was a few

minutes late, and then these two spoke exclusively to one another – this pissed me off. Thus, at the first Zoology class directly after this, I decided I'd do what I felt I was meant to: sit alone. When Microbio was done, I made sure to exit with JP and the rest in sight as to avoid coming into close proximity with them.

I think a lot of people couldn't quite gather enough awakening in time for Microbiology, because Zoology had significantly more people waiting to go into the venue. The *sapiens*-syrup flowed slowly into the open lecture hall, so I added myself to the current and once inside went to the back: if I was to sit by myself, I would be seen sitting alone by as few people as possible.

It was daunting to decide which of the many open spaces I'd plop my ass on, but my decision was easily made as I saw *her*: the prettiest girl in BSc. She was sitting with two of her friends at the back left. I sat in the row behind them.

The one friend was a tall, black-haired guy who had a continuous smile and a bit of a slouch. The other was a girl, a pretty girl herself – blond and big boobed. Alas, with some acne on top of the skin and some fat underneath it, she was not a threat to the aesthetic throne held by the prettiest BSc girl, who now really needed a better title than “the prettiest BSc girl”, I decided. And so, I paid little attention to the lady giving the first Zoology lecture, as the majority of it went towards the disjointed conversation going on in the row in front of me.

‘What are you doing, Jake?’ asked blondie-big-tits to tall-humpback. Sorry, I mean “Jake”. She went close to his face and in a serious voice said: ‘It’s the first class, bro, and you’re already playing games?’

‘What? They’re not going to say anything important yet.’

She shook her head, going “tisk-tisk”. ‘This boy,’ she said with disapproval to the Goddess. Her Majesty’s reply to their banter was an elegant “He-he”.

Jake went on playing on his tablet, boobs-à-la-blonde checked her phone, and the still nameless exquisiteness eventually broke their silence.

‘Sennie, do you also have your genetics prac today?’

*Ah, too bad, I was just enjoying my place-holder naming of “Sennie”. And now only one remains anonymous; the only one I actually want to know, of course.* They spoke now and again: mostly it was Sennie making comments about Jake’s game (it seemed she enjoyed the entertainment after all), but after about 20 minutes of Darwin and evolution, Jake finally said: ‘Hey, Niksy, where’s Jennifer?’

“Niksy”... *Interesting.* Niksy said that Jennifer, whoever the hell that was, had decided BSc wasn’t for her. Niksy didn’t say much else. She looked tired and even laid her regal head on her elegant arms for a bit. Now that I knew her name, I didn’t really listen to the other two’s babble anymore.

When the lecture was over and everyone started pouring out, my mind was pleasantly occupied with this Niksy girl. I was therefore oblivious to the fact that my trajectory toward the exit was on a collision course with JP, Carl, and Hope until it was too late. My heart got a jolt when I saw them so

close, but I don't think there were any outwardly noticeable reactions. I looked at JP's hazel eyes for a microsecond, and he at my dark blue, and then, casually as possible, I looked in a different direction, trying to blend in like a phasmid.

*They could have spoken to me if they wanted – could have called me nasty names for leaving them.* But they did neither. It was as if I was a stranger, no different than any of the other people trying to get out of that lecture hall that had imprisoned them for an hour.

When I escaped the tension-filled lecture hall, my next destination was a completely new one to me: the Art Building where my first art class was to take place. The class was only after an hour's break, so I walked around and my thoughts drifted to the JP-and-jocks meeting: *I guess that wasn't too bad... could have been worse. I ignore them, they ignore me, all is well!.. I wonder if they miss me?*

I found a nice quiet bench and turned thoughts to the non-degree subject I was taking. I had started painting as a hobby one December vacation when the TV broke. I was 11 and bored out of my mind without cartoons and movies, so my mom suggested I paint, since I was always drawing in my schoolbooks. At first, I sucked, and I didn't like what I made. Ma said that I just needed practice.

'The first ones are never good. You mustn't take them seriously.'

So, I kept making images, having fun and then throwing them away. I did this until one day I looked at the product of my fun – a thorn tree near the house – and said to myself: *I'm not throwing this one away.*

For my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, by which time I had managed to create a few don't-throw-aways, I got a big illustrated book of art. You know how it is with kids though: I never read the written info, I simply drank in the pictures, and a few of the names of the artists snuck into my mind too.

*Next time I flick through it, I'll be sure to stop that adolescent habit and read it properly,* I decided.

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The Art Building was in a corner of campus I'd rarely ventured to. There were many trees surrounding the building, and just outside the entrance were benches, currently occupied by a few people, most smoking and all very "artsy" looking. They didn't pay attention to the imposter entering their building for the first time. I guessed that this was an old building, since it made such inefficient use of space by including a foyer. To the left was a staircase, to the right was the doorway to the main lecture hall where I'd soon have class. The walls of this archaic vestibule were decorated, unsurprisingly, with high quality posters of famous artworks. I went closer to a Picasso – *Guernica*. I knew it was called this and by him, not because I was so familiar with it, but because this information was on a little white note next to it. Each artwork had such a note accompanying it. Its bizarre, patchy disarray almost made my head ache, so I gravitated to an artwork for which I didn't need a note to know its name or maker. It

was a piece that I had made a connection with the very first time an image of it reached my retina: *Starry Night* by van Gogh. What I'd always liked about it was how it found the perfect balance between realism and fantasy: it was clearly an image of the real world, but warped to look different – with its vibrant colours and the stars' massive halos. I had tried to do something similar in my art in my late teens, instead of just copying what I saw in life, but I couldn't just mimic the brilliant old impressionist – I had to find my *own* ways of incorporating a fantastical feeling. I tried adding magical creatures, tried using unnatural colours, tried mismatching fauna and environments – they all just ended up looking very childish and tacky.

When I saw Vincent's masterpiece now, it brought up a feeling it hadn't before: nostalgia. Those enormous stars reminded me of the lovely night sky at the farm, and in my head, I could feel the evening breeze, and hear the army of crickets, and smell the bluegums... All that was unattainable here in the city.

With these bittersweet feelings, I thought to myself: *Yes, this truly is a great piece of art. It belongs in this foyer.* Next to it, I saw a mess: a poster of what I called "splatter-crap" back then – more officially called "abstract surrealism". I recognised it, for it was definitely in the big book of famous artworks back home, but I couldn't remember whose it was, or what it was named, so I went closer to make use of its note-companion. The artist and the title sounded familiar: **Jackson Pollock – Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)**. I thought it was quite absurd. I did not see it as being on par with the masterpiece next to it. It didn't seem to boast any great talent or mean anything, or conjure any good feelings.

This troubled me. *But it's famous, and highly regarded, so it must be good, right? So why don't I like it? Do I have bad taste? I really do like other pieces that are considered great by experts... Maybe I'm just an idiot who happens to like ones like *Starry Night* because I find it pretty, or was told to like it. Perhaps I don't truly "get" art. Does that mean I'm hopeless at creating it?*

These thoughts were worrying me. I decided that it was probably a result of my lack of education in this realm: *My knowledge of art is fragmented, and thus I can't see this particular piece's integral part in the history of art.*

*Or, it's a massive joke to make art plebs like me confused, and trick us into saying we like it when it actually is garbage...* While I didn't completely reject this final possibility, I opted for a more positive outlook: *I'll understand its brilliance soon, with my new art lecturers. They'll fill in the gaps, and then I'll see everything clearly. I will understand Pollock. Hopefully...*

I continued to look at the remaining posters, which included works by Dali, Seurat, Rembrandt and Monet. This didn't take long, so there was still some time to be murdered before the lecture. I decided to venture up the staircase; I did so gingerly, in case I was unauthorised to access this higher plane. Up top were some of the smaller lecture rooms and offices. One of the rooms I saw while snooping had no door: inside was a kettle, fridge and microwave, making its purpose clear. It was

decorated by genuine artworks: next to these were the same notes, but they not only read the artist and the title he or she bequeathed, but also what year in their degree they were. Most were either final year undergrad or Honours, but I saw at least one by a first year, and it was fantastic. Or at least I *thought* so – that madman Pollock had made me deeply uncertain about my taste. As I looked at these works, which were of a variety of techniques like gouache, oil paints, decalcomania, pallet knife, and etching (had it not been for the notes I'd have been clueless), and I desperately wanted to try all of them.

But how could I? I'd had not even mastered watercolours! And I'd prematurely started *oil* painting – the formula one of painting. My technical repertoire was incomplete and disjointed. These works also made me doubt my validity in taking the course. *I'm going to be one of the worst here...*

I comforted myself as I left the kitchen with the excuse that I was not a legitimate art student, but taking this for fun. And also, there was the fact that I had indeed been accepted thanks to my portfolio.

*Then again*, I thought as I left the upper floor, *I cheated a bit, since the portfolio was my best stuff, from all through my life! Ag shit*, I thought as I walked into the class, *I haven't painted or sketched anything in ages! I must be all out of practice...*

This “main lecture hall” was misleading nomenclature: it wasn't even half the size most of my BSc venues were. Also unlike the BSc venues, the seat layout wasn't amphitheatre-style, but instead the benches formed a hard-angled-C around the middle of the class. Clever little me quickly deduced that the reason behind this scheme was that objects to be sketched or painted would be placed there for the students. *Man, I hope a naked girl will be one of those ~~objects~~ subjects.*

I, the sole occupant of the room at that time, made my way to one of the back seats, when I realised that there essentially were no back seats. I opted for the next best thing: a spot furthest from the entrance.

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The first to ruin my solitude was a set of three girls: a sub-group of the smokers that had ignored me outside – ignoring me now still. The one had braids, the other had a blue streak in her hair, and the last was very, very plain. All three had those big flat rectangular bags for carrying cumbersome sketchbooks and canvases; the fact that I didn't boast such a specified tool worried me that I was already behind schedule. *Well, it's too bloody late now!*

This triplet must have broken the seal – suddenly students began pouring in. Most were girls and most were irregular looking in at least one aspect. One of the rare males that came in was a big, muscly guy with long hair in a man-bun and a healthy range of stubble. This older looking individual was clad in a cream hippie-shirt – sorry, I mean *Guatemalan* shirt – complete with a shell necklace, dark green harem pants, and sandals. He gets a detailed description because he came and sat next to me. I

pretended to not notice his incoming buttocks placement, trying to keep my cool. He immediately engaged me: 'Guess I'll sit next to basically the only other guy in this freaking class!'

I smiled and said: 'Ja, mostly girls it seems,' looking around, and added the addendum: 'not that that's a bad thing, necessarily.'

He laughed a loud laugh. 'True! Better than if this were a damn sausage fest!'

I returned the laughter. 'I'm Frans,' I said with a hand presented. He took it surprisingly delicately and said his name: a name I didn't take in because of two reasons. Firstly, it was strange, and secondly, an attractive girl came and sat next to him in unison with its proclamation. She was not dressed like a Woodstock-attende, but rather normally.

Just as he had finished saying his unusual name to me to no avail, she said to him: 'Hey, fatso.'

"Fatso" turned around chuckling and said: 'Greetings, Samantha dear.' They spoke for a bit about what each did over the vacation: he'd gone to Cape Town, where he helped his brother with some stuff and Samantha visited her mother who lives in Vereeniging. I felt like I was losing a potential buddy in this class of strangers, so I tried to think of something to say to initiate conversation. The best I could do was: 'So do you guys study art?'

The hippie guy remembered my presence with a start. 'Oh, Sam! This is (and he looked at me) Frans? Correct?'

'Yes!' Then, leaning over his bulk to Samantha, I said: 'Hi!'

'Halooo, I'm Samantha.' I REALLY liked her apparently immediate approval of me.

Fearing they'd not respond to my question, I elaborated: 'Because I don't study art – this is just an extra subject.'

She replied: 'Oh? What do you study?'

*Oh my goodness, answer my damn question*, I thought. I didn't even care what the answer was, I just didn't want my query to drift off into oblivion, for some reason.

The still unnamed dude must have sensed my senseless frustration, because as I was about to reluctantly answer "BSc", he said: 'We both study Visual Arts.'

'Great! Because I study BSc, so I may need a tiny bit of help from *actual* artists.' These nice people said they had my back. They also said it wasn't hard, it was all about being "real".

'Brentwyn...' Samantha called the attention of the dude, thus rendering him named. 'Do you remember what that one shop was called that...'

*Brent-what now?! I wouldn't dare attempt to refer to him by this thing I'd heard yet because I thought the chance was fairly high that I'd heard wrong and he was actually something sensible, like Brendon.*

The lecturer came in: a jolly man of about 50-something with glasses and a smile that revealed a gap between his front teeth. He welcomed us with a soft, kind voice: 'I see some unfamiliar faces, so I



should explain how things work around here. This, VIS 120, is unlike VIS 110 in that it is almost only practical work we'll be doing. Those who took 110 can tell you that it was a lot of history and then here and there we couldn't help but draw and paint a bit!' *That history would probably have helped me understand art quality better. Oh well... 'Now it's mostly practical!'*

'Who!' went this "Brentwyn" (allegedly) next to me, and some people laughed, including the lecturer.

'Yes! Good news, I know! So, today is just an introduction to the course and then we'll draw some sketches.' He went on to explain the course, which was to begin with sketching, then move on to painting. We were told to get an A3 sketch book, and one of those rectangular bags. After that admin we were told to sketch the portrait of the person to our right in less than 15 minutes. To my right was Brickton, or whatever. To his was Samantha and to hers were two empty seats.

Sometimes my brain just did things it normally didn't have the guts to do, and from January until now, these instances had steadily increased in frequency. This was one of those occasions: as the paper was being handed out to those who needed some, I turned to the newly met Samantha and said to her: 'Boy you're lucky: you get to draw air. I have to draw this ugly mug,' and I gestured to the newly met Brenda, or something similar. They laughed – I couldn't believe I'd taken the risk of insulting him so soon for a laugh. But he wasn't insulted. Brintin (?) said he was sorry that I was forced to stare at his "hideous face for so long" and would try to pull his "prettiest expression". Sam said she'd sketch me, since no one was to my left for me to be someone's right.

I said: 'Shame! No, I'm sure you'll be happier if you draw the nothingness. It'll be more beautiful.' They laughed more. Bantwagon drew Samantha first; he took less than ten minutes, and it was a good, energetic sketch. Next was me. I was nervous about my blunted skills, so I decided to do a caricature of him, since I'd established that they didn't mind my japing. I exaggerated his muscles, his jawline and his man-bun – which also got a muscled, veiny, flexing arm poking out it.

I was done within minutes; before I unveiled it, I announced that it was a caricature. He laughed his good laugh again, and Samantha said: 'That's so brilliant!' I decided it was okay to explain the title I'd put in the top left corner.

'The title is *Brentflakes #1...*'

'What!?' they asked laughing, "'Brentflakes"?!'.

'Yes, because your name is really weird and I don't know how to spell it, so I just called you "Brentflakes" instead...'

They thought this was hilarious. 'This is how you spell my name, dude,' and he wrote it on the back of his sketch. Sure enough, he wrote **Brentwyn**.

'And my surname is Asana.'



After this, it was my turn to pose for Samantha. There was about 12 minutes of the lecture left when she began, and when they were complete, she had a very nice albeit quite incomplete sketch of me. ‘Nooo!’ she squeaked when the lecturer said we had to hand in. Similar protests were made by other sketchers. He reassured us that it was not for marks. I walked out with my new art buddies. They had a class in the same building, so I greeted them there.

‘Well, guess we shall see you in the ensuing classes, Frans!’ said Brentwyn.

‘Byeeee!’ went Samantha.

‘Cheers!’ I said, feeling chuffed with myself.

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My first practical of the semester directly followed – Zoology. The lab room must have had almost a hundred microscopes on the benches. I would have sat elsewhere but scarcity of open seats dictated I sit in the middle of a bench, in a middle row. I clumsily shimmied past the two unfamiliar guys to take my seat. The practical’s lecturer came in: a stout, brown-haired woman.

‘Okay everyone, settle down! My name is Leja, and I’ll be giving today’s prac. It will serve as your introduction to study unit two, insects. It’s on metamorphosis. Now who can tell me what metamorphosis is?’

No one.

‘Come on, I know you guys know...’

One girl near the front coyly put up her hand. ‘Uh, it’s an insect changing form?’

*Duh.*

‘Yes! And no... ha-ha. That’s the kiddies’ definition.’

*Dammit!*

‘It’s scientifically defined as the process of an insect transforming from a juvenile to an adult in distinct stages.’ She let the slides run with pictures of insects at different development stages. ‘So, we get two types of metamorphosis: hemimetabolic, which means incomplete metamorphosis, and holometabolic, which means complete metamorphosis. For hemimetabolic metamorphosis there’s no pupal stage, and typically the juvenile resembles the adult forms, except they haven’t got wings or reproductive organs. Examples would be grasshoppers and crickets. Now in holometabolism, the juvenile takes the form of a larva – these are your maggots, grubs and caterpillars – then there’s a pupal stage, and then the adult – or “imago” – looks completely different to the larva forms. An example is obviously butterflies, but also beetles and ants.’

She went to the next slide which had a diagram of the life cycle of a fly. ‘There are actually a few stages of larvae, each ending with a moulting’.

A furiously note-taking girl in the front bench stopped her vicious scribbling to put up her hand.

‘Yes?’

‘Sorry, what’s the “moulting” exactly?’

‘So as the juvenile grows its epidermis, or outer layer, becomes too small, so it sheds it and underneath is its fresh new layer. Okay, so the pupal stage is where the drastic morphological changes take place, and is where the insect is at its most vulnerable, since it must remain stationary. Thus, it is typical to create this hard, outer shell to protect the fragile body within – we call this a cocoon or chrysalis.’ She changed slides. ‘Then finally we get to the imago, or adult stage, where the insect is sexually reproductive.’

I got bored around here and looked around the class instead of listening. I recognised the face of someone a few rows ahead of me, though I could not assign an exact identity to it immediately because the body attached to it was very different to what I was used to.

It was Charlie van Beth, and he must have picked up at least 15 kilograms (i.e. about a quarter of his initial weight) of pure muscle since I last saw him a few months earlier.

*How in the free-range fuck has he gotten that buff? Would I be that ripped if I’d kept at it? No way... He must have had double the time training, but he must have gained four times the muscle.*

It was quite a sight: he was wearing a tight T-shirt despite the cold, no doubt to display what he had accomplished in the holidays. In my mesmerisation I completely missed the fact that specimens were being passed down the rows for us to look at with the microscopes. I just caught the last of the lecturer’s words: ‘–please don’t break the microscopes. If you’re struggling, rather ask for help,’ and a commotion slowly developed as the students took the opportunity to talk a bit.

My bench mates went to work getting their microscopes ready for the incoming slides. I casually observed them like a spy; I managed to switch the light on and adjusted the height of the holder thingy. When one of the slides came to me, I put what I presumed was insect parts on the holder, looked through the eyepiece and saw a brown, slushy blur. I fiddled a little with some knobs to no improvement of the mushy haze, which now resembled censored vomit, instead of a semi-blind person’s view of dirt as it did before. With only limited knowledge of the contraption, it was rendered unusable.

I was afraid of breaking a lens or something, so I stopped fiddling. I was also not keen on asking for help, so I just pretended that I’d had a successful specimen viewing and handed it to the guy sitting next to me. The lady spoke, and I made sure to listen this time.

‘Okay, now I’ll be sending around the insect mouthparts.’ More slides came: this time I looked closely at the slide with my natural, God-given eyes first. Sure enough, I could make out the ugly bastard’s decapitated pincers.

‘Ah, cool!’ said a girl in front of me, her eyes buried in the microscope. *Were they mammal parts, these people would be shocked by this gore, but no one has sympathy for a little insect.* I sceptically put

the new slide on the holder. This time it wasn't Vaseline covered bark, but more like a view of sticks through glasses covered in soot. Once again, I just passed the slide on, trying to seem like I wasn't completely failing at this task.

'Wow! They look badass, bro,' said my bench mate as his eyes were in the black tubes.

*Aw man, I also want to see badass pincers... Or are they mandibles? Boy, I need to stuff my mandibles pretty soon... And a nap would be nice...*

Next came more slides of wings, thoraxes and pupae, all of which were reduced to abstract surrealism through the microscope I had (no) control over. Once all the mutilated insect fragments had gone around, the lady said we were halfway and could take a 10-minute break. My break was spent on a pillow of my skinny arms (well, much skinnier now I had seen Charlie's forelimb cannons) and the subsequent second half of the lecture, which concerned insect social life, was spent in a similar sleepy haze.

The class ended with a quick 10-mark test on the prac; I could answer the questions about metamorphosis fairly well, albeit with atrocious spelling ("hemymetaboles"), but the later ones about insect social living were Hebrew to me. Thankfully, this was my last varsity appointment of the day. While I lazily made my way out the building with the crowd, I was shocked out of my lull by the distinct, silky voice of Deon: 'Hey, Treeman.'

I turned to see he was with Jan, which sent adrenalin flowing. *Hope he's not angry...*

Jan simply waved at me. He'd sprouted a healthy amount of facial stubble since I last saw him and was in *plaas* clothes, as usual. 'Hey, guys!' I said, unable to make my wide eyes smaller.

Without any further words, they walked on – no comment on my abandoning res, no asking how my holidays were. *Good, I don't want to be any concern of JP apologists...* But as I walked to my bicycle, I couldn't help but feel strange. I wondered how they felt about me being gone, if anything.

I felt even stranger when I saw Charlie the transformer walking in the distance: his ridiculous new right arm was holding a protein shaker with gloopy brown stuff inside. *Was that what I did wrong? Should I have spent all my dough on horse hormones and concentrated whey protein?*

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My path saw me pass the campus pub: Oom Piet. I had never been here because Geelhout Lieutenants were not allowed, unless invited by Captains or higher, and invites to their beloved old pub were rare. I was just thinking to myself: *Boy, I wish I still had friends to go there with now that I'm out of res*, when a voice came from it: 'Hey! it's the funny guy... uh...'

'Frans, dummy.' I looked and saw that the "dummy" had been Brentwyn, and the other Samantha – *And I the funny guy!* They were both sitting by themselves at an outside table.

‘Yes! Frans! Come join us for a drink, man!’

‘Oh, it’s Brentflakes!’ They chuckled. ‘Just kidding,’ I said as I sat down, ‘I remember: it’s Brentwyn Asana and Samantha ... did you ever give me your surname?’

‘I didn’t! It’s Dubiham.’

Brentwyn immediately put in: ‘Doobie and ham: a superb combination.’

‘You’ve made that joke so many times!’ She playfully smacked his shoulder.

‘He’s never heard it, you imprudent pudendum!’

‘“Imprudent pudendum”. That’s a good one.’

Samantha was smoking, which made me realise I’d not had one all day. Lighting up, Brentwyn commented: ‘Ah! Another silly-smoker to join this one, I see,’ in a friendly manner, taking a sip of his draught, surfacing another, analogous yearning in me.

‘Ignore this holy temple over here,’ said Samantha. We got to know one another better over drinks: they learnt where I was from (though I left out details), that I recently terminated my Geelhout relationship, even that I needed new friends, all thanks to the beers.

‘My group of friends is really starting to annoy me...’ I casually slipped into the conversation at one point. This wasn’t entirely true – by now they were definitely not my friends; I had ignored the three or four messages I’d received from Christoff and company relating to invitations to hang out, and then there were no more messages to ignore. I explained to Brentwyn and Samantha that they were a hole of negativity that I had outgrown. They were sympathetic: Brentwyn said that he could tell that I was not a negative person, and that my decision was admirable.

Samantha, bless her, said: ‘Ag don’t worry. We think you’re super cool. We’ll be your new friends!’

‘Yeah, man!’ I couldn’t help but smile a big dumb smile. Soon after Sam’s proclamation of friendship, she announced that she had to leave. Brentwyn said he wanted one more beer and asked me if I’d join him, so we greeted her and my third round was ordered.

Brentwyn said to me: ‘Listen, man, since you’re keen on meeting people, my friends are hosting a back-to-class-bash at their commune tonight. You’re welcome to join.’

‘That sounds great!’ Thanks for the invite.’

‘No problem, dude. I can’t remember the address now, so give me your number and I’ll send you the address later.’

We then talked about art. He asked why I took it and I told him that it was just for fun. I didn’t mention that I didn’t want to study Agriculture. When I asked him why he was studying art, he told me that he was an “expressive soul” and required a job that involved creativity – be it artist or teacher, or whatever. After this short exchange, Brentwyn suddenly announced: ‘Oh damn! I forgot I’ve got to run an errand!’ He downed the remainder of his beer and got up.

‘Cheers, man! So nice to meet you!’ He gave me a pound hug.

‘Remember to send me that address!’ I blurted out in desperation.

‘I will!’ I still had some beer left, so I sat down to finish it. I felt like a bit of a loser now, sitting on my own, and was also afraid I seemed like an asshole by taking up a whole table by myself in this busy bar – I made myself take big sips. In my solitude I observed my bar-mates: I began eavesdropping on a brimming table in front of me. Here were a group of older students and a guy whose voice made it clear he was an American. At some point the Yankee said: ‘South Africans are obsessed with love, especially Afrikaners,’ which was met with some shocked exclamations from his audience, evidently mostly Afrikaners.

‘Yeah! It’s true! You’re in a relationship, you’re in a relationship, you’re freaking married!’ he said, jabbing fiercely with his index finger to three of his table mates. ‘And you guys are all what? Under 25? Back in the States, people don’t even think about relationships until they’re like, 27.’

*Am I obsessed with love?* I remembered my vulgar hairstyle I’d recently gotten rid of, and the city boy threads before that. *Am I even an Afrikaner anymore?* This question brought a most bizarre feeling – I suppressed it. *I’m not obsessed with love. I just wanna score some action!* I thought, being optimistic about the commune party Brentwyn had invited me to, even though I knew I wasn’t very good in that department: Millie reed-skeleton had still been my only snog.

I redirected my attention to the bargoers around me: a table to my left was in the process of being taken by three Geelhout Majors – their Geelhout caps grey from age. *Shit, what if they recognise me? What if they don’t believe I’ve left res? What if they get even angrier once they learn I’ve forsaken their cult?!* In my paranoia, I considered going to them and pretending I was still in Geelhout and apologising for being at Oom Piet. *Better a more predictable pan than a possible fire.* But I realised this was akin to a bug flying into a zapper. I blasphemed the party gods by abandoning my beer when it had a gulp or two left, and rapidly scurried away.

My return to the commune around 4 p.m. was not great: my eyes were tired and my stomach full of foam. I still met no member of my commune on my way to my room, though I saw a few more of them standing outside, including the tanned one I’d seen that morning. In my room, I fell on my bed.

I heard my commune mates moving chairs about, putting heavy things on tables, having muffled discussions and making a general ruckus outside. *What the hell are they doing?* I still didn’t want to meet any of them – I blamed my fatigue. I went on to my laptop and did some admin, seeing as I was soon to go to a party (hopefully) and wouldn’t have any other time to do so. I downloaded lecture notes, signed up for practical classes, got some study guides, and tried to ignore my desire to open a new tab for porn. This took me about half an hour thanks to the rubbish Wi-Fi at the commune.

When I’d done what I could, I lay on my bed and stared at my notification-less phone and thought to myself: *Don’t think it.* But of course, the thought had already come. How could I tell myself not to think something without knowing the thought?

The thought was: *Why hasn't Brentwyn sent me the address yet?* I hated thinking this. I decided to keep my mind occupied with something else. Since I was in dire need of sketch practice, I got back on my bicycle and made the trip to LC de Villiers with some blank paper and pencils.

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The trip to the sport campus took less than five minutes. Once inside, I saw that the dam next to the entrance had some picnickers on the side I had intended to go to; I wanted to draw in peace, so I went to the uglier side instead. With my bike chained up near the entrance to the Rembrandt Hall, I walked along the dam's edge till I was at a spot I liked – the sun setting behind me. I took in the lovely view and sounds for a bit and then considered what to draw. The winner was quickly decided: the tiny island in the centre of the dam.

This was very ambitious – what with its gnarled willows, untamed grass, Egyptian geese and their erratic nests – but the attempt would be good practice. I remembered some of my forgotten techniques, such as continually “stepping back” and ensuring that I was on the right track, and trying not to draw the scene, but rather just the bunch of shades of light in front of me. Once I had the broad outlines drawn, a suggestion inside nudged me: *It looks like a mystical island... maybe draw badass griffins there! Or no: manticores!* With indignation, I disregarded these remnants of this outgrown part of my mind, and continued sketching exactly what was before me. *Later, probably after the art course, I can try to develop a way of adding magnificence in a mature way, like van Gogh did.*

After about an hour, close to 6 p.m., my eyes were tired from sketching, so I stopped and walked along the dam. Now I was really starting to believe that Brentwyn had forgotten me. Just as I was considering the excruciating possibility that I would have to remind him of my wretched existence, my phone sent a vibration onto my leg. I eagerly read the message: **YOU HAVE WON 200 000 EUROS FROM THE UNITED NATIONS! CALL DR STEVE TO CLAME**

*Ag fokoff*, I thought passionately, followed by: *Jeez, Frans, you'd swear this is your boyfriend you're waiting to hear from!* I began to accept that I was both forgotten and that I didn't have the nerve to demand remembrance. In my sullen state I took a walk around the dam, supposing I'd see Brentwyn at the following art class, and that I'd just pretend that I too had forgotten about his invitation. *Or how about I pretend I've no idea who he is, and sit by myself... Jerk.*

I got close to the individuals who were still picnicking, though their loud laughter suggested they were drunk too – *A drincnic?* My tired eyes directed at them began to express their overuse with the threat of liquid. I quickly leaned against a tree, shutting and giving my eyes respite. Once calm, I reopened and reutilised my dry vision to examine the goose island from this new perspective. I thought to myself: *Boy, wouldn't that be the ideal place to have a house? Not in a university's dam obviously –*

*away from the city. A cosy thatch cottage, with plenty of good trees all around. The only way in would be by boat, and there would be –*

My fantasy was interrupted by another vibration in my right pocket. This time it really was Brentwyn: **Hey man! Its Brentflakes :’D the address is 31 Richard Street. I’m going to pitch at 7 already, so feel free to come any time after that.**

*Richard Street...* It sounded so familiar. Embarrassingly, it took about ten seconds to dawn on me: *That’s the street my commune is in! Sweet! Won’t have to walk very far!* Then I realised the number was also familiar. *No... It can’t be... is it? 31? It is! The party is at my new commune!*

I was buzzing from the sheer absurdity of the chances involved in this phenomenon. I was just about to tell Brentwyn that *his* party was at *my* new commune, but I stalled as I realised that this was a great opportunity to play a trick on him and my new commune mates. So, I rather replied: **Thanks! See you there, bro :)**

Plotting, I walked back to where my bicycle was stashed. *It’s only 6:20. For my plan to work I can’t arrive before Brentwyn.* With this thought, I instead walked past my bike, toward the entrance to the enormous Rembrandt Hall, the curvaceous outside of which I had seen many times before, though the inside was unknown to me. Inside was a wide hallway: I followed it to an open door through which I saw the expansive indoor court of the main hall, surrounded by thousands of seats that were currently unoccupied.

The court’s glossy surface looked suitable for basketball or badminton, or a nude body sliding race, but at this moment the sport that was being practised was trampoline. I stared in fascination at youths and young adults being flung to immense heights by big, professional trampolines, and then increasing the danger by violently twisting and flipping their bodies, as if a swarm of bees were attacking them. This mockery of Newtonian gravitational laws terrified me – and I was firmly on the tranquil ground! I was so captivated that I kept looking at the acrophiliacs for a good while. One of the potential-energy anarchists – a teenage girl – noticed me ogling their kinetic ritual in the doorway. I didn’t want to be rude or creepy, so I quickly moved away. But I simply had to observe their display of fearlessness some more – perhaps let it infect me. So, I made my way to the elevated seats of the court where I was not seen.

*Am I frightened of heights now? Has that come with age? Young me would have been eager to try this adrenaline-inducing physics. I thought one became braver when older. Do I have some mental condition!? Hopefully it’s just one of those things...* Like most entertaining stimulus, I got habituated to it quickly, and I left as 7 p.m. was drawing near. I was on my bike, cruising away from the Rembrandt Hall when I saw that the gigantic rock-climbing wall, which stretched up for probably a hundred metres or more, had picked up a strain of humans since I had last seen it an hour or so earlier. They were sprawled and clinging to it like amputated spiders. *Great! More courageous gravity-heathens to make*



*me feel like a pussy.* I stared at them for a good while too. I had *loved* climbing trees as a kid, but I asked myself how I would cope if I got all the way up there now: I didn't think I'd be very comfortable. I left the wannabe geckos to their formal pull-ups for my party.

It was a peculiar experience, a few minutes later, when I stood outside my own home, to which I had keys, but instead phoned Brentwyn to tell him I was waiting outside. So strange in fact, that I almost aborted the whole scheme. But Brentwyn soon came of my front door with one of my commune mates, who I had seen making a racket in the backyard.

*Oh, that's what they were up to!*

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'We meet again, Frans!' Brentwyn said with a fancy craft beer in his hand, as my gate was opening. His friend was a thinly built, long-haired individual whose virtually non-existent lips curled to a smile. 'This is Fer Beal.'

*What's up with the names of this friend group?!* When I shook his hand, I saw in the lamplight that his long hair was the lightest shade of blond. This Chris Froome hippie-doppelganger, who was wearing a yellow and navy tie-dye T-shirt, welcomed me to my own home and told me, in a squeaky, raspy voice, that I could call him "Ferbie". We went to the back porch where a tranquil party was being held, and where the smell of marijuana invaded my nostrils.

There are several basic acquaintance-making-modes that I've documented over the years, which include eager, neutral, uninterested, merry, disgusted and shy, as primary examples. I had always tried to be somewhere between neutral and merry, though almost always a rogue mode like shy or, God forbid, *eager* came through. My introduction by Brentwyn to my new house mates and the visitors, serves to exemplify these different acquaintance-making-modes. I first met the dark-skinned, curly-haired individual I'd seen that morning. This was Paul Bard. *Finally, a normal name.* I'd soon learn that Brentwyn, Ferbie and Paul were a trio of best pals. I was also introduced to a girl with dreadlocks called Leigh Kulungile, a visitor; a large be-speckled guy named Bernard Smith, who was a commune mate; Cynthia Koeja, a skinny, angry-faced chick who was the only girl living at the commune; and Eric Koen, who was handsome and very quiet – the fifth and final member of the commune.

These meetings were almost all of the merry sort, which pleased me, and each had another type mixed in. Paul's other mode was eager, Leigh's was neutral, Bernard's shy, Cynthia's was disgust (*Bitch*) and Eric's was uninterest (*Son-of-a-Cynthia*). The last person I met was Flou Kruger, and hers was a relaxed merry. She was blonde, slim and very graceful. This dainty fairy-person had an effect on me comparable to that of the prettiest girl in BSc, or rather *Niksy*, as I learnt that very day.



There was punch – spiked of course – to be had as I pleased. I pleased myself with a nice big cup thereof, to ease the old nerves – the never before experienced nerves of playing a trick on strangers. Most people were sitting on plastic chairs around a fire in the yard. That big cup was matched with big intakes, so that soon I chatted relatively easily to the group. These people were of a person-genre I had not yet had much interaction with: they were spiritual, peace-loving and wholesome. They were hippies. The modal age was 21 – the age of Brentwyn, Paul and Ferbie. Brentwyn was only first year now because he took a gap year, then did a year of Architecture but hated it, so switched to Art. Ferbie also took a gap year, so was now in second year Engineering. Paul was in his third year of English, as was Leigh. Flou knew the commune through her friend Cynthia. She also did English but was second year. They were nice, but unlike Brentwyn, they seemed reluctant to accept me, almost certainly because of my youth; Brentwyn’s being in first year was probably why he was okay with my 19-ness. Cynthia, for example, asked me how old I was and I told her, she nodded her head knowingly, and changed her behaviour towards me.

Listening to flame-lit conversations, I learnt that Brentwyn was a yoga enthusiast, and that he’d gotten his teacher’s licence in his gap year. I learnt too, that Fer spent his gap year doing charity work abroad and that Paul was an aspiring musician and poet – he sang and played some simple but quality guitar while we sat. I didn’t learn much about Flou, who didn’t speak a lot, though I could have read a book about her (preferably a picture book). She was dressed in a brown shirt with a yellow sun painted on it, intricately patterned yoga pants and was barefoot. Her brown-blond hair had single braid that made her look tropical. I didn’t want to seem pervy to this beautiful girl, but her presence was like a magnet to my iris - especially the tight yoga pants. One of this nymph’s few contributions to the conversation was asking those present how there could be a north pole when “it’s all just ocean”.

‘Come on, Flou,’ said Paul, ‘how dense is the rock you live under?!’

‘You’re such an anal orifice,’ said Leigh, and proceeded to politely explain to Flou the phenomenon of the polar icecaps.

*Anal orifice?* I knew it was an insult from the tone of voice and context that the words came with, but I was puzzled. *Oh, she means asshole!* I quickly realised. They did this quite a bit, it soon became apparent: not ten minutes later Brentwyn called Flou a “sexually liberal female” instead of a slut, which she denied avidly. *She doesn’t seem like a slut to me: she seems prim and proper.*

‘I mean, if a woman wants to be that way, more power to her,’ she elaborated, ‘but that’s not who I am.’

‘You know who I’m not?’ Ferbie began. ‘My clothes.’ And he tugged at his bright shirt.

Cynthia responded with a vexed: ‘Here we go...’

He continued: ‘So the other day *somebody* (he head-gestured to an eye-rolling Cynthia) complimented me on my attire, right, and I simply couldn’t bring myself to say thanks. Does that make me a cockerel-cranium?’

‘Yes,’ said Cynthia.

He presented his case to the unsuspecting jury. ‘Why? I didn’t make it. I just bought it.’

‘No, but you *chose* to buy it,’ the feisty prosecution interrupted.

‘Ah, so you’re commending my taste?’ retorted the defence, ‘It just happens to match your taste. Someone else may dislike it, must I then feel bad for their judgement? Or, are you commending the way I pull it off? I’m just lucky, then.’

Cynthia conceded with a middle-finger. Brentwyn the peacemaker passed judgement: ‘I agree with you Ferbie, but you come across as a real sphincter.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Ja, ja...’

‘Oi! Fer, you “cockerel-cranium”, how about a smoke break?’ asked Paul.

‘Yes, let’s!’

‘Mind if I join?’ I asked, keen for a ciggy.

‘Oh, you smoke? Sure, man,’ said Paul.

‘There goes the emphysema-investors!’ said Brentwyn.

Ferbie defended himself again as he was exiting the circle of seats: ‘Hey man, it’s important to have a balanced diet, right? We all get our solids and liquids, but what about gasses? I don’t want a gas deficiency or something, so...’ and he lit up. I was glad that I could smoke with these two at least. As we created our carcinogenic clouds, they asked about my studies and my background. They weren’t yet very comfortable with me, but they were nice enough. After I blitzed through my cigarette, I set off to the lavatory – even asked Ferbie where it was to keep up the façade.

As I passed the circle, Leigh was passionately complaining: ‘The other day, I tried to google “face”. First it immediately took me to Facebook login. Then I tried again, and the results were just showing things for Facebook, then I said show “face” only, then it said: “did you mean Facebook?” What the fuck!? You can’t avoid the damn thing!’

On the way I bumped into Brentwyn retrieving a beer from my fridge. ‘Want a beer, Frans my dude?’

‘Don’t mind if I do!’ It was one of his fancy, cloudy beers, which I tried my best to enjoy.

‘So, enjoying the merrymaking?’

‘Yeah! Cool people.’

‘They are indeed.’ He took a sip, then said: ‘Man, I’m seriously going to have to do some yoga tomorrow – get rid of these toxins.’

'I've never done yoga.'

'What!?! I've got to give you a lesson, dude! It's my passion,' he took another sip, 'my original surname isn't Asana, you know. I changed it to that.'

'Oh?'

'Yeah, "asana" basically means "pose" in Sanskrit, so in yoga all the poses' real names end with asana, like *shavasana*, and *halasana*.'

'So, you changed it officially? Legally?'

'Yes. Paul and Ferbie did the same thing. We all decided to make our passion part of our name.'

I went to the bathroom, which had already been robbed of a noticeable amount of its cleanliness since the other commune mates had waltzed in. In here I considered what I'd just been told. *He threw away his birth surname and chose his own. I wonder what his parents thought. I doubt he cares. Did it make any difference in his life? He certainly looks happy and self-assured. Does he feel different? Do people treat him differently? Did he develop dissociative identity disorder? Better keep an eye out...*

Once back outside, there was a conversation going about one of their friends, also 21, getting married soon. *Marriage?! Jeez, these people really are older!* 'I'm sorry, but she's making herself guilty of some major credits living there,' said Paul.

I was drunk enough to inquire: 'What's "credits living"?''

To my surprise, fairy lady Flou answered me: 'It's living only for goals, and not appreciating the journey of life, you know?'

Gazing into her brown eyes was lovely and terrifying. '... Ja...'

'Have any of you seen her husband-to-be?' asked Eric the almost-mute, in one of his preciously rare verbalisations.

'I have: he's older, and he's a handsome chap,' said Brentwyn.

'Hey, have any of you even seen the *new* guy?' Cynthia changed the subject. My heart began beating faster at my deception.

Ferbie replied: 'Paul said he heard him, I think.' His voice loudened to engage with Paul, who was smoking: 'Hey, Paul, have you met the new guy!?''

'I haven't even seen him. I only heard him last night in his room, and then I heard him leave this morning.'

'Is he in his room now?'

'No idea.'

I mischievously inquired: 'Is that room across the bathroom his?' trying my best to conceal a smile.

'Ja, the one with the green door.'

'I heard someone in there making a phone call just now,' I lied.

'He *is* here! Shame, guys! Let's go invite him to chill with us!' said Leigh.

Off we went to this weird recluse's room – this mysterious figure. *Knock-knock* went Ferbie's finger on my door, with the light from inside radiating from the edges.

'Anybody home?' asked Brentwyn. No reply, obviously.

I decided to take advantage of this real-life dramatic irony. I walked up to my door, slammed my fist against it and shouted: 'Hey motherfucker, come party with us! *Yoo-hoooo!*' and I attempted to try and open the door I very well knew was locked.

'Whoa, calm down, Frans!' said Flou laughing, shocked at my behaviour, like the others.

'Since you guys just met me you probably don't know that I can pick locks,' I claimed and took my key from my pocket: I covered it with my hand and sneakily put it into the lock. I pretended to fiddle about a bit ('Wait, you can't do that!') and loudly turned it to unlock the door. I proudly grinned at my audience who gaped at me – some kind of secret agent presumably, or expert-tier burglar. I laughed, opened the door, casually strolled over to my bed and lay down on it with authority.

'I am the new dude in commune, you fornication-acumens!' I held out the key I just used. Everyone stared at me, bewildered. 'I live here!' I clarified.

'What!' exclaimed Brentwyn with ecstasy, laughing in awe – he clearly understood what was going on, unlike Cynthia.

'Wait, what?!' she asked, her face contorted with confusion.

Ferbie and Leigh, in hysterics too, explained to her and Flou: 'Frans is the new guy living here.' 'He was tricking us into thinking he was a guest.' I explained to the jubilant crowd what exactly had occurred. All of a sudden, I was no longer the odd youth Brentwyn had dragged along: I was the cool new dude in the commune, going from near unspeaking to buzzing.

Brentwyn was especially proud of his new mate. 'Some of these vulvas were sceptical when I said I'd invited a first year. Oh, citizens of little confidence!'

My evening's highlight was when Flou came to me and said: 'Oh my Jehovah! Thank you so much for a brilliant story that I'll be telling everyone,' and she hugged me. This pixie's intentional body contact was heavenly.

'M-my pleasure!' I chatted to her for a little bit. She seemed to think well of me now. Later, after she'd left, I regretted not asking her number. *Hell, I could have maybe even asked her on a date...* I solaced myself with the fact that I was a bit too drunk to have thought of that, and that I would see her again soon.

Brentwyn, Ferbie, Paul and I were the sole remnants eventually, lazing by the fire. Soon, Brentwyn's lack of response to a question indicated that he'd fallen asleep. We gathered around his unconsciousness. Paul shook him – nothing. 'Comrades, we've lost a brother,' he said dramatically.

'He'd not even known the touch of a woman,' Ferbie played along.

I joined with a favourite quote: “I would have gone with you to the end, into the very fires of Mordor,” placing my hand on Brentwyn’s head. The duo laughed, recognising the allusion. Spurred on, I added: “If by my life or death I can protect you, I will. You have my sword.”

“And my axe,” contributed Ferbie in a gruff voice.

Brentwyn stirred minutely from the chuckles; I milked the referencing one last time: “He is passing into the Shadow World. He’ll soon become a wraith like them.” The loud laughter from this awoke a disoriented Brentwyn.

‘Intercourse me, it’s late!’ announced Paul; we decided it was time to pack it in. Ferbie was still giggling as we went into our rooms. While lying in bed, a bit too drunk for a weekday, I happily thought: *These aren’t like those dumb jocks, who I hung out with because they seemed to be what all city people were like. And I’m not friends with them because they look cool and anti-Boer, like those skater losers. I genuinely like these people for their intelligence and personalities! I guess you sort of go through friend groups until you find some people who you truly click with. And my goodness, Flou has a nice ass.*

I fell asleep.

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The next two weeks, I kept up the bonding with Brentwyn and my commune mates, especially Ferbie and Paul. At BSc classes I sat alone, but it was okay – *My friends are waiting at home*. I never sat alone in Art though: Brentwyn and Sam were there and we always had a good time, and I quickly got back into drawing and painting. With the Brentwyn group, I started going to the more mature hangouts nearby, like Impala’s, Kingsley’s and Westwood’s, and felt badass.

Through our commune living, I learnt that Paul “Bard” was actually born Paul Oitonos. His chosen surname was linked to his passion for music. He would show me poems he was analysing in class. He was even fine with me borrowing his car – a green, 2006 Volkswagen Golf – if I arranged with him beforehand. “Fer” Beal’s selected name needs a more thorough explanation: it came from the suffix “-fer” meaning “that which carries”, e.g. aquifer. This is what he was “all about now” – “helping carry others’ loads”. So, he dropped Richard and became Fer.

Ex-Richard quickly became my good mate. He and I often relaxed on the porch with a smoke and/or a beer, and a conversation, and as happens with people who get closer, our conversations got ever more intimate. The first deep conversation was on a Tuesday, about two weeks after our meeting, where we made a fire in the backyard to brighten our dialogue. I was waiting for Brentwyn to pick me up: after Art class that day he said that he was “itching for an adventure” with me, even though Tuesday and Monday are the week’s dull couple.

So, I sat with Ferbie, chewing smoke-flavoured fat and drinking tea while waiting. I was already clad in my outfit for the evening; I was excited because it was a chance to wear some brand new clothes I'd bought that weekend – garb to fit more with my brand new buddies. It was a brown flannel shirt, bell bottom jeans, old leather shoes and a shell necklace. I had bought these, among other items, with Brentwyn at a specialised shop over the weekend – bloody expensive stuff. Since the razor was clearly the enemy of this group of people, I had also decided to develop an aversion to hair trimmings, though there was, as of yet, little evidence for this: my blond mane was still short, and my “beard” still infantile.

At first, I was afraid that the braai smoke would get into the clothes, but then I realised that such concern was going against the ideas the threads represented. *Besides, tobacco smoke will get in anyway.* Paul and Fer were slightly ashamed of their nicotinic habit and wanted to quit; I too decided I should try to stop, but soon realised the extremely inconvenient nature of this undertaking. *I'll give it up when I go back home in December, when I'll have to anyway.*

Fer and I chatted about arbitrary stuff for a while, but a silence came and added a serious tone: Ferbie took a deep sigh, his soft face, illuminated by the glow of combusting logs, looked vulnerable and sombre. ‘I dunno about you, man, but sometimes, I feel like there are no more smiles left inside me,’ his heavy eyes were tied to the flames, with occasional bounces to meet my slightly tense, slightly intrigued eyes. I had nothing to say yet, so he continued: ‘I remember when I was a kid, even a mopey teenager, I was so much happier. I didn't have a care in the world. Those were the days! But they're lost.’

He stared at the fire a while. I stared at him, not knowing if this awkward and abrupt change of topic was going somewhere. My first, reactive thought was: “*no smiles*”? *We were just busy laughing! Your dental-floss lips are constantly a positive parabola!* Eventually he seemed to get his mind in order and continued: ‘Now though,’ he blew out a white-grey sigh, ‘I don't know when, but somewhere along the line I began feeling real down...’ I still didn't know what to say so I just hummed to signify my attentiveness, and to possibly feign understanding.

‘I've talked with some other people and they told me it sounded to them like I'm feeling the same way they do, and they said a psychiatrist told them they were probably depressed – gave them some pills to help. I've come to realise, in the past couple of months, that I really am depressed, dude. I don't have money to see a psychiatrist, so I dunno how I'm going to get those pills I need.’

I finally thought of something to say, though it wasn't much: ‘Have you told your parents?’

‘I can't do that, man... Anyway, my one friend said pills should be a last resort because you can get dependent. So, I'm trying this book I've found now.’ He told me about this self-help book a friend had found helpful. I didn't listen much: I was trying to understand how this usual froth-of-enthusiasm was actually bleak-bubbles inside. The flame's crackle did its best to unawkward the silence that followed his telling of this book he'd only read two chapters of.

Fergie eventually said: 'Yeah, bro, it sucks. I've got a disease, I guess. But I'm not alone. Many of my friends either are, or think they are, depressed.' He looked me in the eye, 'If you ever feel down, dude, I'm here to talk. I'm all about helping others, you know.'

'Thanks... I appreciate it,' I said trying my best to contain the massive conceptual weight he'd just bludgeoned me with. *Do I have it!? He must think I have it – why else tell me this? I don't even smile as much as Fergie, and he's depressed!?! I'm not exactly overjoyed with my life. What happens if depression is left unchecked? Do suicidal impulses just materialise?! Suddenly, old Emily Hanter was standing before my mind's eye. Before I had the chance to dwell further on my mental state, Paul got my attention through the backdoor: 'Oi! Franbo, you phallus-noggin! Brentwyn is here!'*

"Franbo" – that was my nickname among the hippies. I greeted Fergie with a hug and he bade me "a lovely evening". He seemed cheery enough again, but my faith in his appearance had been shaken. When I passed Paul on my way out, I asked: 'You sure you don't want to come with us, bro?'

'I can't, dude, got class early tomorrow.' (So did I) 'Enjoy, Franbo!'

I had gotten this "Franbo" appellation an evening we went to Kingsley's, which was a bar with a Victorian explorer theme, where one sat under a large *lapa*, surrounded by a garden of dense jungle-mimicking foliage. Here I asked Brentwyn, Fergie and Paul when they had decided to officially change their names/surnames. It was when they were 19. They encouraged me to adopt their decision: 'Make your passion your title! Let it define and herald you! Let it be what you are announced by!' said Paul, excitedly.

'Exactly. What is your passion, dude?'

'Uh,' I squeaked. I just couldn't think of an activity or hobby that I strongly associated myself with (other maybe than masturbation and vivid visualizations of naked women), but I couldn't just keep quiet. Thus, I desperately tried to keep a straight face while trying to find *anything* to say to all my eager onlookers. '...I really enjoy going for walks,' I said finally. I'd said it as soon as it came to mind because it was *something* I was relatively fond of and it seemed okay. Then I immediately thought it was an even dumber excuse for a passion than pornography. I was, in fact, just about to try and salvage the abysmal situation by giving a pig-esque snort and telling them all that I was just joking, when Fergie said 'Dude... *walking... that's so pure.*'

Everyone agreed. All of a sudden, I decided walking had been the great ardour of my life all along, and that my subconscious knew this, and so blurted it out, and that these beings were the catalysts for this monumental self-discovery, and that this was further proof that they really were my people. 'And you love *Lord of the Rings!*' Paul remembered; naturally my quotation ability of it had spread fast among the group. Alas, I was subsequently bestowed with the nickname "Franbo" that night, which is supposed to be a muddle of Frans with Bilbo – Tolkien's great walking character. I didn't show it, because everyone

else thought it was a superb name, but I REALLY didn't like it. It sounded like a simpleton's name – something you'd call the village idiot, or rather, the *Shire* idiot.

Upon receiving this sobriquet, I was curious to find out from my new mates what they thought of the sequel to *The Hobbit*, which was still my favourite novel, but was in danger of losing that honour because of its supposed "children's book" status. Ferbie and Paul said it was not for kids at all – 'Besides, it's a bloody classic!' – but Cynthia and Bernard said it was "totally for children", and was "really childish", like all fantasy. Cynthia's cynical opinion was not worth much to me, but, to my hidden dismay, all agreed it was definitely a *nerdy* book, and I couldn't help but see the awful vision of a pimple-peppered, teenage Bloomstein eagerly drinking in the tale. And so now I didn't know what to think of J.R.R.'s masterpiece anymore.

A few days after my re-christening, Brentwyn suggested I change my official name to "Franbo Knollenhoven" (he couldn't pronounce Knollenhoven properly, the English fuck). I told him I'd sooner make it "Frans Franbo", in attempt to keep my moniker Frans, but they still called me Franbo regularly.

When I now got into Brentwyn's car – a nice new hatchback Volvo – he greeted me: 'Frans, my dear!' so the name wasn't sticking too firmly at least. I greeted him over the hum of the trans music he liked so much, which he loudened to a throb as we set off. He – clad in a purple and brown baja hoodie – was in a pumped-up mood and drove a little unsafely. I was fairly sure he'd had a pre-drink or antesmoke before picking me up.

'We're quickly going to pick up my new squeeze, Inze. She'll be joining in our adventuring.' This "squeeze" lived in one of the apartment buildings on Lunnon Road, and the squishy dame was already waiting at the gate for us when we got there. She, a pretty blond, was dressed in jeans cut into shorts, a green, blue and yellow hippie-top, and boots. This was Inze Kuhr – she stood with arms folded, looking somewhat bitchy, but it was just because it was cold and her scanty outfit was inept at heat retention. When Brentwyn introduced me, she smiled at me gaily. Their relationship was very new – they did not kiss-greet, but rather hugged. After their embrace, Brentwyn announced: 'Can I just quickly use your bathroom?' and before waiting for Inze's answer he started toward the gate.

'But it's so far!'

'Be quick, promise! Besides, I want to say hello to Sebastian,' he turned to me, 'Sebastian is her obese cat.'

'Shame, he's not obese!'

'You'll see, Franbo – he's *enormous*.'

'Oh, shut up, you're the obese one, you... portly-rump!'

'Not bad!' He turned to me, 'I'm getting her into the snobbish insults.'

I said to her: 'I'm still wrapping my head around them too.'



‘Cool! We can be like study buddies.’ Her flat was only one flight of steps up. Inside was a neat disarray of clothes, papers, dirty dishes and ornaments – mostly purple.

‘Hey fatty-boombalatty!’ said Brentwyn to the kitchen floor, where I noticed a chubby, white Persian cat. It didn’t return a vocal greeting, but instead erected its bushy tail and stroked the wall with its coat. ‘Told you he was fat, right?!’

‘Well, he’s not exactly skinny,’ I admitted to Inze.

‘Well, no...’ she said defeatedly.

‘Do you think he’ll be able to walk much longer?’ Brentwyn’s voice was full of concern.

Inze ignored him and whispered to me: ‘I’m not actually allowed to have him here...’

‘Good thing he doesn’t meow then!’

‘Ja, he only meows when I’m eating something he wants.’

‘See! The bastard only raises his voice for food.’

‘Don’t listen to the mean man, Sebastian,’ Inze said, stroking it. Brentwyn went to the bathroom, and I talked with Inze – I learnt that she was studying Psychology. Brentwyn emerged with Sebastian in hand and interrupted us: ‘Guys I think he has water retention... or maybe it’s everything retention...’

‘You leave Sebasty-buns alone!’ Inze said over me, laughing.

I couldn’t resist joining in the mockery of this cat and its human: ‘Let’s just put him down, guys, he’s clearly suffering,’ and I gently put my hand over his head as if I was about to ring his neck.

‘NOOO!’ Inze wailed before she rescued Sebastian from my pretend malice.

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First, we went to Emblems for their two-for-one cocktail special. This joint – the bar at Loftus Stadium – was one I’d never been at before. Here one found mostly people in their mid to late twenties. Brentwyn went straight to the bar to order a two-for-one mojito.

‘I’ve no clue about cocktails – I’ve never really had a proper one before,’ I said after he asked what I wanted.

‘Really?!’ exclaimed Inze.

‘Real *boerseun* this maternal copulater here. Nothing but *brannewyn en coke!*’ I felt a rush of negativity at this comment: my new friends knew that I’d spent my upbringing on the farm, but this was the first time one had condemned me to that person-genre.

*I guess there’s an answer to my question of whether I’m still a Boer: yes, I’m still bound and gagged by my birth-genre, even though the bars of the cell are broken... But I do think my efforts have loosened the knots that still tie my hands, and my mouthparts are working the gag away.*

Inze got a strawberry daiquiri and I got a martini; the other two advised against this – said it was terrible – but I had to try the classic. Besides, we shared all our drinks anyway. My first sip of Bond’s drink, though very strong and not really tasty, satiated my growing desire for alcohol such that it was actually quite pleasant. After tasting the refreshing mojito and fruity daiquiri, though, I decided it was much less good. The others didn’t like it at all – grimacing with each mouthful – but that didn’t stop us finishing them. After our cocktails, Inze said she was in the mood for some pool, a mood Brentwyn shared, ‘What do you say, Frans?’

I was keen to demonstrate my skills, so off we went to the pool tables, though my skills were certainly tipsy now, like the rest of me. ‘Okay Mr Asana, Miss Kuhn –’

‘It’s *Kuhr*.’

‘That’s what I said. Time to respectfully smash you two in pool!’ Smash them I did indeed: Brentwyn was hopeless – hitting the ball too hard – but he was a good loser, mocking himself, while Inze was pretty good, and very dramatic when I conquered her, but was happier when she beat her squeeze afterward. While she was concluding their match, another group of people came to the pool area: a sizable addition of six people, four of which were girls. They went to the bar in this section to get drinks. Brentwyn, who had given up on his competition with Inze, said: ‘Finally, some more people.’ Inze soon sank the 8-ball and Brentwyn said: ‘Let’s make some friends on this adventure of ours!’ He simply went up to this group and said: ‘What’s up, guys?! My name is Brentwyn, these are my homies, Frans and Inze.’

I was surprised. *Not even an excuse!?! He just went and said hello?! Can you do that?! I mean, he could have used an excuse like “Do you want to play pool with us?” That’s what JP would have done. But no – just introduces himself. He must have an even better magic scent that he puts on.* It seemed that Brentwyn could indeed just do this: these people were happy to meet us. Brentwyn led the conversation, asking them things about themselves, making comments and jokes. Thanks to the powerful cocktails, I was able to also mingle. Inze wasn’t speaking much, and when I glanced at her, I saw she looked uneasy. I guessed that she must have not liked Brentwyn coming over to these girls, all friendly.

The conversation soon turned to pool; Brentwyn told them that I was very good, so I was challenged by the one competitive girl to a game. While we played our game, the other group had their own. Our spectators were Brentwyn, Inze and one girl from the new group. Though I definitely had industrial strength beer goggles on by then, all I can say is, I found her pretty attractive that night. I can’t remember her name, so I’m going to embrace this oblivion and pretend her name was “Randomina”.

My game with competitive-woman (whose name I obviously can’t recall either) started out with her taking a small lead, but I soon sank a few balls in a row and went on to win while she had one ball left. Randomina congratulated me, saying she’d never seen someone beat woman-who-wants-to-win.

We got chatting and the other group soon joined ours again. When Brentwyn and I went to the bar he said to me: ‘Dude, you could bag Randomina! Want me to wing you?’ I didn’t think she was *that* interested, but Brentwyn insisted.

Soon, a subgroup of myself, Brentwyn, Inze (still a church-mouse) and Randomina formed. Brentwyn slipped into the conversation: ‘You see, Frans here, he’s an attractive chap, but he’s selfish, and always plays really hard to get.’

‘Is that so?’ Randomina asked, looking at me with *eyes*. I got a rush of adrenaline when I realised that Brentwyn’s stupid plan might work. I pulled myself together – told myself: *I can do this*.

‘It’s true I’m afraid. But tell you what: you seem like you’re a cool girl, so I’ll give you a chance,’ and this idea came out of nowhere: ‘If you can beat me in arm wrestling, I’ll give you a cheek kiss.’

She giggled, looked at my fairly skinny arms (especially with Brentwyn next to me) and said: ‘Deal.’ We sat and assumed the arm-battle stance. I took her little hand in mine and counted down: ‘Three... two... one... go!’ and proceeded to let my arm flop down to the able.

‘Oh, damn... now I have to kiss you...’

‘Ha-ha!’ laughed Brentwyn, the casual spectator.

She burst out laughing too. She stood up and said: ‘Well, a deal’s a deal,’ and presented me her right cheek.

I was about to pay my debt / receive my reward when Brentwyn, the attractive baseborn, said to her: ‘How about you insist on an upgrade to a *real* kiss?’

She smiled at me, I looked at her with a raised eyebrow, and then we made out: a short, sweet smooch.

*How did I manage to do that?* I thought after the awesome 2.3 seconds. Then I realised I had to say something, as she went slightly red and laughed silently into her hand. I decided I’d say this: ‘Best arm wrestle ever.’

She just laughed. Brentwyn had politely left us two – his job done – and Inze had slipped away some time before. I didn’t know what to do now, but I was stoked. We chatted awkwardly and I decided to ask her for her number; she gave it and we returned to the group where Brentwyn was entertaining the new people with a story. I didn’t know how to deal with Randomina now. I didn’t know whether it was polite to carry on normally or whether I should have continued with a more seductive approach. I decided it was best to just leave.

‘Dude, can we go?’ I asked when we were alone.

‘Sure thing, champ,’ he said, as if he knew I didn’t want anything more to do with Randomina. He announced to the group that we were heading out. I greeted Randomina with a hug – it was weird, but she seemed happy enough.

We decided to go back to Inze's apartment to have some leftover wine she had. In the car, I revelled in my triumph. I decided it was down to me *not* thinking about it. I equated it with the fact that the best drawings and paintings I'd made resulted from me entering trance-like state of little thought, then coming back to, and beholding what I had created.

Brentwyn interrupted my thoughts: 'Could maybe even have taken her home, hey, Frans?!'

I just chuckled. I imagined Randomina trying to make us go to bed together: a burst of adrenaline went to my heart. I didn't know how I could go through with that. (By the way, Randomina is nameless, not because I never contacted her, but because she ignored the message I sent her a day or two after our meeting, and then angrily deleted her digits.)

We soon got to Inze's apartment block, which was fortunate considering Brentwyn's intoxication. We drank wine on her microscopic balcony, and Brentwyn enjoyed a doobie – I still didn't want any of that stuff. When it was finished, he sat on the floor, cross-legged, did that Buddhist thing with his hands, and meditated. Sebastian, the opportunistic bastard, went to lie on his lap.

'Ahhrrrgh, tell... my .... Mom ... I'm sorry...' followed by death noises. I laughed. The weed made Brentwyn even more talkative than usual, and with less boundaries: 'Yo, Fanbo, you're not a virgin, are you?' he asked after his short meditation.

By the power of alcohol, I had little trouble in admitting this rather humiliating fact.

'What?! I'm surprised,' he said. Then, examining me, he elaborated: 'You're an attractive bloke. I'd give you at least... eight and a half out of ten.'

I just smiled and nodded thanks.

*8.5!? Why has Randomina been my second only? How garbage is my personality?! Or am I truly cursed?!*

'I suggest you cash in that V-card of yours ASAP. I can help you if you want – I know some promiscuous chicks.'

This, and these "chicks", sounded awful to me. 'No thanks, dude. That's something I've got to do myself.'

'I respect that, man. And you can believe me when I say you're handsome, bro-beans,' he said as he was meticulously sculpting a second grub-like joint, 'because I'm bisexual.'

'Oh! Really? Well, that's cool, man,' I said, proud that I this information didn't affect my friendly feeling towards Brentwyn, like it probably would to a proper Boer. I was somewhat surprised, but I decided this did explain some of his quirkiest mannerisms.

'My first kiss was from a guy. I was 15, on a camp.' This clearly wasn't news to Inze, who was being drunk on the couch. 'I even had sex with a dude before a girl. With one of my best friends when I was 17.'

'Oh my god!' interjected Inze, laughing.

‘What? You’ve heard this all before! And you’ve had your pussy licked by a chick, you *lesbian*,’ he joked.

‘Queer!’ she joked back.

Not even this surprising revelation of these two could keep me awake anymore. ‘Where can I sleep, Inze?’

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After making friends with an older crowd, kissing Randomina, and receiving a gay man’s compliments (well, semi-gay), I grew in self-confidence. Because of it, I decided that the feeling of impossibility associated with the idea of acquiring beauties such as Flou and Niksy, was not necessarily true. For the first time, I allowed myself to get a bit of a crush going – I felt I could now act on such an emotional commitment. The idea of snaring Flou was indeed amazing, but Niksy was still the favoured deity (*Blasphemy!*). However, she still needed to be *met*. Since we had no mutual friends, I would have to initiate the first interaction.

*But how?*

After a bit of brainstorming (more like brainhurricaneing) I got the idea to pull a JP (instead of the still baffling Brentwyn-method) and exploit my only conversation excuse – the fact that she was also at the previous Park Reverb concert. After assigning myself this task, I failed at making use of the first two meeting opportunities. The first was when she passed right by me after a microbiology prac – her white lab coat like a priestess’s gown – and the other was when I saw her relaxing on the grass between classes – like some mythological deity of nature. In each situation, the plan was foiled by a few missing or faulty components. At the lab, one faulty element was her mood – she seemed irritated – and another was my appearance: I’d overslept, so my hair looked stupid, and my hippy clothing choices didn’t complement one another.

The lawn opportunity’s operation was foiled by the corrupt component of her friend Sennie, who was lazing with her. Besides, Niksy’s wakefulness was a constituent I was sure was not in the best condition either.

I thought to myself: *Without all the gears going as they need to, the machinery of our meeting will grind down to a horrible halt. Just one or two integral components missing or broken, and the application is doomed.* I knew, though, that the most integral factor that was broken was my bravery, squeaking away its rusty excuses.

The third opportunity went different, though. The day of this opportunity, I ran into Bes Nogi after Genetics, and she suggested we catch up over a coffee, seeing as we both had a break. This was the first

time I saw her with her new nose – quite a bit shorter and slimmer. It was bizarre to see her transformed like this. I told her of my new commune and how fantastic the people were, and she was glad for me.

‘This whole hippy-style suits you!’ That day I was in a boho shirt and old-looking jeans.

Small talk exhausted, there was a short and uncomfortable silence. Mercifully, she beat me to its annihilation with an excited gasp. ‘Have you heard about Charlie, I think his surname is van Beth?’

‘Ja, he was my roommate. I saw he got insanely buff!’

She nodded, ‘Yes, but did you hear that he’s been *hospitalized*?’

‘Hey?! When?’

‘Last week – because of steroids. Apparently, his heartrate was very high, and he had chest pains. He got freaked out and went to get help. Now he has to get therapy...’

*Aha! That’s how the coitus visage got so big!*

‘Boy, that’s so fucking dumb!’ I revelled in his misfortune.

‘I know, hey? Just to be big and muscly...’

I processed this information while ~~playing~~ fiddling with a sugar sachet. *I get that he wanted to get ripped, but how could he sacrifice health (and testicle volume) to gain it? That trade-off doesn’t make any sense!* Bes had been gazing at the students in the coffee shop, and I couldn’t help myself: ‘So,’ I asked, pointing with the single-serving-sucrose to her recently guillotined nose, ‘money well spent?’

‘Oh! Ja!’ she said embarrassed but happily. ‘Well, I mean, I suppose it’s up to other people to decide whether it was worth it. So... what do you think?’

I got very uncomfortable. *If I say it’s an improvement, I’m implying it used to be ugly, but if I don’t, she might feel it was a waste...*

‘It looks... good,’ I said politely.

She smiled shyly and said: ‘Cool.’

It certainly was an improvement, but she was still quite average in the beauty department on the whole. I had Zoology next. It was at this class that the third opportunity to meet Niksy came. I was just on time, and so sitting space was sparse. I took a seat at the very edge of a bench. Niksy floated in a minute later, officially late, and also made do with a lonesome side-seat a few benches in front of me. Her consecrated presence greatly distracted me from the lesson regarding avian taxonomy, and after I was done admiring her, I decided that this was the opportunity I would take to meet her.

At the prospect of elongating my neck like this my feet suddenly felt frostbitten, but I was *sick* of missed opportunities, and sick of keeping this divinity a stranger, so fought through my fear. *I don’t even need an excuse! But I’ve got one! So just go for it!* I paid a morsel of attention to the lecturer going on about how birds were somehow dinosaurs.

*But I don't have alcohol, my intrinsic patheticness crept back in. I took a breath and reined it in. Too bad! Just try! You look good in your new boho shirt and leather bracelet. Don't be a wuss! The machine of your meeting is fully optimal: all that the components require is the fuel of your courage.*

I managed to keep my default afraidness at bay for a few minutes until the class's end; the other, non-holy students poured out, while Niksy was patiently packing her things away at her lovely leisure. I pretended to check my phone, keeping her in my sights. She got at up last, and I casually left the lecture hall at her glorious rear. She was right in front of me: I resisted the mesmerising effect of her back, as well as the wimp in me wishing to let go of this ambitious attempt, which insisted that I was a moth, and she a sacred flame. I got close and used an extraordinary amount of brain power to say: 'Excuse me, but am I right in saying I saw you at the previous Park Reverb concert?'

I had said it, casually as I could. I had said it southwest of her. I had said it perhaps a bit too loudly, but I had fucking said it! She glanced at me somewhat surprised after my random first phrase, then, when I tried my best to smile a small, friendly smile, she said: 'Oh, Ja!' and proceeded to point her head away to look where she was going down the stairs. She didn't say anything to me as we descended the steps, and I considered the dire possibility that she didn't intend to say anything else beyond that "ja", and I suddenly realised how strange that sentence I'd blurted out to her actually was.

But she *did* say more: at the bottom of the flight (which must have had a thousand steps), she actually turned to face me, smiled and said: 'I'm pretty sure I saw you too,' nodding her pretty little head – her brown curls bouncing gaily.

*Pfff, that sentence wasn't strange at all. It was perfect! I was highly* relieved to hear this positive response. 'Cool! I really like that place, and you're, like, the only person from BSc that I've ever seen there,' I put in as a jolt of life for the conversation – I quickly realised that I especially detested awkward silences when it came to demigods.

'Ja, people from BSc don't really know about it, unfortunately.'

'Ja, just cool people like us, I guess,' my decidedly brilliant brain announced to her graceful giggle in response.

'I guess so!' She proceeded to hold out her precious hand. 'I'm Niksy, by the way.'

The thought of touching the sanctified flesh exhilarated me; I was afraid my hand would shake when I shook hers, so I kept it flexed and stiff.

'Frans, nice to meet you.'

We had a short chat as we strolled to her next class (I was done for the day). I learned that she studied Genetics and that she had attended Norford Academy, like Bloomstein – I asked her if she knew the disappeared doofus.

'Ja, I know Bloomstein. Smart guy! And quiet,' she said this as we got to her lecture venue. When I stood there to greet her, a little voice in me said: *Ask her on a coffee date.* And a response from a

weaker, louder voice said: *IT'S TOO SOON!* Instead, told her it was a pleasure to meet her (*If only you knew how pleasurable*) and I hugged her goodbye. I felt elated as I finally pressed her wondrous body to mine.

I got home and beamed at myself in the mirror from this religious experience. I had done it: I had grown a pair. As I was lying on my bed, basking in the vast magnitude of my behemoth scrotum, my phone vibrated as the WhatsApp group of my new friends began a conversation. It was Flou asking Paul and Leigh if they wanted to sell a book they'd been assigned in second year – she knew buyers. My good mood meant I was in a comedic mood.

**Leigh: How many people want?**

**Paul: How much is it new?**

**Flou: It's 5 people**

**Frans: It costs five people?!**

**Flou: It's R250**

**Flou: HAHA :’D**

**Leigh: The textbook slave trade is really booming.**

**Frans: Good. I need more people.**

**Flou: Shutup Frans! :P What do u guys say to half price?**

**Leigh: Hahaha, yeah sure.**

**Frans: Ja, I'll sell mine for 2.5 people.**

**Paul: Franbo :’D :’D :’D**

**Frans: What? Half a person makes the best doorstep ;)**

**Frans: Split at the side, not down the middle. That's just uncivilized.**

**Paul: What do you need the other two people for? :P**

**Frans: Who do you think is going to carry the half-person? Not me.**

**And who do you think I'm going to blame when the cops come  
and ask where the other half of the corpse-doorstop is?**

**“It was them, officer” :|**

**Flou: Haha, omg Frans... XD**

**Leigh: You're such a sagacious derriere, Franbo ;)**

I soon heard Paul come in the front door, laughing.

‘Frans!’ he summoned me. I met him in the living room with Ferbie, who was being told to read the “funny messages Frans sent on the group”. Ferbie laughed as he was going through the textversation.



‘Ah nice one, Franbo,’ he said warmly. They suggested we go out that evening and I said sure. I had just made the fabulous Flou laugh, so I decided this night would be optimal to try bag her. I’d never told Ferbie or Paul about my liking of Flou, unsurprisingly.

Ferbie promptly sent the message to the group saying he, Paul and I were going to grab a gaggle of drinks. Brentwyn quickly said he was in, followed by Leigh and then Cynthia, who replied on the group chat, even though she was in her room a few steps away. With bated breath, I waited to see what Flou would say. As I was getting dressed to leave – a Bhutan jacket and shorts – she finally said she was in too.

*Brilliant! What a great day!*

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Hatfield Square was the selected hangout. Specifically, the more laid-back Square Jam. Us three, along with Cynthia, sat with drinks for about half an hour, then Leigh came, who brought along a bloke called Rory Kleineren, who everyone referred to as “Klein”. Klein was even older than this new crowd of mine – 23. He even had his *degree*, and was now an English Honours student who tutored Paul and Leigh. Another small while and Brentwyn came, followed by Flou minutes later. Her short, flower-patterned skirt, and the mystical object that it covered, made me giddy with desire to strike up conversation with her, but, like most people at the table, she made effort to talk with Klein, the elder. She asked him questions about *A Tale of Two Cities* – the book she was being taught at the moment.

‘What I don’t get is, is why is Darnay so hated by the French when he never did anything?’

‘Well, they were blinded by their yearning to be freed of the oppression that crippled them. Darnay is an aristocrat by birth, so he remains one in their eyes despite his actions.’ He took a sip of his neat whisky. ‘Yeah... France underwent a violent and chaotic revolution, which was indeed merciless, but it was for the good of the country. That uprising rid the nation of the shackles of royalty, and thus showed other nations with a monarchy that it could be done. One of the morals of the novel is that such horror is often necessary to overthrow greater evil, and that denying the less privileged a voice will end in uprising.’

‘I see...’ she said, nodding as if struck with his comprehension. While my nymph darling had been getting a bar-class, I’d become entangled in a quite-serious conversation with Leigh regarding some plants she was growing in her little garden for which she wanted guidance from me – me hailing from a *professional* garden and what not – and so I couldn’t start chatting to Flou now that she was open for dialogue. Luckily, Leigh soon got to the point, I gave my worthless advice, and was thus free when my muse got up to replace the *sletsappie* she had depleted.

I waited a moment for appearance's sake, and then followed her like a fly after dung. I casually strolled to her as she was waiting for a bartender. 'Want some company?' She didn't say anything: she just smiled a small smile, and kept her arms folded. I felt she needed a reminder of my funniness. 'So... where do you think everyone's going to get 2.5 people to buy the book?'

'What?' she asked, confusion overcoming her.

*Oh, for fuck's sakes.* 'The chat we had on the group earlier... The book that costs 2.5 people...'

'Oh! Right!' She forced a fake laugh. *Would have laughed a lot more if she'd done me the courtesy of just remembering without my damn explaining!* I proceeded to ask her how her day was, and she told me of its tedious events in unwelcome detail. When a bartender finally came, I told her I'd get it for her, and I saw another opportunity to impress. I said to the barman: 'Can you fetch me the girliest, pinkest, most oestrogen-filled drink... And then whatever she wants!' She chuckled. *Gratitude deity.* 'Just kidding, man. A beer for me, and a cider for her.'

She was on her phone now. I looked at her brown hypnotic eyes, and then she up at my blue. We smiled at one another. It's interesting that some men, in this type of situation, are too scared to *look away*. They're afraid they might hurt the girl's feelings, then they kiss and create a whole mess. Other dudes, on the other hand, are too afraid to *keep* looking into the girl's eyes, and look away – no kiss, no mess, nothing. Here, I fell into the latter, nothingness category – obviously.

I suppose I thought she was too old, and that she didn't seem keen on me a few seconds before, and I was petrified that my kissing her would end in catastrophe – end with me losing my awesome new friends. But what I told myself was that Niksy was my true goal, and not this tantalising, lesser sprite. I just pretended to have my attention caught by something in the distance behind her and ceased our pupil linkage. It felt pathetic, but it felt safe.

We got our drinks and went back; I looked at her face to see if my inaction had had a glooming effect on her. I suppose I wanted to see her looking devastated at my turndown, if you could even call it that, but she was pretty much her standard, somewhat taciturn self. I cheered myself up by means of reminder that Bloomstein would never have been able to *meet* Niksy as I had, or have made Flou *laugh*, like I had.

A flock of people my age, generating notable noise, came past our table, on their way to The Drop Off. Paul commented: 'Oh! There go the younglings to *party-party!*' in a condescending tone.

Cynthia couldn't allow a scorn opportunity to pass her by: 'They're big now, hey. They simply *must* go get wasted at Drop Off.'

'I swear everyone in there looks so young to me nowadays,' contributed Brentwyn.

Fer added: 'The whole damn Square is full of 18- or 19-year-old teenagers, dude,' with a level of disgust. I felt an itch in my throat; if I were to let out, it'd go: "*I'm 19...*"

I observed the people around myself; the people going in and out of Drop Off, those in Square Jam, and my friends at the table. Maybe it was my as yet incompletely developed ocelli being ineffective, but to me, my friends looked almost no older than these “teenagers”. Sure, some dudes had clearly only just begun shaving (a bit like me) and some girls still had some baby fat. But they were rare. Hell, there were plenty of people I knew from Res, like Joe and Deon, who looked older than anyone at that table.

Klein announced that he had to tutor some of those “younglings” early the next day, and was off to bed. Paul greeted him last with a hug; as he was about to sit again, his face lit up from a sight off in the centre of the Square. He began pointing excitedly, so everyone looked there too. Optimistic at his enthusiasm, I was immediately on the lookout for a drunk, naked chick.

Surprisingly, it was *my* name he spoke first: ‘Frans! You were in Geelhout, right!? That’s your Pope right there, isn’t it?!’

Added to my hormones, adrenaline was excreted at the prospect of seeing *him* – the abominable resman. ‘I’ve never seen him, dude!’ I said excitedly.

‘Of course,’ he said knowingly, ‘there, that guy in the light-blue button-shirt!’

I quickly pinpointed the shirt – quite far away; I saw him in snippets as he was obscured and revealed from people standing in between us and him, torturously preventing a cohesive image. He was walking briskly at an angle toward us. Once he was closer, Paul said: ‘Yup, yup, that’s definitely him!’

My eyes were glued to the sporadic glimpses of him until he disappeared out of the Square. At his closest he must have still been at least twenty metres away, so I still didn’t have a clear idea of his appearance, but he was no longer purely imaginary. I saw his face, his moustache, the shorter stubble surrounding it, his shoulder-length, brown curls, and I could make out a brown thing over his right wrist – *The leather watch Carl spoke of, probably.*

I asked Paul how he knew my old Pope, and he reminded me that he had been in Geelhout’s rival res, Voortrekker, for a year. ‘Bro, have you seen his fiancée? Someone Facebooked her. She’s a real beaut!’

‘Can’t we Facebook *him*?’

‘He’s not on it, as far as I know. Besides I don’t know his real name.’ We discussed this mysterious being for a while: Paul had stories of him I’d not heard before, mostly about his notable debaucheries and the subsequent calming down; apparently, he once pissed off some cops, escaped from them by swimming across a spruit, and then threw rocks at them from the other side.

We chatted for a while longer, and at around 11 o’clock, Paul uttered the killjoy phrase: ‘It’s getting late.’ All agreed except for Brentwyn, and myself; since all party venues would be fairly lifeless, I suggested we continue at his commune. Inze, who had joined us at some point after our Pope sighting, was obviously in too.

-----

At Brentwyn's we played a drinking called "My Genitals", at the host's request. The aim is to describe your reproductive organ with an adjective starting with a specific letter, and when someone can't think of a word within a few seconds, they have to drink, and you move to the next letter of the alphabet.

'My penis is ... beautiful.'

'My vagina is ... bouncy.'

('True, true')

'My penis is ... bent.'

('ha-ha!')

'My penis is ... hmm ... bloody.'

'Ew... My vagina is ... uh...'

'...'

'Drink!'

Okay, C's next. My penis is ... cuddly.'

You get the idea. After our privates were deemed sufficiently described, Brentwyn suggested we try intoxicated yoga in his yard: our instructor made adjustments to my attempts at the postures, and I laughed due to my ticklishness; I fell over in downward-facing dog – sorry, I mean *Adho Mukha Svanasana* – I laughed so much. I couldn't be bothered to get up, and the other two hosed themselves. Once they were done laughing, they too reclined on the grass. I noted Brentwyn's tattoo on his back, now visible because he was wearing a vest. It was the *Om* sign, he told me.

'I'd like a tattoo,' I decided.

'That's great! What of? I believe tattoos should be meaningful. They should remind you of something, or represent something you love, or they should be like the scars that you learnt a valuable lesson from. Is there something like that for you, bro?'

My inebriated neurons tried their best, and came up with this: 'I want to get something that reminds me not to hang out with people who aren't my people.'

'Great! I wonder what could that be best represented by?' He asked himself more than me.

I wanted to come up with the design myself, so I quickly thought of an idea to blurt out before he could. 'How about a flag, right...'

'Yeah, go on...'

'... Like a war banner that's waving, and the wind it makes blows back those unwelcome.'

'Nice! I'm thinking maybe the flag should be this massive thing wielded by a disembodied arm that hits the ground, sending smaller, shadowy figures flying!'

I let the boy-child-of-a-girl-canine have this input. 'Yeah! And I want it here on my chest,' and I pointed to my right pectoral.

'That's a good spot,' Inze voiced.

I was cold, so I went inside. I found Brentwyn's room – his bed looked tantalisingly comfy. I lay down on it and stared out his large, open window for a while. I then heard the other two chatting in the bathroom nearby like naughty school kids. All I could make out from Brentwyn was "Come on" in a pleading tone, and some embarrassed giggles from Inze. They eventually came to me and Brentwyn said: 'Frabbo, we have a proposal.' Inze was at his back, shy.

'Ja?' I asked, very curious from their behaviour.

'Inze and I have intentions...'

'*Joh!* Formal, hey?!' laughed Inze behind him.

'Shhh! Miss Kuhr and I, Mr Asana, propose that the three of us... engage in a threesome.'

I just stared at him, my mind blank from shock. Brentwyn gazed back at me, with his usual warm, inviting face, but now suggestive too. Inze was still embarrassed behind him, and now I knew why. I was incapable of saying anything, but luckily Brentwyn elaborated.

'Because it's high time you get rid of that pesky virginity of yours,' and he gestured to the general vicinity of my gonads. At this, Inze came halfway out her human hiding place – all embarrassed. She *did* look super sexy.

I just began laughing at the preposterousness of the whole situation, but before I could say "no" – the idea of the first time being a devil's three-way did in fact overpower my lust – Inze, the drunken strumpet, emerged from her lover's rear like an excited toddler, came over to me and began nibbling my ear. *Fuck me, that's how that feels?!*

Her warm breath sent waves of goose-bumps over my body. It was too amazing a sensation to stop. While Inze was moistening my auricle, I heard Brentwyn take off his vest, but it didn't bother me yet. I heard him pull down Inze's yoga pants – that obviously didn't bother me. It also didn't really bother me to hear Brentwyn's belt-buckle jingle in its newfound freedom. It very nearly bothered me when Inze undid the button on my shorts, but the ear snogging was still too overwhelming.

The bother finally came though, when Inze stopped fellating my ear and pulled off those shorts. Not because of this, but because while she did it, Brentwyn said: 'I'm going to enjoy this...' then to Inze, who he was de-topping, 'I thought he might have some homo in him...'

Released from the hypnotic tongue in my pinna, I could finally act. But then Inze's bare breasts came close and I was stock still again. She took my gypsy shirt off as I was mesmerised by my first sighting of three-dimensional boobs.

But once it was off, I saw the unwelcome phallus dangling half-hard a metre or two away, and this was a strong motivation to get the fuck out. But the door was behind the off-putting organ.

*What the in the flying fuck do I do!?*

Inze went to Brentwyn and gave his ear a saliva-plastering turn, and with closed eyes he said to himself: ‘I haven’t had a man in a while...’ That was *it*. I REALLY needed to get away – while they were busy with one another.

I looked around in panic: in nothing but my pale-blue undies, I dashed for the large, open window – out I slipped into the unkempt garden bushes. With some minor twig-scratches I emerged from the shrubbery and went straight to the low wall and leaped over. There had been no protest about my departure coming from the room of exposed genitalia, though I was in a bit of a frenzy and may have not heard.

Only when a car passed me in the street did I become cognisant of the fact that I was clad in nothing but my Calvin Kleins; a deep embarrassment and vulnerability overcame me, followed by panic regarding what I was going to do. My commune was much too far away to walk to bare, but there was simply no way I could return to that licentious duo I had escaped, for in there was temptation, requiring me to cast aside my sexuality in order to achieve a goal I was ashamed of lacking. I chose to instead endure exposure.

*Dammit! What can I do?! I decided that first, I needed to hide from open view, and so went behind a tree close by. Oh crap, oh shit... okay think, Frans, think! Pull it together! “’n Boer maak ’n plan”! Who lives close to here? Leigh! Damnit, she’s two blocks away...*

I mustered up my courage and, like a freshly moulted ant, started marching the couple hundred metres of suburban tribulation, which now seemed like a marathon. I kept my head down, and kept close to shadows and vegetation where possible, in attempt to avoid the eyes of judgemental predators. It wasn’t entirely effective: ‘Hey!’ shouted a carnivorous critic over a wall, a small while into my journey. My heart vibrated at this. There was a braai going on at this house. ‘Hey!’ he shouted again, and I involuntarily looked at him.

‘Yo, bro! Why you in your birthday-suit?! You should hide, there are cops roaming about, and you’re guilty of public indecency!’ A few other amused faces popped over the wall to have a gander at the near-naked numpty. My inane lips couldn’t help but smile as they laughed at me.

*Cops?! I thought with horror, smelling old leather from dread already. But I didn’t mean it! I’m not a bad ~~boy~~ ~~man~~ person! I’m just an idiot who doesn’t think things through!*

I considered going back to Brentwyn’s, since it was still closer, to avoid those dull-silver prison bars looming in my mind, but I rejected it, and instead ramped up the pace to Leigh’s place. I got there without any other incident, rang the bell and waited in the cold night air – quivering like a cricket. An unfamiliar male voice answered: I told it that it must “tell Leigh to please come outside” – that Frans was “in dire need”.

‘Alright,’ went the voice. Soon a groggy Leigh emerged from the front door in her pyjamas. Her fatigue evaporated when she saw me and was replaced by confused amusement. I must have resembled an abandoned babe in a blue nappy.

‘Don’t ask,’ I said shivering. I asked pretty-please for a lift to my place, and she gave it. At one point on the drive, she burst out laughing.

‘Franbo, what the actual-fuck!?’

‘It’s... embarrassing, so, sorry, but I’m not going to tell you. But I do owe you for this.’

‘Okay, fine,’ she said reluctantly. Once home, since my keys were at Brentwyn’s and my phone was in my room, I had to ring the commune doorbell. Bernard was awake to open for me; he also laughed, and I just grinned in eye-contactless humiliation as I wordlessly went to my room.

I got into bed – didn’t bother to change my skimpy outfit – and thought: *Maybe not such a great day after all*, and immediately fell asleep.

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Naturally, the tale of Frans-in-nothing-but-his-knickers spread from Bernard and Leigh through the entire group like a hysterical virus. Ferbie and Paul came and woke me up with coffee to hear the story from its silly source. The coffee was not made to my liking.

‘You know, dudes, I don’t really remember,’ was my sleepy reply to their delighted interrogation, ‘something to do with a bet gone wrong.’

‘Aw, man! Brentwyn says he’s doesn’t remember what exactly happened either.’

*Suuure he doesn’t.* I was pretty damn hungover: a headache and that awful, hollow feeling. I powered through this to go to class because I needed to keep up the meeting momentum with her holiness, Niksy. I couldn’t ride my bike in my state – the pills had yet to take effect – so I asked and was granted permission to use Paul’s automobile.

While driving the short drive, I thought about Brentwyn. *I suppose he didn’t do anything wrong – he just wanted some Frans-meat... And he’s not a customer I’m willing to sell to.* Still, I felt weird towards him. He remained, however, my most powerful link to my new, and only, group of friends. *And come on! We were hammered!*

We were to have Art class late that morning, but I didn’t want to wait till then to have a chat with him; I phoned him once I’d found parking. With a deep, hungover and very friendly voice, he apologised profusely: said he got “quite randy” whenever mixing wine and weed. He also said that I just had to say I didn’t want to, and he would have immediately stopped, but of course, I’d just bolted without a word. (He and Inze simply had a good old twosome after my escape, unsurprisingly.) I was very relieved at his

kind explaining and apologising – I told him it was no problem at all, and that I was excited for our class together.

‘Oh, no, fuck that, bro, I’m going to sleep until three this afternoon!’

I laughed and told him to enjoy it – said I had a “girl” (*Irreverence!*) I had to get to know better, so I was forcing myself to go to my classes. The class that saw Samantha and I alone was quite interesting: we got to bond like only a duo can. The conversation we had whilst painting got quite intimate eventually. She asked if I could advise her on her “boy issues”: ‘So, there’s this guy I met a month or so ago, and we get along really, really well, right. So, eventually he asked me if I’d like to go on a proper date with him, and I found myself quite stoked at the prospect of breaking our friendship boundaries, so I said yes.’

‘Okay?’

‘Well, I told my close friends about it and they all said to me that he wasn’t good enough for me. That I could do a lot better.’

‘Why? What’s wrong with him?’

‘Ag, he’s a little bit chubby, I guess. He’s not like, *super* handsome, or anything. But, I mean, he’s not *ugly*. And he doesn’t come from a very wealthy background... brought up by a single mother.’ I kept quiet. She continued: ‘I know those things aren’t the most important, but my friends are right – they *do* have an impact on a relationship.’

‘I think you should give him a chance,’ I said, being a hopeless romantic as usual, looking out for my fellow seeker of love, aiding in this brother’s quest for his Niksy (and hoping it would do my karma good in that department).

‘Maybe... I do really enjoy spending time with him. But I guess you’re not the one to ask, since you haven’t met or seen him.’

I hummed in diluted agreement. ‘You do like him, right?’

‘We do have a lot of fun together, ja. I donno... I have to go and think about it some more. Thanks for listening. It helps a lot.’

I didn’t understand what the problem was. *She likes him, he likes her! Do I just not “get” people? Am I socially retarded? I guess it’s just one of those things. Chicks are weird.* Her situation, keeping my mind occupied on my way to Bio-stats, was a godsend, because it meant that when I walked by Niksy and saw her a few meters in front of me, looking at her phone, I was in a daze, and had no problem saying: ‘Oh, hey!’ in my surprise, instead of overthinking it. She looked up and smiled her stunning smile, took in an audible breath of surprise through her magnificent nose; ‘Hiii,’ she sang. For a moment I was shocked that I was chatting to her again, so unceremoniously, it seemed – I hadn’t even had time to get heart palpitations!

‘...Niksy, correct?’ I blurted.



‘That’s right. Your name is... Francois, hey?’

*Oh, how glorious to have a seat in the temple of thy memory!*

‘Bingo! But you can just call me Frans.’ She nodded her head at me – the cool, random, new guy. This was going brilliantly, but I knew it could go south fast – I needed to get some conversation going.

‘So, the funniest thing happened to me last night.’ *Shit, is this a good idea?*

‘Hmmm?’ she smiled.

‘It’s actually kinda embarrassing...’

‘Well, now I *have* to know.’

*A dude nearly had sex with me.* ‘So, I got a bit too drunk at a friend’s place, and we made a bet: whoever lost had to run two blocks in the streets in just their underpants.’

‘What! Ha-ha, did you lose the bet?!’

‘I did,’ I said grinning, ecstatic that I was bringing such effective entertainment to my goddess. I went on to tell her about the party that saw me, and even threw in a fabricated close call with a cop car. She loved it.

‘Hey, do you mind if I sit with you?’ I asked as we walked into the lecture hall.

‘Not at all – just don’t start running around in your underpants again!’

*And she has a fine sense of humour – her perfection has no bounds!*

She introduced me (officially) to Sennie *Brust* and Jake *Puckel*. I was elegantly commanded to tell them my “great story”, and of course it was my pleasure to obey. These two acolytes were actually really nice people – must have been the effect of second-hand divinity. When class was over, we four spent our break accompanying Sennie on an errand to the library, and this was good fun too.

*Jeez, I think I’ve found the people I’ll be sitting with at classes from now on!* Mind you, I didn’t think these comrades of Niksy were nearly as cool as my new flower-children friend group – they were only first years, after all. The thought of making them my lecture companions came just before our Genetics class, where I sat with them again. And when it was over, and no lectures for the day remained, I decided I’d voice this thought to them as well: ‘It’s been a real pleasure meeting you guys and spending classes with you.’

‘Likewise, man,’ said Jake.

‘I think I’ll make a habit of it,’ I dared.

‘Yeah, dude!’ said Sennie. This was a nice reaction, but it could have been better – Niksy could have said something, but instead she just smiled. My new, non-deific friends went one path on their ways home (Sennie gave me a tit-tastic hug goodbye) and Niksy went another. Hers was not the way back to Paul’s car, but I fibbed that it was. Now that we were alone again, and I was exhausted, we didn’t chat as nicely as before, but it wasn’t too bad. I asked her about herself, and she about me, until we got to her car.

*Ask her out to coffee.*

This idea made very nervous. *Too* nervous – I simply couldn't do it, not yet. *Maybe my courage is spent from the beating it took to meet her, and needs to recharge. What if I've broken my bravery organ with overuse in meeting her?!* This I thought after I'd hugged her (nearly came in the splendid process), whilst waving goodbye as she drove off.

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Let's not mess about, shall we? The day of, and the day after meeting the girl I was besotted with, were the best: after these, it was a steady decline in our relationship. With every sanctified encounter, I was left exhausted from the parasitic sapping of emotional vigour that was the rewardless crush I had on her. And the similar protist of Flou-admiration that had also infected me was lingering, despite attempt at curing it by routine insistence that I preferred Niksy's draining.

The dread at the prospect of asking her out didn't get better with time, but slowly *grew* like a tumour of terror. It was probably feeding off of her becoming habituated to my novelty; with every day of attending lectures together, I sensed that I was becoming more and more just what Jake and Sennie were to her – a study buddy. And I couldn't rely on alcohol because right after we'd met, semester tests riddled our weeks, and so my new lecture mates never went out (I went out with the hippies though, at the expense of my marks).

The result was soon a worn-out psychological state. I thought of Ferbie and his depression disclosure some time before. *Was his telling me of his disease a hint? A hunch diagnosis? Do I have it too?* I paid attention to how I felt, and became aware that I felt awful. I tried to think: did I feel any different now, to any other recent period? I certainly felt worse now, but I hadn't exactly been peachy for a very long time, so I decided it wasn't just the sapping from my crush-cancer. How fortunate to make this discovery! For now I could address it, where before I was oblivious to it! Right?

*But how do I address it? Does my state really qualify as proper depression? I don't want to see a freaking shrink! But will it progress into an abysmal hell of sadness if I don't?! Will it become too late?*

The most disastrous interaction (communion?) with her grace was a Botany practical – around four weeks after we'd met. Niksy often didn't bother to show for classes, even compulsory pracs (one of her three votaries would sign the register for her), so I was relieved to find her standing in the sun in front of the lab with folded arms. *I need all the opportunities I can get.*

'Hey there, Niksy!' I tried to sound enthusiastic yet cool.

'Hey,' she said smiling slightly, looking sluggish. After an exchange of pleasantries, we had a bit of a silence. To execute it, I decided to tell her about one of my interesting res experiences – a tactic I'd

probably resorted to too often by then. As I began, Jake and Sennie showed up. The lab's doors opened when I got to the climax of the confetti-cannon incident, and we began moving in.

At the door I said: 'Ladies first,' and let her go before me, to which she said thanks. I made myself touch her back as I let her pass – in hopes of breaking some boundaries – but I think I was afraid of defiling it with my impurity, so it was done very awkwardly.

Sennie lead our posy to some seats. There was a space, but no chair next to the spot Niksy had blessed her choice with. I saw a chair next to Sennie at the end; I grabbed it and began moving to the spot next to Niksy, when she asked: 'Why are you moving that chair?'

My blood froze. *Because I want to sit next to you, Niksy...* She looked a little annoyed, and a little confused, and very tired. I was aware of how desperate I seemed. My instincts overtook my actions in this dire situation: 'Oh, right! I can just sit here next to Sennie!' Sennie smiled happily at me.

*Did I just screw up?* I couldn't tell from Niksy's expression anything other than that she was not in the mood for this prac. The rest of the time I chatted with Miss Brust, trying to pretend that the whole chair incident hadn't happened. About 15 minutes into the prac, Niksy and Jake mingled by basically play-fighting with one another like kids: the childish Jake had pretended to put some lab soap in her glorious hair as a prank. Niksy was shocked yet amused and began softly hitting him in annoyance and he defended and pretended that he was going to lather her hair some more - both laughing their heads off. Their fun was a spectacle I found hard to spectate. I REALLY wanted to join in – to share such laughter with Niksy. I tried to somehow participate without actually stooping to their preposterous age-defying behaviour, which I didn't want to do.

I tried commenting on their juvenile display: 'Come on, kids! Play nice now!' and I tried mocking them: 'You guys are going to make *great* scientists one day.' Alas, all my comments were virtually ignored. This abysmal prac ended with her racing out to meet an appointment after a short, and not sweet, single, spread-out goodbye to the three of us. *What's happened?! I despaired that evening. Has she become used to me? Have my less appealing aspects made themselves apparent? Whatever they may be... Is she frustrated that I haven't made a move? Does she even know I'm interested? Is she interested?! Is it too late?*

I tried to Bloomstein comfort-comparison, but that was a much too shallow, blunted apparatus by then. I tried to carry on as if nothing had happened, but it didn't work: I was *super* self-conscious in her presence from then on, and even my attempts at being jaded came across more as being pissed off at her – she even asked me why I was being such a "party-pooper" in one class.

The rotten cherry on the cake of failure was that Niksy came to class less and less for some reason, and so I had less chance of making things right. *Though, God only knows how I could possibly manage that.*

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With the Niksy dream devoid of hope, I decided to return my efforts to Flou. I needed another mythical creature to hunt, having become a Niksy-nullifidian, and there would be an opportunity in the form of a party at my commune the weekend of that goddamned Botany prac. Everyone, including my backup deity, was super amped for this shindig – a celebration of the end of the round of semester tests – so the booze would, in all likelihood, simply flow into Flou – *My best chance*.

When the anticipated evening came, Flou did indeed get drunk very quickly, and so did I – drowning my misery a little too deeply. Some members of the usual group had brought friends of their own: Ferbie had brought along a guy named Cedric Namandla, who was his buddy from Engineering; Cynthia had brought her school friend Lily; and Brentwyn had brought with two older men he'd met through his yoga, who, at 24 years of age, I found weird to have around – I almost felt reluctant to indulge in nicotine and alcohol in front of them.

Cynthia's plus one, Lily, was dressed in a white lace-top with a surplus of cleavage and black hippy pants, and kept engaging with me by asking questions. *Well, it seems I've got a plan-B if the whole Flou thing doesn't work out tonight.*

We were all pretty hammered within an hour of the *kuier*-kickoff, but Brentwyn, Ferbie and Paul went off into the garden to add tetrahydrocannabinol to their already volatile blood. While they were away, the remainder of us mingled on the porch. I can't remember much of this, but I do remember a comment made by Cynthia, referring to the flame the trio were using to light their bong a few metres away in the garden. She said: 'Look at their little flame! It looks like they're playing stalk-the-lantern.'

Flou's little fairy-face lit up. 'I loved that game! We should totally play that!' she said to some chuckles. Before I could help it, I thought: *I'd be so keen to play that!* And then I immediately counter-thought: *No, you don't, you immature simpleton.* Some people said they'd like to play it too, but sounded sarcastic and laughed as if they weren't serious. I didn't know whether it was going to happen or not. Cynthia just continued the conversation in another direction and eventually the subject seemed lost. A desperate voice in my mind implored me: *Ask them if they really want to play stalk-the-lantern,* to which I responded: *Shut up!*

We'd started the braai earlier, and Ferbie, although blazed, was the cook. There was boerewors for everyone, but I wasn't hungry. Music was then put on, and naturally most of the girls went off to dance; I sprang at this opportunity to make my attempt at Flou – I was drunk enough not to have a plan ready. I first needed to relieve myself in the toilet though. While in there, I got distracted by a funny video Sennie had sent me that was about five minutes long. Upon returning to the dancers, I was shocked to discover that Flou and one of the ancient dudes Brentwyn had dragged along were sensually

dancing with one another – chatting in each other’s ears over the loud music. I went over to join – I suppose I wanted to break them apart somehow.

While I was awkwardly standing here, Lily bumped her rear against mine and asked: ‘Why aren’t you dancing, hon?’

I shrugged. ‘Because I suck at it.’

‘Well then, let me help you,’ and she moved my hips with her hands to get them going. We chatted a bit – the usual getting-to-know crap. This girl was something: she seemingly craved my attention, yet she was quite self-assured. I was too drunk to make the mistake of being too nervous or being too nice to her.

Mid conversation, Paul came to me and told me to join him in his room. I was so sloshed that I didn’t even excuse myself from the dance lesson: I just said “Okay!” and left Lily to herself. Paul wanted to share some of his very expensive whisky with myself, Ferbie and Brentwyn – luckily, I did comprehend that this was quite the honour I was being shown, despite my state, and thanked him sincerely.

Single malt in hand – in a badass tumbler – I returned to the dancefloor to find Flou and the old man missing. I checked the kitchen to find the two sucking-face.

*My little nymph, no...* That was my immediate reaction. Then it turned into rage: *Fine. I hope you choke on his dusty saliva, bitch.* I slammed back the whisky and tried to interrupt their moment by loudly placing the empty glass on the counter near them. I was now in an extremely nonchalant mood: one that I thought would be most attractive to Lily. I went to her – still dancing. ‘Am I doing it right now?’

‘Hmm... You should stick you bum out more, hon.’

‘Oh, okay, like this?’

She gave my protruding bottom a little spank. I gasped dramatically and grabbed her ass in response.

‘Naughty, hon!’ she said coming closer, grabbing hold of me. I kissed her, lots.

I don’t know how long we were lip-locked, but eventually Paul came past and said to us: ‘Ah, blossoming love... I shall write a sonnet in honour of this majestic scene!’ and he began reciting some old poetry. Our touching lips became unable to continue their duet due to the smile this brought to them.

‘Shut up, Paul *Mall!*’ she said, and then she grabbed my hand and began pulling me, ‘let’s go get a shot!’ She insisted I have a shot of Amarula, and she was going to have one of peppermint liqueur. ‘And then we’ll kiss, and the flavours will *blend!*’

Shots in, tongues out, tongues back in, I said: ‘So that was a *springbokkie* kiss.’

‘Exactly!’

‘Hmm... I prefer regular kissing.’

She went to the toilet after this; she requested I stayed where I was, but there was no way I was doing that. I decided I'd not spent enough time with my three best bros this evening, who were mostly keeping to their marijuana-infused selves in the garden.

The three name changers were in a cannabis-crazed mood when I joined them – laughing uncontrollably.

'Tell Franbo, tell Franbo!' Brentwyn said through choking laughter.

Ferbie obliged: 'I heard this great joke today, dude,' then he looked around in a manner that was all too familiar to me.

*No, don't you do it...*

Satisfied with his examination of the immediate surroundings, he proceeded to excitedly whisper: 'So there's a fire in a tall building and the fire brigade hasn't come yet, but there's a retarded guy, and he's too dumb to be scared so he decides to try save people so long, right?'

I'd never heard this flowerchild use the term "retarded" before. I'd also never heard any of these people do an impression of a mentally handicapped individual, but here was Ferbie doing it, complete with spastic tongue and stereotypical voice:

"Jumpp!" he says to someone at a window of the building, "eye'll kach yoo!" So, one person jumps, and to his surprise, the retarded boy catches him! The crowd cheers: "Yeah!" "Jumpp" he shouts to the next person, and the retarded boy catches him too. This carries on, people jumping and him catching, and after about the fifth one, the retarded boy again says "Jump!", but this time, just as the person is about to land in his arms, he jerks back and lets the poor guy hit the cement. The crowd gasps, and there they see a black man dead on the sidewalk. The retard looks up at the building and says, "Downt thro thu bernt wans, mann!"

And the three reignited in their hysterics. I didn't laugh. I couldn't believe it: it was just like being back at school in Zastron, for goodness sake! So, I just responded how I'd always responded to those little teenage racists: 'Oh, ja, I've heard that one...' as explanation for my lack of laughter, and smiled awkwardly.

'Aw, man!' said Paul.

'I suppose an old *boerseun* like you would have heard them all by now,' Brentwyn said, wiping a joyful tear.

'Ja...' I tried to say amusedly. They were too stoned to be aware of my unimpressed reaction. Cedric came to us, asking what everyone was laughing about. Ferbie, took his friend by the shoulder and said: 'No, dude, it's a stupid inside joke I can't even begin to explain,' and I saw him wink at Brentwyn.

I left their company. I tried to assimilate what had just happened, but all my alcohol-numbed brain could conclude was that these *hippies* were actually *hypocrites*. I decided I'd just keep myself busy with my third kiss, who had been eagerly looking for her "hon" when I found her.

I tried to find Flou so that I could kiss Lily in front of her – return the insult – but she and her pensioner gigolo had disappeared. Lily and I experimented with some more smooch-shooters – or kiss-cocktails. After a disgusting marriage of tequila and brandy flavoured lips, I can't remember very clearly. Somehow, we ended up standing alone in my room, making out. Here, her hand slipped to my rear and gently caressed it. I thought this meant I was in the clear for a boob feel – my first second base.

*Soft and squishy... go figure...* In response to my feeling her up, her hand moved quite rapidly around from my glutes to the crotch region. I was flabbergasted at first, but on consideration, this seemed quite in line with our behaviour immediately prior. She began undoing my belt.

*No! I can't lose it to you!* But I didn't make any sign of protest yet. I calmed down, focused on the awesome side of these proceedings. *Just let this go a bit further. DON'T pussy out on this pussy. You're nineteen, at least touch it... at least get to third base.*

She touched *my it* at this moment – slipped her hand in. It felt foreign, and invasive, but also pretty good. I slid my hand from her left breast to her intimate region: no belt here – just easy-to-enter elastic-waisted hippy trousers. I dipped in... no underwear... first slightly rough stubble, then some longer, softer fibres ... then...

*Damn soft... confusing folds... wet... oh my god, so wet and soft and silky – it's fucking true! The holiest of holies indeed...* Like a diligent, horny scientist I investigated this novel territory eagerly; first I thoroughly explored the outskirts. Then, I decided it was time to return from whence I came.

*No, not there. Higher up? Nope. Down? More Down?! Yes! Very down!* The right middle finger was the chosen digit for my first female fidget. My data collection had not been so much concerned with what felt good for her until she went from merely caressing me to tugging away. I remembered the old Knollenhoven jewel was actually also in play, and also that she *felt* all this. I got a little in-out action going with my finger, matching her tempo on my instrument.

*Is she enjoying this? Am I doing it right?* She wasn't making any noises, and I took this as a sign that I was doing something wrong – my years of “theoretical studies” on this subject implied that moans were necessary. I switched my technique in some way every ten seconds or so – mostly just applying pressure elsewhere, trying to get some form of positive feedback, all the while with her tongue in my mouth.

Before I made any perceptible progress on her pleasure gauge, she released her delicate grip – I noticed then that through all this I'd not become entirely erect. *Too much discovering to get very aroused I suppose.* She began corralling me to my bed.

*Shit, I can't... not you... not as my first.* But I allowed this sex-shepherd to lead me. I manoeuvred onto my bed and she took off my pants. I still wasn't very hard – perhaps she noticed this and decided her mouth was the perfect tool at hand to fix this problem. Whatever the reason, my semi-flaccid dick was now in this girl's kisser.

*Holy shit! This is a lot of firsts I've managed all at once... In my shock I initially forgot to focus on the feeling of the novel encounter; when the unbelievable sight of an actual corporeal girl bobbing around my groin had sunk in a bit, I directed my awareness to the sensation. Well, it's slippery. It's actually very delicate – much less pressure than her hand. And now and then a not-so-nice tooth makes slight contact.*

*It's quite nice!*

*But I don't think it's enough... I'm still quite soft...*

I began to feel embarrassed at the lack of full hardon. This obviously made the possibility of an actual boner even less likely. I began to feel sorry for her – exerting herself in such an awkward position, and this asshole not appreciating it.

*At least I'm off the hook for hooking up...*

*Jeez, you are pathetic...*

It went on for a while, me hoping I'd start to get into it. But no – I got dead to the sensation, and then I knew there was no way.

*'I, uh... I think I'm too drunk...'*

She gently regurgitated the broken organ. 'Hmm? Oh... That's okay,' she said kindly. There was some spittle below her lip that made me feel strange.

I forced myself to say: 'That was...really nice though. You're really good...'

*If one can die from awkward conversation, I'd better write my will ASAP.*

She said: 'I'm going to the loo quick,' and left the room.

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I put on my pants to hide the poor, nervous prick. Then I lay on my back and tried to assimilate these events. *Yeah... take that, Flou... You and your old-fart.*

*Old-fart? I'm the one who apparently needs Viagra – bet he didn't need a blue pill to stick it in you...* I heard the muffled, watery roar of a completed bathroom visit, and to my surprise, Lily actually came back. She came and lay next to me – put her head on my chest. I held her, absorbing the comfort to combat the queasy feeling inside. Looking back, this was definitely my favourite part of the evening. *A human being is a good thing to hold. Even a rubbish one.*

But why did I think her rubbish? I suppose she was just too easy: she'd made a beeline for me from the beginning, so it was hardly an achievement I could be proud of. *But I've broken a few barriers tonight! I can be happy about that, right? I don't have to feel so sexually inadequate anymore, right?*

*But she didn't have an orgasm, and you didn't even get a stiffy. Progress, perhaps, but this can only be described as a failure.*



*Pathetic.*

I'd made myself feel abysmal. I didn't know whether or not I wished it had all not even happened. And in my negativity spiral, I began worrying about STDs from this harlot I was holding. But I couldn't stop holding her. I fell asleep.

She woke me up at three in the morning, saying she had best be going. I let her go. When I walked her out, I passed the passed-out carcasses of almost everyone – most on couches or Brentwyn's yoga mats. I was too down to notice any awkwardness between myself and Lily when I greeted her with a hug. *I guess she's too embarrassed to wake up and face everyone after our conduct and disappearing into my room*, I thought as I watched her drive off in the deadest of night.

I had a smoke and then went back to sleep.

'Where's Lily, Franbo?' Brentwyn asked with a huge smirk the next morning when I walked into the kitchen to find a *babalas* breakfast being made by him and Cedric.

*Where's your racism gone now, you fraud?*

'She went home at like, three.'

'He-he, typical Lily: she gets nice and ploughed and then she's too shy to face her friends.'

*He thinks we screwed. Of course he does.* I was on the verge of telling him that I had not gone all the way with her, but I stopped. I didn't want to admit that I couldn't have done it even if I wanted to, but even more, I didn't want to admit that I indeed didn't want to. And I also didn't want to lie and say that Lily didn't want to – she *did* want to jump my bones, and I was proud of that.

And this decision to let lie the lie that had made itself, soon ran away from me: while everyone was enjoying Brentwyn's breakfast, which was more accurately a brunch, the topic of discussion was Frans who'd finally lost his virginity. They were all so happy for me, and they began discussing my fictional first: I learned that Lily had slept with a few newly met "hons". They were highly amused that I was "added to her little list".

*Why did she want to sleep with me? Why does she have sex with these guys she's just met? Are girls really the same as boys – horny little intercourse-crania? Or does she want love but thinks men won't love her unless she pleases them? Maybe girls like her hate boys, and know that they'll go through these feelings I'm am right now.*

'Just, please don't mention this to Lily... at all!' I desperately tried to medicate the festering wound this fib had become.

'We won't, Franbo, relax,' said Cynthia, 'she does this shit quite often, and then she's always all embarrassed. I mean, look, she left at an ungodly a.m. to avoid this lovely breakfast.' All laughed except me. *They can be racist, offensive, and they can be horrible to their friend behind her back. Who are these people!?*

Flou was not avoiding the breakfast, even though she'd presumably done exactly what Lily had. She was sitting next to her new *daddy* at the dining table, and they looked like an old couple already: holding hands, giving each other pecks, having soft private conversations in each other's ears... I didn't pay much mind to her, though – she especially was dead to me.

While washing down my bacon and eggs with a second mug of coffee, I realised that Lily was almost certainly one of those “promiscuous chicks” Brentwyn had offered me a while before and had turned down. I had envisioned some loose skank who had no shame at all, not a sweet, insecure girl who was far more complex, and I became even more livid with Brentwyn – offering up this poor, silly girl to me. I left the post-party festivities to sulk in my room.

I remembered the time they all belittled the younger people at the Square – *my* people. And I remembered the time Brentwyn tried to seduce me with his own girl as bait, knowing I wasn't into guys. And I remembered countless other little flaws and incongruences with their hippy creed, and I inflated them all, and I began to hate my friends. Again.

The couple of days immediately following, the strange feelings did the opposite of subside. I'd thought that getting some of that weight off my back – that testosterone-society alloy – would be a good thing. Having no coochie-credentials had been a major annoyance to me ever since Gunter told us about his conquests when we were sixteen, even if I mostly didn't believe the proofless philander-promisor. But no: I'd somehow managed to lose my innocence without losing my virginity, and I felt hollow inside: like nothing good would spark in there anymore, no taste would be savoured, no music inspire, no idea gestate, no woman heal. I stopped caring about anything: I went into prac tests completely unprepared; I ignored messages sent to me by Brentwyn and Jake, and even one by Niksy. And one morning, I didn't bother making my hair look neat and simply wore the same dirty, wrinkled clothes I'd worn the previous day, thinking I didn't care what people thought. But of course, this carelessness was punished by an episode of severe anxiety: *They're staring at me, and judging me: a defiled, failed, filthy grub of a man.*

The group knew something was up. Keeping up their whole caring-people façade, they tried to offer therapeutic conversation. I angrily told them I needed space and wasn't ready to talk about it. I knew that would succeed in making them leave me the fuck alone. Brentwyn seemed completely unaffected by my new demeanour, and didn't suspect at all that I was most pissed off at him – he simply said he was there for me for whatever I was going through, and was his normal self around me.

I came home one evening to find Flou, Paul, Cynthia and Eric chatting about where and when to play “drunk stalk the lantern”. I felt no inclination to join in such an event anymore; I indignantly told them they'd have to enjoy their “little children games without me” and that I was above such “immature rubbish”. I could tell that they were quite startled by my abrupt change in character, but that racist joke

had been the bringer of disillusionment that had revealed their *true* character. They, who were always going on about peace and acceptance, had shown themselves to be phonies. I didn't confront them though: Brentwyn was too imposing, Paul and I weren't close enough and Ferbie was a wreck himself...

About two weeks after the Lily incident, the skinny stoner came into my room and said he knew I was "going through some stuff" but asked if he could please tell me "something". Before he came in, I had been in an episode of high despondency about all the crap that had happened. I had a thought that crying might help; in my jadedness I humoured the silly idea by trying for about a second, but nothing came out. I was glad I hadn't succeeded in such a boyish attempt, but of course, as soon as Ferbie came in the room, my tear ducts decided to go haywire.

So, while I was hiding watery eyes by pretending to put some clothes away, he told me that he'd managed to get some anti-depressants from his drug dealer. When I was sure no tears would escape my cornea surface-tension, I looked at him. He looked terrible: hair all messy, clothes ill-matched and face sullen. I asked him: 'What about dependence?'

'I need them, bro.' I tried to comfort him best I could, but my own depressive state was a handicap. He told me they were very expensive, so I could expect his absence from socializations – not that I was going to any myself. I said I understood and that he should take them, trying to politely end the terrible conversation. When he finally got lost, that sickly slim spectre appeared in my mind's eye once again.

*Will Ferbie become my Emily Hanter? Will I one day have, on my wall, a deceptive, sinister grinning picture of Fer Beal, high-as-a-kite-on-cocaine?* My brain didn't allow too much thought on this as it was too hampered already. *The pills will help*, I told myself.

*Will they really? What if they just make things worse?* I'd no medical degree, so I just couldn't say. It was one of those things. I, a fellow sufferer of sadness, was powerless to aid Ferbie.

Though I was angry at Brentwyn, his invite for a "two-man adventure" to cheer me up a day or two later couldn't be turned down: I REALLY needed to drink, smoke and take my mind away from things. I also intended to get drunk enough to confront him about his racism and hypocrisy, but that didn't quite happen...

'I ended things with Inze,' he told me as we sat down at Impalas.

'Oh. Why?'

'I never intended our relationship to go longer than a few months. When I met her, I realised that this girl needed my love in her life journey, and now that I've helped her through some of her issues, I'm sending her on her way.'

*What? Could she not possibly have been happy without the brief foray with your bohemian todger?* 'How did she take it?'

‘Not great. But her wound will heal. I’ve offered her all the teachings I could. Besides, my best friend Arnold is coming over next weekend and it’d be a shame if we couldn’t indulge in our homosexuality.’

*Oh yes! You’re such a considerate copulation-counsellor! You fuckwell of foulness!* I didn’t any of say this, though. Instead I did something this evening that I had managed to avoid up to this time: a complete shut-down of control when it came to drinking. I didn’t give a damn anymore; I went to the bar and ordered four shots of tequila. What followed these little quadruplets of chaos was a detailless haze of flashes that have no order or meaning – flashes that I can’t piece together to form any cohesive memory. Flashes of singing loudly, falling over, and more fanatical drinking with God knows who. Because of the latter, there’s a complete, flashless void in memory from a certain point onward. I certainly don’t remember leaving Impalas, but I did...

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When memory functionality was restored, it was tasked with scribing an experience that is deeply etched into my mind. It began with a feeling composite: the individual elements of it were freezing coldness, debilitating head pain, severe nausea and utter confusion. In that order. The latter is so extreme that the recollection of it is torture. This final feeling came as soon as my eyes took in the completely foreign surroundings in which I woke up.

I was outdoors with a blanket draped over me, on a couch that was relatively comfortable, but far too small for my length. What surrounded the couch seemed like a low budget re-creation of the Mad Hatter’s tea party. There were all sorts of junk scattered among other couches, benches and chairs: stop signs, potted plants, gnomes, fountains, watering cans, old books, old bath tubs (which were themselves converted into benches, I noticed), an old fridge, traffic cones, tea sets, mannequins with artificial breasts exposed, even an old open-top car, and many other miscellaneous objects strewn either side of cobbled walkways. One direction of the rocky path led to what I deduced was the entrance to whatever the hell this place was, and the other went deeper into this kleptomaniac-backyard, obscured by the aforementioned objects and a few trees. And there were fairy lights and Asian lanterns everywhere, all unlit at that moment, since daylight had very much arrived – my achingly sensitive eyes couldn’t help but notice.

As I took in this astoundingly strange location I had awoken in, pondering the possibility that I had died, and subsequently wondering how equally likely this could be both hell and heaven simultaneously (Schrödinger’s afterlife perhaps?), a person of clear authority emerged from the obscured path with a hard-to-interpret frown when she noticed me and my wakefulness. She disappeared back the way she came.

I was quite anxious at her arrival. Suddenly my thoughts were forced from the surroundings and their inexplicability, to what the consequence may be for having used the surreal premises as a camp site. Not long after her disappearance, this lady emerged once more, this time holding a mug in her hand. When she got close, she smiled mischievously and said: ‘So! Our drunk squatter has awoken!’ She had no make-up on, and had shorter hair than mine; she looked quite militant, and right then I really wanted a nurturer. Regardless, she was bringing me something – the steaming mug – leading me to believe that there wasn’t any serious antagonism in her toward me.

‘Here you go,’ she said quite sweetly, handing it to me. At the prospect of a drink, I either became aware of, or suddenly developed, a dour thirst.

‘Thanks,’ I said hoarsely, and I took a gulp of whatever it was to cure my parched throat. Of course, it was coffee – instant coffee. Very sweet and very strong. I set down a considerably lighter mug on the “table”, which I now noticed was a tree stump with some varnish poured over it, and asked what urgently needed to be asked: ‘I’m really sorry, but I have no clue where I am. Where am I?’

My butch Good Samaritan laughed heartily, giving a single clap and throwing back her head as she did it. I was offended but couldn’t help smiling. ‘This is *The Station*. This is the venue you and your friends apparently decided would be your final of the evening. You and your buddies came around 12, quite drunk. I left around then, but the bartenders found you here at closing time, and generously left you with a blanket.’

‘Thank you very much.’ I truly was very grateful to my Afrikaans Mother Teresa and her helpers – the idea of awaking at 3 a.m. from deathly cold in unfamiliar streets made me shudder.

‘I’m really very sorry...’ I added quickly.

She smiled a little, putting me at ease. ‘Ag, ja, it’s okay, hey. I’m angrier at your friends who just left you here. Probably thought it was a *moerse* joke.’

*Friends? Not just Brentwyn? Who the hell did I end up coming here with?! I was way too embarrassed to ask who these “friends” were.*

‘Lisa!’ One of the workers called from obscurity. Without another word, the honourable lady got up; I watched as she left with great gratitude: she had come and granted me a sliver of peace against the confusion with explanation. I now had time to take my attention away from this bizarre bar/restaurant known to me now as “The Station” (it’s right next to an old railway station, I was later told) and move it to myself. Here’s what I didn’t have: any boastable recollection of the previous night’s events, nor a sound state of mind, as you know, but I neither had my phone, nor my wallet, I realised. My pockets were empty and my immediate surroundings were lacking these belongings too. I despaired.

Here’s what I indeed *did* have: an accursed hangover, an excessively sore ankle, a cut in my left palm with a bandage over it, and a fucking tattoo on my chest! I noticed this when the tenderness that it brought about made itself known over the several other pains I was being bombarded with.

This tattoo was the very one Brentwyn and I had discussed: that monstrosity I'd designed while intoxicated and was not serious about, had ended up on my flesh after an even drunker evening. Luckily it was where it was supposed to be: on my right tit – *Easy to conceal*. It didn't look too terrible, thankfully – it was quite tastefully done.

I stopped looking at it and returned to other pressing matters. *What the hell is this cut from?* It wasn't very deep, I saw as I inspected the wound by lifting some of the bandage off. The next urgent matter came up: *How the hell am I going to get home? I can't phone anyone!*

I felt utterly dreadful. I needed to urinate badly after I had finished the awful yet amazing coffee, so ventured with all my ailments through this five-star junkyard in search of a bathroom. Beyond the trees that obscured the path my bountiful saviour had emerged from was a section where more sitting areas were decorated with the same crap, yet completely different too. Here were tiki-torches, animal statues, an old refrigerator, an old phone booth, a chess board table, a toilet-seat chair and a large ivy-covered fountain in the centre. Just right of the fountain was a glorious sign of a stick man and woman. In the building it pointed to, I alleviated myself into a bucket-turned-urinal.

Emerging out of the bathroom, I saw that on the other side of the fountain was the bar – naturally with its own set of second-hand décor. Here stood Lisa going about a task. She saw me looking at her and asked: 'Oi, is this your phone?' and she retrieved the phone in question from beneath the bar.

It was. I was unspeakably relieved at this tiny consolation. I thanked her sincerely once more. I immediately phoned that bastard Brentwyn – who else could I? As it was ringing, I made my way back to what will forever be *my couch*, so as to be alone when I asked him what, in the name of all that's holy, happened to me. It rang a long time, but he did eventually pick up, answering with a sleepy voice.

I just got straight to the point: 'Hey... so, I've no idea what happened last night after a certain point, so please, fill me in from those tequilas I went to drink.'

He gave a small laugh and proceeded: 'Bro, you got real wasted. I saw some of my friends and introduced you. You were hilarious to them. They said they were going to The Station and you said you were joining, but I didn't feel like going, so that's all I can tell you.'

'Oh... okay. Hey, dude, I'm uh, I'm still here at The Station...'

He laughed. I begged him to come pick me up. 'Yeah, yeah, sure, bro.' Relieved that my escape from this Willy Wonka scrapyard was on its way, I decided that I needed to inform Lisa, the patron saint of drunken trespassers, of my leaving and thank her yet again for her and her employees' benevolence. I did so as she was on her laptop at one of the tables near the bar – she laughed and said it was fine. I asked if they had seen my wallet, but it seemed my luck had run out. Brentwyn seemed to take his sweet time to get there, though I only later found out this damn place was in Irene. While I waited for him, I explored the fascinating venue a bit more – now that I was no longer trapped here, I could actually

appreciate it. My headache and other pains inhibited the pleasure I took in my escapade, but it was quite entertaining.

When Brentwyn came, I had been sitting on a wicker chair that had a view of the entrance. He laughed at me as I stumbled toward his car. I couldn't help but smile.

'Well, hello there, Franbo, my party animal!'

I still felt disgust towards this man, but he had come to my aid. 'Dude... I lost my wallet, I have a cut on my hand, I think I sprained my ankle, my head his killing me, but look at my fucking chest!' I revealed my shiny new tattoo – we co-authored it after all. (The irony that I now considered Brentwyn one of those figures being flung by the flag was not lost on me.)

'Oh shit! Dude, that must have been Sabrina!'

This "Sabrina" – one of the people "I" had "befriended" the previous night – was an apprentice tattoo artist. 'You must have swung by her place and gotten it.'

I didn't say much on the 20-minute drive back home other than ask about the scrapheap-hotel I'd used. 'The Station is such an awesome place, bro! I mean, it's like our group manifested into a bar! It's a real shame it's so far away from campus.' It didn't surprise me that such a ridiculously artsy place was a favourite among those counterfeits. And it seemed fitting that I should be punished for my going out with the head-*hippicrite* by becoming devoured and waking up in the stomach of that hippie epicentre.

*I won't go out with them again*, I decided as Brentwyn stopped at my commune. In the glorious shower a few minutes later, I wondered if there was *anyone* I wouldn't begin hating after a few months.

The group found this latest escapade of mine hilarious, once they heard it later that day. I pretended that I appreciated the experience, but the truth was, I hated it. Without any recollection, I really wasn't a participant in that scene of my life – it was some *impostor* that had overtaken. Yet people insisted that I was responsible for the events – events that formed part of their view of me. It baffled me, yet no explanation could alleviate the burden. I wasn't the executer of the events, but I was the initiator. I was to blame, but *I* hadn't done anything.

The incident kept me at bay, but only for two weeks or so, after which I couldn't resist getting tipsy at home and braving a few bars in and around the Square alone. I felt pathetic going solo, so I drank a lot – until I didn't care. No waking up in weird locations with all my valuables missing this time – just a hell of a hangover and feelings of extreme woe. Both were treated with a screwdriver cocktail and a trio of cigarettes for temporary symptomatic relief.



## Chapter Five: Imago

April 2014

I watched a blue damselfly whizzing around our garden. I was sitting on the porch; the crispness of the morning air meant that my steaming coffee was particularly tasty. I knew the bright insect – which I found especially handsome in the light from the low, rising sun – was a damselfly, and not a dragonfly because of the way it rested: it held its wings close to its body, where a draconic cousin would have held its wings out to the side when perching. I knew this difference because I wrote a semester test for my Entomology subject just before coming to spend the holidays here at our *plaas*, and a large scope of the paper was the different orders and suborders of Insecta. I remembered this difference by associating the word “damsel” with modest – *So it covers itself*. It was a test I’d breezed through, because I’d studied properly for it, and I was chuffed now that I had an opportunity to apply the knowledge – I felt like I knew this creature better now, and was thus more captivated by it. My blue buddy went away to go about its business elsewhere.

I wondered: *What other things that I’ve recently learnt will become useful in my daily activities?* I’d certainly stuffed my noggin a lot in the previous round of semester tests: my average for this first quarter was a radical improvement over that of the previous year’s. And it was because of this that I found the opportunity to relax so satisfying – guilt free.

I’d felt like a prisoner on the run in the previous holidays, after I’d stumbled my way through the final exams in 2013, and the contrast with that “vacation” made this chill-time all the better still. There was, however, one little niggle that slightly besmirched the serenity I was feeling: there was a rather serious discussion I was to have with the parents sometime before I went back to the university. We all knew it was coming. I thought it might have come the night before this one, when I arrived here, but Pa and Ma made it clear to me that they were not keen on it yet: they kept asking me questions about my studies, and kept telling me what had happened in their little world while I was away without pause throughout dinner, until they asked if it was okay if they had an early night.

This conversation’s inevitability came into being when I sent them a message about a week before, in which I told them that I very much wanted to switch my degree from Agriculture to Genetics – that I found the genome fascinating. This was so that they could process it on their own before I came. In my message, I told them that I’d checked with the administration people and that there would be no consequence to this switch in terms of money or missed subjects, since the two degrees had not diverged yet. I ended the communication by saying that we could discuss it during my visit.

The fact that Pa had been cheerful when he picked me up in Pretoria made me not worried about it, though. I just wanted to get it over with as soon as I could now, so that I could lose myself in the wonderful nothingness that would be my to-do list.



*I'll initiate our chat at breakfast*, I thought as I took the last sip of my morning brew. With the coffee done, I decided to go and be closer to the view I'd been admiring for the last ten minutes. With bare feet, I made my way down the steps and onto the lawn. This was Ma's realm, and she'd always kept it pretty. Well, me as a kid with a ball or some improvised weapon gave her some of the harder years, but she'd managed by confiscating my toys when I got too destructive. I was now glad that she hadn't become lazy at any point and let it all go to ruin: I loved that I had this green oasis surrounded by the wilder, brown farmlands – a bit of civilized order to relish.

While feeling the mown grass on my soles, and admiring the pansies, petunias and cosmos that boasted flowers this close to winter, and taking in the earthy smell of fallen leaves that Ma had raked into the flower beds, I realised that this was her life's primary work – her magnum opus. *I must compliment her on it. I'm certain I never have...* Like a bee, I meandered from plant to plant, until I got to the fence, and looked beyond it. *But I do also really like the rough pastures that enclose the garden.* I realised here, having shifted my appreciation to the less tame part of our lands, that I'd never had a jog through those *plaas* paths, and was now eager to do so. *I'll go tomorrow morning, before my coffee makes me bloated like I am now.* To address my deteriorated cardio capabilities, I'd started running this year as a new year's resolution; I usually did it through campus on Saturdays and free weekday mornings. I'd always been quite fit as a kid and teen, but the unhealthy memory that was 2013 had ruined it: this didn't sit well with me, so I decided to address it, and I was already much better.

I turned to face the house, resting my back against the fence. I had never actually inspected the veranda from this angle before. That feature of our house was used by us kids for many things, especially when it was raining and that was the closest we could get to being outside: looking at it now, I fondly remembered playing Lego there, drawing, and building puzzles with Sussie. At one stage, I often slept on one of its couches instead of in my hot bedroom.

I was having a damn good morning; I thought to myself that I must have been about 6 when I last enjoyed the farm as much as I did now – then I'd known too little to care, and now I finally knew enough.

I continued walking along the fence; when I got to the other side of the house, I saw something that had become part of the scenery, and noticed now for the first time in ages, in this strange and spectacular mood of re-evaluation: the pool. It had been empty for years now – Pa had used the water therein as a desperate backup one drought and never got around to refilling it. Staring at the shallow little mosquito breeding-grounds at the deep end, I started reliving some of my childhood swimming occasions; a while into my reminiscence, I remembered something I'd completely forgotten: I went back to when I was eight and all four the Knollenhovens were swimming. I had latched onto Pa's back – the dark, muscly thing seemed so gigantic at the time. I remembered that I'd noted how strange his skin felt – all slippery, and warm compared to the water. He pretended to be a submarine and would say: 'Here we go under!' and submerge us for a few seconds, and I laughed under water and gagged a bit once, at

which Sussie freaked out a little. And then I asked Pa to launch me into the water, and he obliged until he got tired, which was quite a few times, considering I weighed about as much as a large chihuahua, but it obviously still hadn't been enough for me. *I wonder when we lost that.* The question: *Whose fault was it – mine or his?* came up, but I brushed it aside. *It doesn't matter – we've made progress. We will make progress still. Fok net voort.*

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The previous visit in December, like this one, also had a looming conversation between us three Knollenhovens, though the prospect of it had been horrific, compared to this one, and it served to ruin that vacation even further. My parents hadn't known that that talk was coming, so I could get away with putting it off far too long, and I did because there was a military-grade block in my head when it came to having sincere talks with them. But, I eventually sank my teeth into that bitter bullet, and the good that came of it was really why I could now enjoy myself like this at the farm for the first time in years. Its results may have been good, but the talk itself was nothing but awful. The way it started, a listener would think I had some sort of severe speech impediment.

'I want to tell... to talk about what happened to me... this year...,' I said when the subject of me failing three subjects in the second semester came up once again.

Pa looked serious, but deep down I could tell that there was terror too. He took a preparatory deep breath, then said: '*Goed. Praat.*'

I waited for about a minute before I finally decided to simply say: 'There was too much shit I had to sort out in myself.'

'Frans, don't talk that way!' Ma interjected.

'Ja! You don't talk that way around the table.'

I ignored them: 'And I finally had the chance to do that when I went off on my own this year... I needed to do it, because I couldn't go on the way I felt.'

'How... how did you... feel?' Ma forced out.

'Like... an absolute nobody.'

'...'

'I never... fit in with the kids at school, but I certainly wasn't a city person either.'

Pa grumpily looked out the window, as if this pouring out was some mess he had to clean up afterwards, while Ma looked at me worriedly. 'So I tried to change and fit in with the city people, but that didn't go great either—'

'You not liking anyone is no excuse not to pay attention in class and not study,' Pa said into the air.

‘No! no... I felt like no one liked *me*. And it made me depressed and angry, and I guess that took up all my attention, and I couldn’t concentrate. I guess it was more important to me to find out how to be happier than learn useless crap like physics.’

Ma cringed at “crap”, but since it’s not a very high scorer on my Grandmother Index, it went uncommented. Pa now looked bored on top of pissed off. ‘So, what? You think the whole world should cater to your little issues? You can’t just laze about while you take your time finding out how to not always sulk.’

‘I’m not saying I should have done that, and I never wanted to just do nothing! I’m grateful for this hell-ride of a year! All I’m saying to you two is that this mess up was necessary for me to figure out my *fucked-up* head.’

Ma gasped over-dramatically, and Pa shouted: ‘Stop swearing, Frans! I’ll—’

‘Pa, if you try go for that *belt* I’ll treat you just like any other dirty assaulter. I may not beat you, but I’m not scared of you anymore, and I swear I’ll die fighting.’ His face went red from rage at this, but his eyes told me he was also shocked.

‘Why was that ever necessary? Just by the way – corporal punishment? Hmm?’

‘Ag man, Boet, you get kids and see how *impossible* it is to stop them from doing stupid *kak*! That time you stole my quad – you could have...’ he began whispering, ‘you could have *killed* yourself. Or gotten *paralysed*. Easily! You guys made me *sick* with worry sometimes... like Sis, sneaking off to party with those *bliksems* the Papenwagens – she could have gotten drugged and... *raped*! *Sold into trafficking*...’ He said each of these possibilities as if they were spells that, if said too loudly would make them real. ‘And, say whatever you want, but I’d do *anything* to stop... *those things* from happening... “*n Plaas is gevaarlik, Boet.*’

‘...’

‘Besides, I don’t think you two can complain – my Pa did *much* worse to us.’ His tone switched to bitter: ‘You never met him... your Grandpa... old Cois, but he once saw Sussie being naughty when she was a toddler. She’d looked us in the eye as she broke off one of your Ma’s big flower buds after we told her not to. I just shouted at her, but then Papa said to me: “A real man doesn’t let his progeny disrespect him so,” and said that I needed to give her a spank. So I did.’ I’d never heard him speak this way – looking down.

A long silence followed, then I said: ‘Okay. I understand the grey belt. It wasn’t necessary,’ he tried to say something here, but I cut him off, ‘*it wasn’t necessary*, and I’m sorry for being a wild kid with a seeming death-wish, but, that belt is over now. I’m 19 for goodness’ sake.’ I gave them a chance, but neither said anything. I continued: ‘So, I’ve explained myself. I want you to know that I’m done with all that insanity, and I’ll be applying myself next year.’

‘Good! You better,’ Pa said, angry as ever, looking at the ceiling.

‘Well... there is one more little thing I’d like to sort out, actually,’ I decided, now that the talk-engine was finally going.

‘...’

‘Pa, let’s be straight, you don’t like... *other cultures*. I’ve felt... I’ve *known* for a long time, that you didn’t like that I wasn’t turning out to be something different to your culture. You wanted me to be one very specific thing, but the simple fact is, I’m not.’

‘You... You’re right... I don’t like it...’ he said frankly.

‘But, Pa I can’t be the way you want me, and it’s awful, this expectation...’

‘So what? Is it so wrong that I don’t want you to not have *our* values – I’m protecting our family integrity!’

I looked him in the eye: ‘No Pa. You’re being hateful and controlling.’

He began whispering again: ‘I... I just *care* about you, Frans. I don’t want you to end up like a bloody *soutie*, or some dirty foreigner, or a Muslim, or a *kaf-*’

‘Pa! You make me *hate* you when you’re like this! And I don’t want to hate you... Not anymore.’

At this he went silent. He looked at the table now. We sat in *legendarily* awkward silence for some time – I’ve no clue how long, since time is so warped in such situations – and then he got up and left – with a strange look on his face. I assumed I’d failed and wondered what on earth I could do.

But it turns out that I’d done enough. After that exquisitely uncomfortable chat, there was a change in him. He didn’t apologise, or say anything heartfelt, or anything at all further to do with our discussion, but he communicated with his actions and demeanour: he stopped making mean comments about my appearance and doings, he made an effort to engage with me, he told me stories he had never before, hell, he was even nicer to his staff. It was almost annoying, this change, but I was glad. I promised them, many times, that I was going to work my ass off in my studies from now, and they were pleased.

It was this talk that served as the hopeful foundation with which I was to have this next talk regarding my proposed switching of degrees. I dried my dew-wetted feet on the mat by the door. I could hear the microwave cooking the oats before I could smell them. I quite disliked oats, so never had them at the commune, but today it was a welcome breakfast because it had been so long, and it was so nostalgic. Pa was at the table already, reading news on his phone. I greeted him and asked if there was anything interesting he’d read.

‘Ag the usual – bad governance, mostly,’ and he added a chuckle. I just smiled. Ma must have heard me; she came from the kitchen: ‘I saw you in the garden just now?’ she asked gaily.

‘Yes,’ I said as I made my way to the kitchen to make more coffee, ‘I was just admiring your work!’

‘It looks quite good this year, doesn’t it!?’ she said, a bit proudly. While I was busy with my caffeine-gastronomy, she told me about some of the different things she’d been trying with the flowers,

like putting ice by the roots before winter; she was still going on when she took the oats bowl to the table. When she finished, I'd already dished up for myself and added milk and honey, and I was just about to start the intended talk, when Pa started telling us about the wild fig tree in the garden that he wanted to cut down – 'The damn thing drops millions of those stupid little fruits,' and how he was thinking of going about it.

Then there was a silence as we all three had our mouths full – I quickly swallowed and started: 'So, I thought we could –'

'Oh, Frans! Sorry, before I forget...' and Ma proceeded to ask me how I could help her with some technical detail on her cell phone. Once I'd shown her how to edit a contact's number, I was about to resume when Pa started telling Ma what our neighbours were thinking of naming their next baby that was coming in a few months.

*For fuck's sakes!* 'Listen!' I interrupted when they'd begun making little jokes about the family in question, 'I want to discuss my decision to switch to the Genetics degree.'

'Ja...' Pa started excruciatingly, 'I've had a think about that, and I don't think it's a good idea, Boet.'

'Okay, why?' I asked, trying to sound as neutral as possible.

'I don't really see how you're going to run the farm with that degree, Frans, uh, the Agriculture degree really exposes you to a lot of the stuff you'll need to know, and you get good contacts, and other things like that.'

'What if... I don't really want to... actually be a farmer?' I said carefully.

The way Pa reacted to this, he seemed like someone who'd just burned his finger, but was trying his utmost to show as few outward signs as possible of the pain he was experiencing. '...Hmm?'

'I love... this place, but I don't think it's, you know, my calling...'

'But, this is the Knollenhoven farm. It has been for generations. Who else can do it?'

'I know, but I can't just take it over for that reason.'

Ma was sitting there as if this was some enthralling soapie.

'Um... So, what can you do? With the... other degree?'

'I can do clinical research, work in a lab, become an academic, but I think genetic counselling is what I'd like most.'

'Genetic counselling... that's where you find out if people have disorders, hey?'

'Pretty much. And if they have kids if there's something bad they could pass on but don't have themselves. Stuff like that.'

'A bit like a doctor,' Pa said impressively.

'A little bit!'

He took a deep breath and said: 'Okay,' and he looked at me as if I were some mythical creature. 'You really aren't a Boer, are you?'

‘I... sort of still am... I’m not sure what that means, Pa. I don’t want to work on a farm, that’s all. I’d make a mess of it, to be honest, and neither of us want that.’

He hummed in agreement. Ma finally remembered that this was an interactive drama: ‘Ag, skat, we could have seen this coming. Let him do what he likes,’ taking hold of his hand.

‘The good side to this is that you guys can now sell the farm when you want to retire and have a *lekker* pension!’

‘I guess so!’ Pa showed genuine surprise at this realisation. ‘But that will still be a while – I’m still feeling strong as a bull that stripped its *moer*! Ha-ha!’

‘*Haai*, sis, Frik,’ Ma said, and gave him a playful smack on the shoulder.

We sat in comfortable silence for a bit. Then, with a smirk Pa said: ‘You know, when I was a *laaitie* at school, I actually wanted to become a vet. My marks were even good enough.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘Cois would *never* allow me to,’ he scrunched his face at the word “never”. ‘But, I really didn’t mind the idea of taking over the farm – I could sort of be a vet to my own livestock! So, I bought a few books on sheep anatomy and birth and so on.’

‘Really? I never knew that!’

‘Have you never noticed how your dad gets a bit excited when one of the sheep gets sick or hurt?’ Ma said.

I laughed. ‘Maybe once I get the Genetics degree, I could even help you breed *rare* livestock; like those bulls with the massive horns.’

‘Really!?’

‘Ja! Genetics a really cool, Pa.’

‘How do you do it? I mean, I just imagined you mate the ones with the biggest horns and hope for the best.’

‘So, with genetics, you can determine whether it’s more from the mother’s side, or more to do with what the calves are fed – stuff like that.’

‘*Jis*... Ja, I do like reading about those auctions for the weird breeds – those black impala look *unreal*.’ The telephone rang at this moment and Ma went to answer. I sat with Frik in silence for a bit, until I finished my coffee. I got up and saw the pool through the window.

‘Pa, I think it’s time we fill that pool again, what do you think!?’

‘Yes! I want to have it done before next December, when it’s so bloody hot again.’

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I waited until 5 p.m. that day to do some strength exercises – after lunch and the day’s heat had both settled. Out of my suitcase, I took a piece of paper that had been printed out in colour, and even put into a plastic sleeve – this document, so evident of effort, was the work of Carl and JP. I’d started gymming with them again this year. This time, instead of going fanatically for two months and then giving up, I went about three times a week and had kept at it for nearly twice as long.

This enthusiastically made article was a few routines of mostly bodyweight exercises that I’d requested for my time away from any gyms. There were a few workouts, however, that involved the 12-kg dumbbells JP had lent me for my “time in the middle of nowhere”. Carl had put an end to his studies, and his plan now was to become a personal trainer – smart decision, if you ask me. I’d basically become his practice client, and he was delighted that I’d given him the opportunity to create a few training sequences for me.

I went through one of the colourful routines; while I appreciated the effort, the heavily colour-coded rag was a bit tacky. *I’ll have to tell Carl to tone it down for his paying clients.* The first one focused on pecs, stomach and quads, so there were mostly variations of push-ups, sit-ups and squats.

With the conversation out of the way, and my exercise done, I could finally do what I’d been looking forward to for weeks: nothing. A couch in the living room was the first chosen venue to do so. After about three hours of sweet, irreproachable procrastination, Ma inquired what I was doing. ‘I’m resting, Ma – I haven’t had time to just laze about in long.’

‘Ag shame, *my kind,*’ she said, giving me a kiss on the forehead. ‘In that case I’ll only disturb you for a second: here,’ and she handed me a small tube of cream – it said it was to get rid of scars. ‘For that *merkie* by your right eye.’

‘...Thanks,’ I said as she left me in peace. I felt a little bad, since it must have cost quite a bit, but I had no intention of using this ointment – I was actually rather fond of my “*merkie*”. *I’ll give it to someone else and just tell her that it didn’t work.*

The next day, after my first ever run through the farm paths, I chose the porch as the next place to get busy with lack of activities. I was no monk though, and nothingness could not keep me amused very long. After these two days of doing bugger-all, I’d gotten all the sloth out of my system and REALLY needed some activity. I recycled the suggestion Ma had given some nine years before: I started painting again. I didn’t even get exam entrance for what was supposed to be my “fun extra-subject” that I took the previous year. I’d missed too many classes, but my marks would probably not have been worthy anyway, because I mostly handed in incomplete works, when at all.

Good advice, it turns out, has the shelf life of honey: after a few practice pieces, I became totally engrossed in an ambitious self-portrait – my first portrait of this variety. The idea, which came to me somewhere during the semester that just passed, was to have my face be in a neutral expression, with the right half being as realistic as possible, and the left being a highly warped, cubistic representation of

my countenance that becomes ever more inhuman the further from the centre it goes – disintegrating into tiny quadrilaterals at the edge. I was worried that it would be too ambitious to try with my underdeveloped skills, but I was eager to try.

For almost a whole week, I worked tirelessly, until it was finished and my visit to the farm was nearing its end. I called it: *Opinion and Contentment*, and it was my best work up to that point. I wanted to know if it really was finished or needed to be touched up a bit, so I took a photo and sent it to Brentwyn. He quickly replied with an excited voice note in which the beautiful bohemian congratulated me, and told me his interpretation of the “fine artwork”: **For me, it’s like the subject went through this tough experience that’s left him scarred, but he’s taken what’s “broken” and has decorated it to make it beautiful in its own way. Don’t tell me if I’m right or wrong! I want to cherish my interpretation... maybe I’ll even write an academic essay about it one day!**

He told me that he thought that the lighting on the realistic side could just do with a bit more contrast. I thanked him for his advice and scrutinization, and I asked him to send me any of his recent creations. He sent a few pictures of his latest pottery, which was fast becoming masterful.

I replied: **So bloody good! And the medium suits you very well – I can already see an interviewer going to your untidy pottery studio in the near future. I want to buy one of them as a gift for my mom, before they all become ludicrously expensive!**

He replied by saying it would be an honour – **And don’t worry, you’ll always get massive discount!**

‘It’s... pretty!’ Ma said, trying to hide her confusion when I showed her the product of my time alone in my room for the preceding few days.

‘*Sjoe*, I’m getting too old for this world it seems,’ Pa said when he saw it done, ‘this generation’s music and art and movies just confuse me.’

‘Well, it was born out of confusion, so it being confusing is kind of the point.’

I took no break before I started addressing the critique Brentwyn gave – I needed the artwork to be done before my friend Stefan came for his visit the next day.

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Though I hadn’t told him, I considered this Stefan my best friend. I had no intention of telling him either, because that would likely create unnecessary negativity, and the idea that I was not *his* best friend didn’t bother me anyway. He was to come two days before I was to leave for Pretoria – he was going to drive up from his parents’ house in Kimberley, and then we were going to drive together to Tuks two days later.



‘Don’t bother coming for more than two nights, dude – there’s only so much to do there,’ I’d told him when we were making plans for him to come visit. He loved farms in general, so he’d been keen to come check mine out ever since I’d told him about my origins. It was surreal to see the familiar old Honda come up our driveway in the morning, and then Stefan’s beaming mug as I told him where he could park.

‘Ah!’ was his first “word” to me as he opened the door, ‘I hope you don’t mind, but farms reduce me to a giddy child of a man.’

‘I don’t mind at all – welcome, my child!’

I introduced him to my parents, who had been discussing something in the kitchen. They made an effort to be kind, but they had virtually no experience when it came to meeting good friends of mine, so they were a bit nervous. Luckily, Stefan was very well mannered – and fluent in Afrikaans. Next, I introduced him to the house, starting with Sussie’s room, where he’d be sleeping – ‘Aw, man, I thought we were going to cuddle together on your bed!’

After this, we went to the kitchen where I gave him a refreshing glass of water and ice. ‘I suppose the next logical thing to do is give you a tour of the farmlands.’

‘Yes, let’s explore!’ He then met Bob, who I recruited as security for the excursion. This was not the best time for a walk, but there was at least quite a lot of cloud cover to shield us from the sun. Midst pointing out places of interest, I began telling Stefan about how I’d successfully convinced the elders that it was best that I leave the Agriculture degree, and I told him of the portrait that had kept me busy for most of my visit.

‘... And?’ he said when I showed him the feed storehouse.

‘What?’

‘Come on, are you really going to make me ask about it?’

‘You want to know about Ryka, I assume?’ I said with an embarrassed smile.

‘Ja!’

‘I was eager to tell you, but I’m trying to not make a big deal out of it – I have a terrible track record of doing that with girls.’

‘I, your genius mentor in romance, give you permission to make a “big deal” out of it for a few minutes and inform me of your first date.’

Through Stefan I’d met this girl named Ryka – a schoolmate of his. While I quite liked the look of her from the start, I decided to see if her personality was compatible with my deranged one. And once I saw that we got on really well, I decided to act very fast and make my feelings clear. In other words, I did basically the opposite to what I did with girls in the past. Ryka was probably (definitely) another reason this was the happiest I’d been on the farm in years.

‘So, I think I told you that I was going to take her to the botanical gardens? I was afraid it would be awkward, this outing that had this invisible difference of *date* smeared all over it, but it started just like our outing to the shops on which I’d asked her out – we were hanging out like good mates.’

‘That’s great!’

‘It is, but I decided that it was a little *too* awkward, you know?’

‘Amazingly, I’m with you, bro-beans.’

‘So, when we started walking along the path I said: “This is a date, right? Let’s give this hand-holding thing a try,” and took her hand.’

‘Smooth! I’ll file-save that one to my date-directory.’

‘She got a little embarrassed by this, and it gave a nice tang of awkwardness to the whole situation – just enough to reinforce the idea that this was a date. But it only lasted a little while, and then we were merrily strolling hand in hand. Well, until our paws got sweaty, then she said “eew”, and smeared herself dry on my shirt, and I returned the gesture and we laughed. At the top of the hill, she had an eruption of oestrogen when she saw a baby dassie.’

‘Of course she did.’

‘And after our walk we had a drink at the restaurant. And then when I dropped her off at her place when it was done, I asked her if she’d enjoyed the date enough for a kiss.’

‘...Go on.’

‘She had!’

‘Nice!’ Stefan was grinning, presumably because he felt he was the facilitator of all this. We walked in silence for a bit, the Stefan said: ‘Hmm... “Ryka Knollehoven” – could work!’

‘Nee, shut up!’

‘Ha-ha!’

‘I don’t think any phrase that contains those last four syllables of my behemoth name can “work”.’

‘Ag, don’t be so self-deprecating, man.’

‘I’ll probably advise her to keep Coetzee, if it comes to that. But hell, I can’t even call her my girlfriend yet.’

‘If this pans out – which it certainly will – she’ll be your first proper girlfriend, right?’

‘First girlfriend of any adjective, dude.’

‘Oh, sweet!’

‘Hmm... How would you advise me to proceed with such an undertaking? Mr “Genius romancer”.’

‘I’d say the advice I gave you for asking her out just carries on into a proper relationship, basically.’

‘What? Keep treating her like a friend?’ I asked, a little surprised.

‘Yes! It’s very important! Sure, you guys will be doing more intimate stuff, like holding hands and licking each other’s elbows, and whatever else you *plaas* people do, but most guys make the mistake where they completely stop treating the girl like a friend. But she should be your *best* friend.’

‘Right – if she’s not your friend anymore, she’s a trophy, isn’t she?’

‘Exactly, and guys want their trophies just like that – all well behaved in their cabinet. But girls won’t obey, not good ones at least. I made this mistake with my first little relationship, when I just got out of school: I was always worrying over her, always trying to control her, getting annoyed when she did her own thing... and of course, she dumped my ass.’

‘Tragic.’

‘It’s fine – looking back, she was not my type. A learning experience was the best I could have gotten out of her.’ I then pointed out a mongoose running near us, and we watched it until it disappeared – which was about five seconds, as usual.

‘So,’ Stefan began with a smirk when our walk resumed, ‘speaking of burgeoning romances...’

I had a feeling where this was going, but didn’t want to assume: ‘... Yes?’

‘You getting the cojones to ask out the girl you fancy inspired me to do the same!’

‘What!?! You and Flou have a date?’

‘Yup! Next week.’

‘Fantastic. Where are you taking her?’

‘Boardwalk in Faerie Glen – she’s never been.’

‘Dude... it’s so awesome that you met Flou through me, and I met Ryka through you.’

‘Right?! If we can manage to not piss them off for long enough, we’ll be able to go on a double date!’

‘Great – we shall compare our relationships and feel inadequate.’

‘Sounds like a plan!’

Laughing, we came to one of the fields where the sheep were. ‘And here’s where some the woolly dumbasses are housed.’

‘Can I ride one?’

‘They’re so terrified of people that they’ll probably faint if you tried to mount them.’

‘Tis a shame...’

‘Did I tell you that Zen convinced me to buy a ticket to Oppikoppi?’

‘How did he do that?’

‘He told me it has the best mosh pits in South Africa.’

‘Oh ja, you two are metal-heads! I wouldn’t know. I suppose you’re going to try and convince me to go too?’

‘Ha-ha, I would, but I doubt I could, since it’s not really your scene. Hell, it’s not exactly my scene anymore either! I’m just going for the music. And for Zen and company.’

‘You could possibly convince me with the camping aspect of it all.’

‘It’s R700 – I feel I must tell you before you start getting any ideas.’

‘*Donder!* No, jeez, we can go camp somewhere else for waaaay cheaper.’

‘Ja! Maybe Rietvleidam or something.’

We started making our way back towards the house. I’d saved the best place as the final for the tour – my bluegum forest. ‘Wow, so this was little Frans’s big playground,’ he said as it came into view.

‘That’s right.’

‘Hey!’ he said excitedly as we were approaching it, ‘we should camp in *here!* How about tomorrow night?! We can make a campfire and everything!’

I grinned at the prospect. ‘I’d like that.’

## Chapter Six: Pupa

31 October 2013

That date right there is a very important one to me – probably the most important of my life thus far. The days preceding it were the bleakest I'd yet experienced. Ferbie was now on his "happy pills" and was always tired, often dizzy, and kept to himself mostly while he adapted to this new medication. Paul was understandably less cheery himself due to his best pal's desperate resort. The other people in the house – Cynthia, Eric and Bernard – fed off these feelings and regurgitated them right back. This commune morbidity made no difference to me: my aversion to the hippies had swollen to loathing, and by now they had lost their patience waiting for me to get back to my "old self".

I felt more and more depressed: I hardly went to class, and couldn't study, and missed two semester tests. Luckily, thanks to my alcohol-corroded immune system, I'd hooked me a nice little cold that got the necessary sicknotes. One of the sick tests that these valuable rags had been cashed in for was scheduled to commence November the 1<sup>st</sup> at 10 a.m.

On October the 31<sup>st</sup>, I awoke with a brain that had almost none of the information necessary to be victorious over the test. The same brain was again doing something it had recently developed a habit of: it aimlessly pondered the possible causes behind its downheartedness.

*It can't be the Lily-incident anymore – I've forgotten about that. It's no big deal, if anything I'm glad about it now. Did that initial trauma trigger this cascade of negativity? Or maybe reproductive behaviour really is the mechanism that flings one into adulthood. Is this what adulthood is? Misery? Do your happy glands just become wrinkly and withered? I haven't been sleeping very well, and I am very tired – is that the problem? Am I maybe just tired? Maybe I've become dependent on alcohol? I've not had any for a few days. Then again, it's not like I'm all peachy when I drink... Maybe it's cigarettes – maybe they've tarred my dopamine receptors... Am I like Ferbie? Do I have a disease? Is my own blood a pathogen to my brain? Or is it just one of those things?*

*Wait a minute! I always ate lamb on the farm, and haven't had any in months; what if it's because I've not had any mutton in a while? And mutton has the happy chemicals? O-or I was just adapted to their composition! Fuck it... I just don't know...*

This internal interlocutor was what accompanied my morning coffee and cigarette in the commune backyard. I rarely got any new theories as to why I felt this way; I just cycled and regrouped through the old shit, but that last one – the sheep-meat theory – was novel at least. I planned on having a good go at stuffing my muddled brain that afternoon and night with the information I would be tested on, so it was good that I didn't want to party with the hippies anymore. They would certainly be partying this Thursday night, as would almost every single student – it was Halloween, after all.

All the clubs and bars had special events on this pagan celebration night, which is such a ripe excuse for debauchery. You're supposed to dress-up and party hard if you're a student, but I had the test, and no friends with whom I could share the hysterical horror, so had long before excused myself. There was, however, one little temptation telling me to skip the studies and join the festivities: Anna Brúnn had sent me a text message: **Hey there, scum-kettle! It's been so long! You must be going to Amusement Empire's Halloween party, right? EVERYBODY is going. Hope to see you there!** But where Anna went, her little brother Julio was usually creeping about as well, and with him inevitably came the rest of the skaters, who were, no doubt, ready to perform some devilish ritual with my body as fodder in their anger at my desertion.

The hippies may have been shunned as well, but, distracted by depression, I couldn't be bothered to spurn their fashion too, so in a floral print shirt, but with a morose face, I walked to class, expelling clouds as if I were steam powered. I attended the class of the subject I was to write on – Genetics. Here I sat next to Sennie and Jake – Niksy had been skipping classes for a straight week, but I didn't ask them why. These two wouldn't shut up about their Halloween costumes: Jake was going as Ned Stark, (which he'd turn into the humpback of Winterfell), and Sennie as a slutty cat. She didn't specify "slutty" herself, but it could be nothing else with her tits peering out the garments.

The lecture was comprehensible in that I understood words like "the", "every" and even "gene" (*Maybe my genes are to blame for my anhedonia?*), but not much else the lecturer said. Now, REALLY fearing the test that was about 24 hours away, I hit the library instead of the other classes. It was usually packed, but this was a non-studying day, so it was quite empty – a state I greatly approved of. Here I studied poorly for a few hours, until I had to go to the day's Microbiology prac – the other sick test I'd scavenged was for this course and was the following week.

As I was leaving the library, I was joined in my exit by Bes Nogi, who too had made a part of the abnormally low library populace. She and I rudely besmirched the lovely quiet of the large room with our surprised greetings. Bes said she still had some time off. 'Can't I join your prac?'

I wanted a buddy there, but the idea of breaking the rules like this didn't sit well with me. 'Alright, but if you get caught, I'm not going to cover for you. I don't know you, if they ask to see whether or not you're on the class list.'

'Ag, fine, you mamma's boy!'

When we went inside, I took one of the medium-sized lab coats to the squeak of Bes, who excitedly went over to get a small one.

'I feel like I'm a mad scientist! *Mwahahaha!*'

I snickered at her meanly. 'Grow up, Bes.' *Jeez, all these people are so damn immature.*

'You're so sour today, Frans!' she said as she was inspecting the test tubes. 'Maybe for next year's Halloween I'll go as a mad scientist. Tonight, though, I'm going as Black Widow.'

‘The Avenger?’

‘Yes!’

*You may have a new nose, but that doesn’t make you nearly as smoking-hot as Scarlett Johansson,* I almost told her, but I wasn’t quite that “sour”.

‘What are you going as? A sour-puss? Going to draw some angry whiskers on that frowny face, hmm?’

‘I’m not going. Got a Genetics sick test tomorrow.’

‘Oh! That’s what’s souring your puss.’ I failed at suppressing a laugh and she said: ‘There’s my happy buddy poking his head out!’

While I was busy trying to identify bacterial cultures to complete the worksheet, Bes got bored and excitedly remembered something she thought I’d be interested in. ‘Oh ja! Hey, did you hear about Bloomstein?!’ Her voice made it clear this information was monumental.

‘Well, I know he’s left Tuks. No one seems to know what happened to him.’

‘Oh, *everyone* knows what happened to him now...’

I stared at her questioningly, eagerly waiting for her elaboration, unaware of the shock that these sentences would have on me.

‘I take it you haven’t been on Facebook recently. Well, Bloomstein has undergone a *complete* transformation; you’d hardly recognise him. I saw him at Park Reverb on Sunday; he doesn’t look nerdy at all anymore – he looks *super sexy* now.’

‘...How?’ I murmured.

‘Hm? He dropped out of university because he got a job at an IT company. Apparently he just went in, told them he was brilliant and that he could prove it, and bang – they gave him a paid internship. He was fully hired within three weeks. When I saw him at Park Reverb, he was wearing these new fancy clothes, and no dorky glasses anymore. He has a nice new car, and he’s gotten this super-hot girlfriend. She has a weird name... what was it again...’

The instant before she said it, I somehow already knew what she was called, but that didn’t prevent tremors barraging my body at its utterance.

‘...Niksy! That’s her name. Quiet girl.’

*No...*

‘I told you I believed he could do something like this!’ my disaster informant proclaimed as I was trying not to tremble. ‘He was always cute – he just needed to get over his awkwardness.’

My practical worksheet was only about halfway done, but I was finished. I told Bes I was going – told her I had to hurry so threw off the lab coat and began running home. I ran because I had to hit something, and the earth was the closest, most appropriate thing. I didn’t have the mind to mind the stares I got from people, who must have thought me either late for a test, or a shoplifter.

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My fitness, which had wasted away to a puddle, was soon completely drained, and I had to slow down to a wheeze-laden stroll. My cardio pond soon had some reserves again, but the pinch in my side prevented me from running again. Sweaty and distraught, I opened the door to the commune and went straight to my room, where I switched on my laptop. *I need proof. I must see this transfiguration...* As the computer was coming to life, I heard the other commune people outside: they were soon going to a friend's house in Faerie Glen to have a private Halloween gathering. All except Ferbie, who had gone to his parents for the day.

I had only checked Bloomstein's Facebook profile once before, when I had added him near the year's beginning merely to increase my friend-count. I recalled it being devoid of any photos of him with buddies, or caring posts on his wall, and his friends-count was appallingly low. It was a showcase of an abject creature that simultaneously filled me with sympathy for the owner (and made me want to click away as quickly as possible), and filled me with security – a knowledge that I was not at the bottom of the social barrel.

That deplorable page had been annihilated root and soul, and had been replaced with a concentrated reservoir of jealousy: a vibrant page teeming with photographs of a man that had morphed into a god, complete with his divine paramour. It boasted photographs of him at several party institutions, including the Park Reverb concert Bes had informed me of. Each displayed Niksy too, and plenty of (*new?*) adoring and photogenic friends. What I found most tremendous of all, though, was Bloomstein himself: gone were his grandpa glasses, replaced no-doubt by contact lenses; gone too was the short unkempt hair – his black curls were straightened and styled to a sleek, modern artwork in all photographs; gone were his ill-fitting shirts and boyish shorts – in their place were expensive-looking, well-fitted suits: he looked like he just came from work – *lucrative* work. His blazers were eventually discarded as these awesome photo series were followed, and his shirtsleeves were then rolled up and his tie loosened in a casual-executive style – he could have been a model for a whiskey commercial. All this was trivial, however, compared to the way Bloomstein radiated confidence in these terrifying images – his body heralded the self-assured legend that it contained.

In disbelief I sat at my laptop being irradiated – bombarded with visuals of the fruits of his transformation, and it made me feel sick. A part of me felt that I should be happy at the success of my fellow pest-person, but I couldn't: he had won, and I was still a creepy-crawly. I realised that Bloomstein was indeed not unattractive, just as those girls had said. He'd never been. It was just the way in which he was presented, and now the presentation was glorious, what with him being drenched with



confidence and having a goddess hanging around his neck. I tried to clear my mind – I needed to study – but the images of that re-formed creature were branded into my thoughts.

*As if Emily, a skinny ghost, wasn't enough mass in my muddled head. Another changeling to haunt my mind, this one with a dense new ego. Changelings to haunt a changeling.* This haunting – this mass on my mind – began to cause its own transformation, as I was forced to mull things over – it rapidly changed from shock to rage. All that surprise and disbelief became a thick clump of red fury, until the anger had reached a critical weight. This intel on my former comfort-comparison, and my fanatical crush, had sent me into a desire to drink myself to death.

*Fuck that. I'm not going to miss the biggest party evening of the year to study. Fuck it all! Fuck everyone! FUCK ME!* I threw the laptop, which had been harmlessly humming in front of me, onto the floor. I didn't check if the maltreatment had broken the old thing, I just shoved it into the corner with my foot, took off my sweaty shirt and hurled it over it, so that it was no longer a problem. Shirtless and furious, I marched to my kitchen. Unfortunately, all the commune people had already left. *Now would have been a good time to give them a piece of my mind.* I sat in the living room, where I saw someone's unopened cigarette pack lying. I began burning one and put the pack in my pocket.

*I'm depressed. I need alcohol to be happy. I'm going out.*

*Where to?*

*To Amusement Empire. Anna graciously invited me, didn't she? Bint wants to see me, so I'll show myself.*

*What about Christoff and Phillip and the rest?*

*For their sake I hope they're not going, but I welcome an encounter with those goths.*

My sudden change of plans meant I was unprepared. *I guess I need a costume, right? You'd swear everyone was a psychopathic cosplayer, the way they're going on about what make-believe monstrosity, or pop-icon idiot they're going as – fucking immature.* I had the brilliantly lazy idea to just throw something together from my existing clothes. *I'll just go as a 60's flower-child.* I got up and returned to my room. Looking through my bohemian threads, my eye was drawn to the fringed jacket I'd only worn once, since it was so eye drawing – *But that's the whole point tonight.* Underneath this clumsy coat, I put on my tie-dye shirt. Legs were adorned with white harem pants, and I slipped brown sandals onto my feet.

*The dirty night I plan to have will show quickly on those,* I mused as I examined the baggy white trousers. I thus got a backpack and planned to put in another pair of pants, but I realised that, thanks to my recent disregard for general life, my current wardrobe was in dire need of a wash. *I guess I could take some clothes from my suitcase...* I glanced over at my big travel suitcase, which was full of clothes I'd not worn since moving into the commune. *I can decorate my body in whatever the hell I want tonight and it means nothing about who I am.*

I opened the case and saw that the countless items of ditched garments had compressed into a singular mass; I chucked the compact contents onto my floor and they separated in a satisfying burst. I randomly selected a pair of black jeans with fashionably torn knees – a relic of my skater/moper /faker days. *It's going to get cold* was the thought that prompted me to indulge in this scoundrel-fashion, so I took my thick purple hoodie and a pair of sneakers to accompany the black jeans as a warmer costume and shoved them into the backpack. I decided that my exuviae would do as costumes for those childish heathens.

As I was violently stuffing this delinquent outfit into the bag, I noted, among the chaotic, sartorial scatter, my green K-Way jacket. *My hip flask!* I excitedly checked the inner breast pocket, and sure enough, there was the forgotten, silver, rum-containing beauty. I immediately took a sip. *I'm going to take it with tonight*, I decided, without a peep of protest in my head with regards to the action's illegality.

I strung together the sips as I gathered my belongings and put some eggs on the pan, and soon my rum was near halfway done, so I went into Paul's room, dug out his expensive whisky and topped it off. *Those pretentious pricks would die if they saw the making of this impure cocktail!* The minute hole of the container meant I spilt quite a bit of the precious single malt – I couldn't care less.

With my egg-dinner wolfed down and washed away with a beer, I went and checked my appearance in the mirror. My hair had grown well over my ears by now. I styled it to look messy, like a fully-fledged bohemian – *I'm the Brentwyn-monster!* I was ready to embark, when it occurred to me that I was home alone with no transportation. *Well, none except Paul's Golf...*

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It was nearly 6:30 when I grabbed Paul's keys from the table at the door and got into the dark green automobile, with daylight fast making its exit. The fact that I didn't have permission didn't faze me at all: there was too much anger in me, and it satisfied me immensely. Gone was my woe and fear – replaced by a will to dominate and a belief that I was capable of doing so. I noticed Paul's iPod in front of the gear-leaver as I was adjusting the seat and the air-conditioning; the music nerd had such a variety on his little device that I was clueless as to what to put on. I scrolled fast and ineffectually until I reached the bottom of his cyber album collection. I paused to try and remember an artist that'd he'd played me before, which I'd found too harsh at the time, but now craved. *That stupidly angry music...*

I soon recalled and put on *The Sex Pistols*, and then embarked on my forbidden evening to these anthems of anarchy. By the second robot I was itching for some nicotine – Paul's no-smoking-in-his-car rule gave me a second's hesitation, but no longer. I did courteously open the window though, which caused my loud punk-soundtrack to be sent into the busy public. I considered how foreign my current

temperament was: I didn't care one bit that the nearby people would find it rude of me to blast such foul compositions. In fact, I increased the volume to deafening in spite.

Traffic was bad, and was putting a pessimistic twist to my otherwise scrumptious anger, so I decided to cut through suburban roads instead, even though I didn't really know the way through them. As I was speeding down the quiet lanes of what I thought was Menlo Park, thinking I knew where the hell I was going, I came across a street with a little ghost, a tiny vampire, a pint-sized werewolf and other miniature monsters prowling for sweets. *Dammit, I've never been able to trick-or-treat, and now it's too late!* I thought bitterly as I slowed down to observe them like some pervert. *I'm much too old to be able to enjoy such things. All I can do now is dress like a proper monster and play tipsy-or-trashed.* I was almost ready to admit to myself that I was lost, when I came across a familiar main road by chance. I smugly used it to get back on track, insisting to myself that my detour had saved me some time. Out of suburbia, I saw a bakkie with adult monsters on the back – three zombies, a clown and a dude in a karate outfit. One of the zombies was a Niksy lookalike. *Guess I'll just have to make do by tricking some skanks into their fleshy treats.*

My Sex Pistols album was about halfway when my pleasing anger was forcibly morphed into hate-soaked road-rage by an inconsiderate driver. After flipping the bastard off, I decided I needed to calm down a smidgeon to attain optimal indignation once more, so at the next robot I found a playlist named "Classical". I'd no idea what played, but it was a solo piano piece, and at first, I laughed at how it contrasted with the previous set of songs, and that this lullaby was blasting out the speakers at the same deafening volume. But it was relaxing: the notes were like gentle explosions of fluff that tickled my ear, which penetrated into my brain and succeeded in ever so slightly reducing the rage inside. With the baroque sedative now degrading my eardrums instead, I drove past a restaurant whose sign was illuminated by the sky's final sunlight – it read **SPICE HOUSE**, but I didn't recognise it as the broken sign I'd looked at a few months earlier. By now the piano piece had ended and some powerful orchestral arrangement was causing turbulence in the compartment, like a roid-raging pensioner – *I like this!*

It was just after 7 when my debatably stolen vehicle brought me to Amusement Empire's entrance. All the normal parking had long ago been claimed, and the surplus of cars were parked on the sidewalks down the street, reaching far away. A car-guard pointed out a nearby field where new arrivals could park. The bellowing baroque had succeeded in taking away the less desirable blind ire the traffic had induced, and had returned me to that lovely state of arrogant pissed-off-ness.

I walked the long way to Empire with the posture of an action movie star, basking in my new cocoon of wrath – caressing and protecting me from all fear and inadequacy. I took out my hip flask and tasted the rum-whisky fusion. It wasn't great, but it would do just fine. I had a few more tastes on the way just to make sure I liked it: *No, no, it's actually not too shabby!* Once near my destination, I stowed away this own-brought booze to deceive the bar jurisdiction. At Empire, I saw two entrances side-by-

side: one read **Pre-bought tickets** and the other **Ticket entrance (R120)**. *R120!? No way in hell*. I ignited a cigarette and brainstormed. The balcony could be climbed onto, but was being watched by bouncers, so that was out. I then noticed that the spiked fence to the left was clear. I took the long walk around hereto and jumped over; I may have saved R120, but I made a small rip in my R700 fringed jacket in the process, but I didn't really care. I was in, yet without a bangle of permission that everyone else had – I felt naked and exhilarated.

I went to the bar to get a beer, all the while observing the members of my generation now disguised as all manner of horrific beasts and abominations – hiding their chosen or inherited person-genre. I saw more blood-stained zombies, someone with a Jigsaw-killer mask, a bright red devil, three whorish witches and a Jason Voorhees to name a few. Next to me at the bar stood a trio of guys dressed as werewolves, who surrounded a girl dressed as an angel – they were busy buying her a shot. She seemed quite reluctant to consume it, but did after a little encouragement. *Looks like this wolf-pack will gorge itself on virgin tonight*. I got my beer and walked around as I incorporated it into myself. *Tonight, there are no person-genres: everyone is displaying what they truly are deep inside – monsters. This night they openly show what they hide from you when you first meet them*. But this evening, I was no longer afraid of these vile creatures, because I knew that they were just squishy weaklings underneath the awful attire; I knew that it was all just a show, and I believed that I, with my new powers of hatred, could vanquish them if need be – without any care for myself anymore, I was unshackled from the fear which makes you weak.

My rambling through the beastly gathering soon brought me to the sight of Anna, who was dressed in a pink, bunny onesie.

'Guess who made it!'

'Fransie!' she squealed, and whilst hugging me said: 'It's been so long! How are you?'

'I'm fantastic!'

'That's great! My brother and his fellow snot-clippers are here, somewhere!'

'Uh-huh,' I ended that topic, and began a new one, 'you're so fucking fluffy!'

'I know! It's amazing, feel!'

I hugged her magenta, woolly body tightly. 'Hmmm...'

'Nice hey!?' she said as she began hugging me back, 'And you're like, a Native-American?'

'Yeah, sure.'

We'd been hugging for a few seconds when a friend of hers called for her attention. Anna let go of me to grant the friend audience, but I refused to do the same: it was too satisfying to clutch this human being I'd always been fond of. I kept one arm around her shoulders as she was speaking to her friend – gently caressing the downy texture. The anger in my veins then weighed this limb down, so that

it slid to her hips – she just kept up her conversation. I could sense her shapely buttocks, so near, and the same red influence now implored me to go there.

*Oh shit... Should I really do it!?*

*I bet new Bloomstein wouldn't be too much of a sissy.*

I slowly obeyed this down-pulling until that flesh-mound was caressed. I felt like a badass – finally taking what I wanted. My paw had been on this happy-place for about ten seconds when Anna looked at me and said: 'I'm quickly going to run to the loo,' and darted away. Her tone of voice had been ever so slightly different than usual – one I'd never heard before. A faint murmur in my head tried to tell me that what I'd just done had been wrong, but I drowned this out with the slosh of my rum-whisky going down my throat, which succeeded in snuffing my flickering compassion. *At least I've gotten a nice ass grab out of the attempt!* I thought as I went for a wander through the creature den, casually stowing away the hip flask. *Don't want to be too irresponsible, now do we!* I decided that I REALLY liked this festivity utensil I'd been too scared to use for so long. I liked the way it felt in my pocket and I liked the way it saved me money. *You, my little grey beauty, are my new kuier companion.*

'NO WAY! Hey, F-shend!' went the familiar shrill of Phillip, plainly drunk, interrupting my appreciation of my booze-dispenser. I looked in the direction the yelp had come from. There they were: all the rockers/mockers/cock-suckers, except Grey.

'Hey there, smut-bulbs,' I said calmly, looking them in their collective eyes, which were all outlined with thick black eyeliner of varying sorts and shapes.

'What!?' the astounded face of Christoff blurted – his eyeliner was all spikey, like a black sun. 'I thought that Woodstock-hippie I saw earlier looked familiar!' he said, running an intoxicated finger through my jacket's fringe.

'We thought you were dead, you mongrel-mat! Or worse: *sober,*' said Dylan, whose cosmetics made a cute little spider-web on his cheek.

'No, bro, I'm alive and living that life,' and I took the drink out his hand, sipped it, and graciously gave it back.

'What have you been up to, man!?' asked Christoff.

'Oh, I've been around. Keeping busy.'

'Ha-ha, cool, dude,' said Zen – high as a kestrel.

Julio said: 'My sister is here, if you want to say hi.'

'Yeah, I know – bunny outfit. I uh... *spoke* to her,' I said with a cheeky smile. From this weird pleasantry exchange, I honestly couldn't tell if they had animosity towards me or not. *Are they just avoiding conflict? Or do they really have no hard feelings towards me? I certainly have some angry feelings for them – I never retaliated to their insults at Park Reverb. Maybe they're just too drunk to remember their hatred for me.*

*Yes. That must be it: they're just drunk. I should do them the kindness of reminding them.*

'So, what are you sad little ghosts crying about?'

'Hey?' asked their zany leader.

'Your pretty make-up – it looks like your black souls are leaking out your eyes.'

Phillip gave an awkward, fake laugh and said: 'Na, bra, Anna's friend said she'd do this for us, so we just went with it.'

'Bullshit!' I laughed, 'You drag queens probably couldn't *wait* to role play as goth Jack Sparrows.'

'Seriously?' went Julio. The rest were awkward and quiet. Christoff came close to me, and whispered: 'Why are you being a cunt? And why did you stop hanging out with us? What the hell did we do?'

'You always were, and always will be *losers*. And I don't hang out with losers anymore.' I walked through them. On my casual retreat, I saw Grey coming from the bathrooms, headed toward the group of lifeless ghouls I'd just disciplined, and decided that the vilest one of them all would not get off unscolded. 'Oi, Fifty Shades!' I shouted as he neared me.

'F-Shend?' he looked at me in surprise.

I went to him and said into his hair-covered ear: 'I want you to know that I hate you and sincerely hope you get some painful terminal illness.' I smiled at him. He looked at me with wide eyes. I walked away calmly.

I could do with a piss, but the idea of experiencing the monstrosities' latrine was unacceptable. *I'll go later, in some bush or something.* I got another beer and went to the balcony to escape the muggy stench of the hideous beings that had accumulated inside. I stood there, shamelessly looking at enticing girls' costumes for a while, when I noticed a bouncer prowling the premises, his plump eye-sockets pogoing from one wrist to the next. I lazily watched as he approached. The fat low-life looked at me, pointed his index-sausage and asked: 'Where's your arm-band, buddy?'

'Right here, sugar-tits,' I said and gave him a most erect left middle finger. His lard-covered brain processed this for a few seconds, then he became visibly livid, while the spectator spectres near us gasped and laughed. I proceeded to leap over the low balcony to an approving "whoop" from the partygoers. I landed and causally strolled through the car park – the bouncer shouting very rude and unprofessional things to my back. I didn't stop until I was far away, and then observed my un-pursued trail. I laughed out the adrenaline, and continued to the car. As I began to walk, I suddenly felt a pang of pain in the ankle that had just recently healed from whatever malice had befallen it during the forgotten evening. *The balcony descent must have done this.* I took a gulp of the *rhisky* in the hip flask as a crude painkiller and told myself to not be a baby.

By the time I reached the Golf, I'd blocked out the sting. I drained my bladder using Paul's and some other idiot's car as cover. Finished, I pulled on the car door in my absentmindedness before

actually unlocking it, and it opened. *Oh shit!* Where in the past I would have felt terribly neglectful and would've wondered what might have been the consequence of my forgetfulness, this night I felt I'd dodged yet another bullet and felt more exhilarated still. I got in and asked myself: *Okay, where to now?*

*Why not the hypocrites' house party?*

*I hate those jerks like I hate the skaters!*

*So go drink their booze, tell them what you think, have a go on Flou's ass, and leave!*

*Sounds good.*

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Though I'd drunk a fair bit already, my well-trained liver meant that my driving ability wasn't yet severely impeded, though I was certainly breaking the law being behind the wheel. Despite this fact I was well aware of, I calmly made my way to the suburb of Faerie Glen. A little *too* calmly I decided and blamed the classical music for waning my delicious rage. At a red traffic light, I saw another playlist named **Metal** – *Hell yes!* Frightening, fast and incomprehensible were the adjectives added to the smoky, air-conditioned air. My frenzy happily devoured this mosh-pit soundtrack: I gripped the steering wheel like it was a cliff edge, and I broke speed limits like they were challenges. Soon though, an unintended effect of negativity came about from the apocalyptic melodies: three songs in and I thought about Bloomstein and Niksy again. In my imagination I saw them kissing: I saw the object of my desire being sullied by my old rag of comfort – now a silk scarf. I envisioned myself performing a dance of violence upon them to the metal that was playing, but none of my harsh choreography had any effect: they laughed at me, which twisted my favourable crimson attitude into hopelessness.

*I should feel glad for Bloomstein, shouldn't I? I know his plight. But did it have to be Niksy? She was supposed to be mine... I did so well in meeting her... In this unreserved hate, tears of rage suddenly crept to their freedom. I hit the rim of the steering wheel, tensed all my muscles and burnt away the leak with hot, masculine anger. I'll steal Niksy from him. I'll put that smug poes back in his place, where he belongs!*

I had heard Cynthia get verbal directions to the house party earlier that day, so I was certain that I could find the house. However, the suburbs soon had me lost; I knew the names of some of the streets, but not their relation or my orientation, and thus I was trapped in this homely maze by my insufficient knowledge and my stubbornness. *Use your phone's GPS*, squeaked a suggestion within. I ignored this and kept winding around, and after two indistinguishable metal compositions and several cups of wasted petrol, I stumbled upon the hippies' familiar cars by chance. I parked outside the humming house behind a bigger car so that the proof of my theft wouldn't be seen.



As I got out the car, I had quickly come to the conclusion that it would be wildly inappropriate to confront the flowerchildren wearing *their* armour, so I switched to the purple hoodie and black jeans – it was pretty chilly by now anyway. It was bizarre to glance down at myself and once again see this mode of attire, but I squished this feeling. *You're supposed to dress like awful things tonight, right?* I noticed a purple bulge on my hip; I reached into the hoodie pocket and pulled out a wad of about nine black bangles – I put them on. I also took a spurt of the *wum* from my flask and rubbed it into my hair – made it spikey like a punk's. I took two more spurts and threw them down my gullet. I rang the doorbell and smoked to pass the time until an unfamiliar girl dressed as a pirate came out.

'Hello?'

'Ahoy lass, I'm Frans.'

She looked at me confusedly, but not unfriendly, so I rolled my eyes, made inverted commas with my fingers and said: "'Franbo".'

She brightened up and remarked: 'Oh! The others were talking about a Franbo! I thought they said you weren't coming tonight?'

'Well... surprise! I guess.'

This boobs-buccaneer let me into the house and took me to Brentwyn, who greeted me with surprise. Through his masquerade mask peered eyes red as my thoughts. 'Frans! I thought you couldn't come tonight?' He hugged me, but I didn't return his embrace.

'I wanted to get wasted, so here I am.'

'Fraaans! It really is you! You copro-cavity,' said a drunk Flou. She was a boring old vampire, but she'd clearly spent a lot on the outfit.

'Hey! "Coporo-cavity" is mine! You unclean kleptomaniac!' protested Leigh, an orange-clad monk.

Paul – dressed as his beloved John Lennon – came to me, removed his dark circular shades, revealing eyes like Brentwyn's. 'Oh, you're like a... uh... skater... or punk!' those red things managed to perceive.

'How did you get here?' asked Cynthia – an actual Native American.

'Don't you worry about that. Is there booze for me somewhere around here?' I'd decided to stall my scolding until I got my drink on.

'Whoa, calm down, buddy, first meet the other guests! Then they'll give you some of their punch,' said Paul Lennon. I went to the porch where these "other guests" were to be found. The lady-washbuckler that had let me in was the hostess, and her friends all escape my memory – all except for a youthful-looking girl dressed as Ash Ketchum.

My inner reaction, when I was introduced to her, was one of hilarity (*What a child she must still be*), but through my irrepressible smile I told her: 'That's so damn cool,' pretending that my grinning was approval's pull.



‘Thanks!’ she said brightly, and after inspecting my grungy attire, she proclaimed: ‘And you’re a Satanist!’ with a smile.

‘Ha-ha! Exactly! Or a turd-sack, whichever you choose. So, listen, Miss Catch ‘em all; where can I get some alcohol?’ She graciously showed me where the punch was. I filled a glass and set about emptying it at once. Mission accomplished, I noticed that Samantha was here as well: she was chatting with people I wasn’t familiar with. Her eyes told mine that she was not her usual, bright self this evening. Like Brentwyn, she didn’t have a costume really: she was in her typical clothes, simply with a cowboy hat and boots added.

I went to this lazy girl, who’d I’d not seen in a while (I’d avoided all art classes for over a week). I tapped her shoulder, and when she turned to see me, her already sad face dropped even further. I didn’t expect this, so just stared at her angrily. Her revolting friends must have thought me some weirdo just standing there, but I didn’t care.

‘Hey, Frans,’ she eventually said, awkwardly, hugging me with obvious reluctance. We exchanged pleasantries, and I had the misfortune of meeting the ghouls she’d been standing with. *What the fuck did I do?! Is she in love with me or something? Maybe it’s completely unrelated to me. Or, is it that she’s never seen me this wasted before and is disgusted? What if it’s that she wants Brentwyn but she’s afraid I’m too much of a hot piece of man-meat that’s drawing his gender-lenient attention away from her wild-west ass.*

*Yeah, that’s it. She’s jealous of me.* I decided that I’d confront her on this preposterous reason to be angry with me. I waited a few minutes, and then, when she walked away from the group, I went after her.

‘Sam!’ she turned and looked at me with the same dismal eyes, ‘Where are you going?’ I asked nastily.

‘I should have listened to you...’ she was near tears.

‘Hey?’

‘You told me to give him a chance, but I cared about *their* opinion.’

‘What the hell are you talking about?’

‘I have to go, Frans. I hope you have a lovely evening,’ and she looked at me with her usual sweet smile, got her bag and left without announcing it. I tried to fathom the words she had said, but her trap may as well have been contorting into hieroglyphics, for I understood it to no degree. *Goddamn people – there’s no point in trying to comprehend them.*

I snooped around this unfamiliar house until I saw the drinks cabinet. The fancy gin inside caught my eye; I took it and topped up my hip flask. I took a taste of my new mixture and grimaced. I chuckled at my stupidity and stashed this triple-mix in my pocket. I then heard my most recently abandoned group discussing Ferbie’s new drug of choice: ‘Poor dude... I wish he could be here with us tonight, but

he needs time to get adjusted to his new medication, and parties are not the place for that,' said Brentwyn.

'Will he get used to them? It seems like they're almost making him worse...' said Cynthia.

Paul replied: 'As far as I know your body just needs to adapt to the weird new chemical. He says he feels a bit better emotionally, just tired and sometimes he feels sick.' The others just hummed awkwardly. I took another sip of the *ruwhisin* in my flask to nurture my fuming desire to confront them.

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'I think his bane is deserved – I think it's punishment,' I announced as I came into their lair. They all silently stared at me. 'Racist dick,' I elaborated.

'Racist?' asked Brentwyn

'Yes, you Paul and the mopey absentee are all racists!' I turned to Leigh, who had been sitting on the couch like a gagged church mouse: 'Our three name swappers are partial to racist jokes. You should probably leave them to find better friends.' I turned to Paul and Brentwyn, 'You want to go ahead and tell Leigh here that joke you guys told me at the commune party? The one you guys found so funny.'

'We did,' said Paul, and turning to his African friend, 'that one with the burning building, and the retard, remember?'

'Oh ja!..' Leigh said with a small smile.

Brentwyn said: 'She liked it, because it's just a joke. And I mean, I feel that laughing and making fun of such things is how we take their power away...'

*Huh!?* I looked at Leigh, astonished that she'd heard it and not reacted like I had – even appreciated it, apparently. 'S-so you all just go around spreading hate amongst yourselves and others? You were all so mean to Lily, and... and mentally handicapped people... you're all fuckin' phonies!'

Brentwyn, sounding a little touched, said: 'You know, we know about your little lie about Lily.' His voice had a flavour of malice I'd not heard before.

'Brentwyn, stop,' said Cynthia.

He ignored her: 'Lily told us that you never had sex with her.'

I looked at him with the most bored expression I could. His tone of scorn took a change when he saw I wouldn't be affected by this reveal: 'S-So, so don't you call *us* phonies...'

'You don't have the gift of hate like I do, Brentflakes. Don't bother trying it.'

'I don't hate you, or anyone, Franbo. It's Lily-lie that's been making you act this way, isn't it? Ever since that night you've been this way. It's okay, dude, none of us mind!' and he looked at me – eyes oozing with expired compassion.

I snorted. ‘There’s absolutely nothing wrong with me now that I’ve eviscerated you awful people from my life – I feel better than ever tonight, and I’m off to enjoy it! Fuck y’all!’ I left their silenced asses and made my way through the house. I saw the *Poké*-girl going to the front door with her sea-bandit buddy.

‘Hey, it’s the “turd-sack”!’ she said when she saw me.

‘Hello, Ashelina!’

She laughed. ‘We’re going to get ice at the petrol station. Coming with?’

‘Why the hell not! Need cigarettes anyway.’ The spring night was getting ever colder, I noticed as we made our way outside. I also noticed that the *Pokémon*-girl had noticed as well, or rather, her nipples had noticed – they were pointing out their exposure through the tight T-shirt. I hadn’t had many naughty thoughts since Lily happened, but I was now blatantly staring at her little *Poké* breasts, imagining what she’d look like if entirely freed from the Ash-costume. *My anger has knocked that mechanism back in order! Good!*

I told the two girls that I needed to retrieve my wallet from the car. ‘Is this green car yours?’ asked the pirate girl as I opened it.

‘Yes, it is,’ I lied.

‘Does it have a name?’ inquired the child girl.

‘Ja, it’s called... *Metapod!*’

‘Ahh! No way!’ and she trembled with joy; I felt like I was indulging one of my younger cousins. The filling station was just a few hundred metres away. I chatted with these acceptable monsters as if I’d not just proclaimed my hatred to my previously closest friends.

I got the strongest cigarettes they had and immediately smoked one as I exited the station shop, ignoring the dozen signs imploring me not to. Lady Ketchum tore open one of the ice bags as we were walking back and pointing to me said: ‘Look, it’s a *Koffing!*’ and threw an icy pretend-*Poké* ball at that made a sloppy ricochet off my hoody and shattered on the asphalt.

‘What? Why didn’t it catch you!? *Koffings* suck!’

‘I’m not a *Koffing.*’

‘What are you then? A *Weezing?*’

‘...I’m *Ditto.*’

‘Ha-ha!’ she laughed loudly.

‘I’ve no idea what you two are talking about,’ announced our brigand associate.

*She’s not bad looking, this anime fan,* I thought as we were making our way back, now wanting to find out how accurate my nude fantasising of her had been. We soon got to the front gate again; before Miss Ash went inside, I ducked into some shrubberies and yelled: ‘Wait! There’s a *Kakuna* in this bush – come catch it!’

‘No way! Get ready to get caught, you yellow turd!’ She dropped the ice and came running to the shrubs I was crouched in. She crawled next to me like a dork, smiling.

‘Where is it!?’

‘I lied, only I’m in here. I just wanted to get you alone.’

‘Why?’ she asked innocently.

‘To make-out. Duh!’

She backed away, her girlish eyes wide with surprise; ‘I’m sorry... I... umm...’

The powerful anger I had fondly been maintaining turned into bitterness. *I can’t get a fucking break! You really are still a kid, aren’t you?* ‘Well, alright then,’ I said shaking my head, and giving a solitary laugh at the woeful turn the mood had taken. I left the bush and stared out in front of me at the empty street, then obscured this view with my unhealthy exhalation.

Suddenly, the pretend-animal trafficker was next to me. I ignored her for a second, then she pulled me from my scene of nonchalance and kissed my cheek – a lightning-fast and cloud-gentle kiss. Then she proceeded to run down the street, giggling loudly. I watched her blue, white and red pettiness become smaller as she did so for a few seconds, paralysed by surprise and information-processing. Then I shouted ‘HEY!’ and began chasing after her with a smirk. Her littleness did her little good in her escape attempt, and me with my long-distance runner build soon caught up to her, albeit exhausted.

‘Wait!’ I said as I got next to her.

She stopped, turned around and, breathing heavily, said: ‘I’m sorry, I don’t really kiss, or date, but you’re pretty cool, and looked so cute and pathetic after I turned you down so I just decided I’d peck you quickly!’

‘I looked pathetic?’ I asked pathetically.

‘No! I mean, don’t take it badly, it’s cute!’

*How the fuck can I be pathetic and cute at the same time? Why do people make NO sense?! Why are they so damn stupid!?*

‘That running was fun! Let’s do it again!’ she said, and bolted off once more. With no cheek kiss to propel me and a cry of anguish from my lungs from their abuse, I didn’t pursue her this time. She didn’t look back and disappeared from sight with a turn down a street. I turned around and walked the opposite direction. I felt that same wretched inadequacy I’d felt with Niksy whenever I failed to ask her out. In my misery, I turned to my hip flask; the warm *ginumsky* therein was pretty damn bad, but its offensiveness didn’t stop me. *She seems like she digs me, then she denies me, then she kisses me, then she runs away – how can anything be so unpredictable!? Look how predictable I am: I drink liquid, a few minutes later I need to piss it back out! Simple!*

I stumbled to a garden that decorated someone’s front lawn and relieved myself of the night’s lubrication leftovers therein. About halfway through this exceptionally lengthy excretion, a police car

appeared down the street. I casually observed it slowly draw closer, wondering whether it would take one of the three available turns between the two of us.

It turned down a down-turning into the first two, and then, a few metres before the last, it came to a dead stop. Then, myself and the yellow stream I was producing were illuminated by the cop switching on the car's high-beams. I unflinchingly stared back in defiance. Its crown lit up with lively blue, as if enraged by jealousy at the sight of my golden crotch-ribbon. I stiffed my aedeagus back into its confines and bolted from the scene of my crime.

I took a right turn to break line of sight, then added another as soon as possible to throw them off my trail. I sprinted to the house of the party and scaled the wall, scraping my hands on its coarse brick, and had an intimate meeting with a large bush on the other side. I crashed through this thick green web thanks to my momentum, destroying plant-matter as I did and dirtying my back-up skater clothes too. I'd also felt my cell phone fall out into the thicket at one of the chaotic moments. A stoned, Rastafarian-dressed guy was watching me from the house – his face radiating confusion – must've wondered whether this was real or not.

'What?' I said unapologetically. I ignored him and noticed the sharp pain in my nicotine absorbing organ. I moodily looked at the pitch-black interior of the shrub I'd just had a tussle with, in hopes of finding my phone. *No use, I need a torch.* I marched into the house, ignoring the looks I got from strangers for my markedly dilapidated appearance. I went into the garage and switched on the light. After making a mess of a few of the drawers, I finally found a small torch, still sealed in its tough plastic packaging. I needed a tool to open the damn thing, but it felt like too much effort to go find scissors or a knife, so I channelled my madness-powers onto the thing and began by bending the plastic furiously, to little avail. Then I tried biting it, but that was no use either. In my white-hot rage I resorted to smashing it against the wall a few times. Then I threw it on the ground and stomped on it, and there, all neatly contained in the still unopened, Fort Knox-plastic, was a thoroughly shattered little torch.

'Fuck!' I blared. I felt a bit bad at what I'd done – this weakness annoyed me. *Myself and these antagonistic emotions needed to leave,* I decided. The way to the front door was too decorated with revolting monsters, so back I went to the bush that had given me a twig-tickling and hopped over the wall once more. This time, the wall itself attacked me on my descent: it scraped my forearm, drawing little droplets of blood that I smeared onto the hoodie.

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The heavy metal that continued as I turned on the ignition bored me now. Besides, I was extremely annoyed by the plastic that I failed at penetrating, so I replaced the music with jazz. Like the classical I'd employed earlier, I found this genre comical at first, but I allowed the cool, moody melodies

to seep into my being, and I warped its influence to my benefit. I ignored the solemnness and focused on the ice-cool aspects of the music – its confidence. I pretended I was a jazz-age gentleman on his way to some joint to show off his cool.

*Where to, Frans? Where will this greatness be exhibited?*

*Hatfield Square will be pumping.*

*Need a change of costume first though.*

*To the commune then! Oh shit, my phone is still in those bushes...*

*Fuck it – don't need it.*

A police car stopped behind mine at a traffic light. *Maybe it's the very one I pissed off with my public pissing.* I felt exhilarated that I had escaped the law after such an insult, so I opened the Golf's window and sent out a 'Whooo!' as I tightened my grip on the circular, pleather reins of this green steed, rejoicing in my freedom and my emancipation from my patheticness. I also felt like I'd had a weight lifted now that I'd made my feelings towards that group of dirty hippies clear.

The jazz no longer suited the mood inside my green stallion; I pulled over into a bus stop and had a look at the racist's playlists once more. One named **Rap** was chosen, since I thought it would suit my new arrogance. I liked the loud, bombasticness of it, but not the idiots telling me how great and wealthy they were – there was only room enough for one such ego in my car! *Does me hating their music mean I hate them too? I suppose it must mean that. But it's okay, because I hate everything – total equality. And that is the antitheses of racism, no?*

Laughing, I pulled the plug on the iPod and instead entertained my ears with the sound of wind violently rushing in through all four open windows.

Close to the commune, I saw more vile monsters roaming the streets; I was tempted to drive over them – *But that would dent my car.* With a bloodless car (well, except some of my own on the driver's seat) I parked in the commune. There was still no one in the house. I snacked on one of Ferbie's breakfast bars and washed this down with the caramel vodka that Cynthia kept in the freezer – she was a connoisseur of cheap, flavoured spirits and insisted they be as cold as possible. Her slut-liquor was much better than the *whisrugin* I currently had in my flask; I had the insane idea to add some of the vodka to try improve the taste thereof. Of course, without hesitation, and with a grin, I poured away. Then I poured the experiment into my mouth: it hadn't worked at all. *Now it's truly vile... But it's so good too.* Back it went into my pocket.

As I walked to my room, I considered what I was going to wear. *It'll have to be REALLY jock-like,* I decided while taking off the dirtied skater crap. I owned only one wife-beater and I'd only worn it twice due to its life-threatening levels of jockness, but that meant it was perfect for tonight. I put on a pair of blue jeans to accompany this, and fancy leather loafers too. I laughed at myself in the mirror, and then became astounded that this is what I wore on a normal night out a few months prior. *This muscle-*

*accentuating cloth isn't going to combat the cold very well*, I realised. I'd forsaken the jock attire before winter came, so had no warm items in that style. I looked at my clothing-peppered floor for ideas. My old green-camouflage windbreaker that used to be my favourite to wear at the *plaas* caught my eye. At first, I ignored it and continued scanning, but each time I crossed it, it grabbed my attention again. A twisted part of me wanted to put it on, just to see what would happen – how I would feel.

I picked it up, but hesitated to put it on. This cautiousness enraged me and my new angry mind. *I'm NOT trapped anymore! I'm not one of them anymore, and I'm not scared to put on their stupid clothes!*

*What will people think?*

*FUCK PEOPLE!*

*Yes. Besides, tonight there is supposed to be no link between dress and identity anyway.*

I put on the long-abandoned jacket, and immediately there he was again: Frans of the farm – Francois Johannes Terblanche Knollenhoven – but with disgustingly messy hair. I began laughing at this poor sap in the mirror. 'You're dead, bro! Not that you were ever alive. That corpse has been overtaken by a glorious madman!' I carried on laughing as I went to find my John Deere cap to complete the costume.

'*Ag, lekker, man!*' I said once I'd put it on and looked at the reflection. Now not even my messy mane was there to hint at the beast that hid within this outward lie. The snack and thinking had respectively soaked and burnt away too much of my anti-weakness medication, so I went to Bernard's room and administered some of his "real" 100% blue agave tequila. *Doesn't taste any different to me.* The drink must have been several bolus doses.

As I stumbled out of the commune and into the streets – still using Paul's set of keys to do so – I was not entirely convinced that the earth was in fact below my feet anymore: a concept so obvious and simple, infants could grasp it! *Alcohol isn't bad, I just need to direct the ethanol-influence!* I tried to regain composure: I stood with eyes closed in the street and revelled in the vicious momentum of my imagination, spinning like a whirlpool. But then, my body decided that this ride was too much, and the fuel soon came out in a neat ejection to splatter the asphalt I'd been gracing with my presence. I felt much better after this, and saw no reason not to continue my pedestrian-journey to the Square.

I was a little too zealous to resume, and soon I felt nausea's weight in my torso once more; I had no choice but to flop on someone's front lawn. The dull ache in my abdomen brought negative thoughts: I thought of Samantha's strange behaviour, and the Ash-chick's denial, and what the hippies were saying about me, and I wondered where Ferbie was.

And then I thought about Bloomstein. *Did he also find this power of hatred? I'd bet he had become fucking livid at life too. Did it also reach a singularity which transformed him? Did Emily never reach hers, and she just offed herself? Probably. Thank goodness I've found my abilities of ire!*

While the others came and went in my queasy dreaming, Emily and Bloomstein stayed. There were all sorts of images of them flashing in front of my mind's eye – some real memories, some fabricated – but then the flashes halted on a particular scene: a thin Emily and the new Bloomstein were dancing together, arm in arm, chanting atonally: *“We are the puppets: the strings are words we listened to, and all of mankind pulls them with razor sharp index fingers.”*

*“She is the victim.”*

*“He is the victor.”*

*“She was broken.”*

*“He was built.”*

*“Who are you? What are you? What should we even call you?!”*

They both began laughing and Bloomstein started bending Emily over and having his way with her animalistically, and she sadly submitted with tears falling down her skullesque face, still laughing, but contorted in misery.

Mercy in the form of another *kots* put an end to this disturbing vision. The anger at envisioning Bloomstein made me feel like a champion again, so I set off once more, this time going just a bit slower and not allowing my mind to drift to such unnecessary subjects that didn't involve my amazingness.

When I was nearing the Square, I was sure the puking episode had subsided, so I decided I needed to start replacing what I'd lost in that leak of propellant. Besides, there was the bitter aftertaste of my regurgitation to address. The new rum-whisky-gin-vodka was utter filth, but I kept the homemade mouthwash down.

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As expected, the Square was an unholy wasteland, crawling with monsters. I was forced to rub shoulders with spooks, zombies and wolf-men who no longer scared me – only disgusted me. *Look at you all, here at a public gathering. But none of you have the slightest desire to meet me, or any of your fellow unfamiliar monsters for that matter. You heartless pricks simply need me and the rest to be here to contribute to your “vibe”. You need to feed off this vitality to sustain your joy, but you do nothing to nurture it. God, I hate people!*

I wanted a beer, but I had no cash, and my bank account was running perilously low. I resorted to snatching unattended drinks on the tables I went by. The first foraging yielded a nice quarter beer, then I snagged a gulp of some slut-juice, and finally I came across a ripe fifth of a cup of brandy and coke. Whilst draining this I wandered to the very centre of the fiendish field. *All these fucking fakers in their costumes – concealing and hiding. They wait until you're close to them before their veil comes off to show what they really are. You know what?*



*What?*

*They're not monsters – there's no such thing. They're something much worse and real: humans.*

*Yes!*

My drunken attempt at deeply philosophical inner rant came to a halt with the sight of Charlie at one of the bars, in what was a lazy excuse for a rugby player costume – he had a Blue Bulls jersey on, sports shorts and togs. He was a pitiful sight: the muscles he'd gained had reduced to almost how he was before, and he also had bad acne almost everywhere – even on his shrunken biceps. And had a gloomy look on his face. *Serves you right, juice head!*

Unsurprisingly, his superior Joe and the other subordinates were with him. Joe had an afro wig, but a real moustache, and a reflective-silver disco-shirt. He was at the bar being loud; I heard his yapping from at least 20 metres away. He tapped a girl in the queue on her shoulder – a slutty schoolgirl. He offered to buy her a shot or something. She wasn't too interested in him by the look on her face, but didn't turn down the free alcohol.

*Come on you fat poes, do it...*

He must have sensed me, because within the next five minutes he started worming his way close to her and eventually tried to kiss her. She turned away, and his filthy face orifice went “*Come on*” and tried again, and she walked away disgustedly. He smirked and walked out the bar towards the Square. *Excellent! This time, I won't stand idly by: I will use my indignation gift*, I thought with bloodlust. He was smoking outside. When in earshot I bellowed to him: ‘Joe Gordow!’ He looked at me waving to him. ‘Come here, buddy!’

‘Treeman, you skinny poes!’ he said smirking, ‘Where in the world have you been?!’ I didn't answer. I rather savoured the immaculate, squishy mug I was about to wreak havoc upon. He looked at me awkwardly for a few seconds, then asked: ‘You still studying or what?’ I still didn't answer. He broke eye contact – very uncomfortable. I didn't though.

‘Bet you think you're tough shit, hey?’ I said eventually.

‘What?’

‘Ja, you do. You think you can get away with intimidating people to your will, and you think you can treat women however you want.’

‘Hey?’ he said, obviously perplexed at the gallantry of this slightly inflated pipsqueak he'd disciplined a few months prior. I smiled warmly at his confusion, myself for once knowing exactly what was about to happen. I replaced my smile with the face of ferocious lunacy in one split second and in the one following, my right fist connected solidly and magnificently with his cushiony belly, winding him like a bagpipe, and bending him over like a good whore. Next my left had a go: paid his cheek a momentous visit. My wrath was not mere power, but tactical brilliance as well: I knew he'd regain

capability with a few breaths, so I took advantage to subdue him while I could. I blitzed behind him, wrapped my arm around his fleshy neck and locked him in this position.

From this desperately wriggling and clawing podium I continued my speech: 'You think you're tough shit, but you're WRONG!' I paused to humour a struggle from him: he succeeded in gently slapping my crown and stepping on my toes like a bad dancer, then I resumed: 'You're not tough shit, you're just a porkie! Oink for me, porky! OINK! OINK IF YOU WANT TO BREATHE!'

My voice sounded demonic, but it still couldn't make him oink. I allowed my attention to behold the monsters that had, of course, gathered for their entertainment, in a drool-soaking circle. I abhorred being their showman, so I decided my and their fun was over; I tightened the arm around his windpipe to a lethal level, and the free arm I plunged once again into his potbelly. There was a revolting gargle as the air evacuated the pig's gut. I let him fall to the floor and gave his face another good whack. Moments after I did a stranger pulled me away. 'That's enough, bra!'

I was done anyway, but this forcing me off made me insane with desire to do more, so I sent a spit to Joe's semi-corpse, on which I saw some red. My repugnatorial secretion missed, unfortunately. Whoever was pulling me shoved his way through the disk of disgusting beasts. They all turned their beady eyes as if magnetically attracted to me. I wriggled free from my inhibitor and heard my demonic voice for the second time: 'WHAT!? HUH!? WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU MONSTERS LOOKING AT!?' I asked them with outstretched arms. They who had been amused were now shocked at the deep tremors this bizarre being was producing.

'None of you know what that fat cunt is like!' I proclaimed. I turned and I walked away from the epicentre of my eruption, looking at nothing but the blurry mess my eyes were telling me was in front of me.

Behind me I heard a ghoul's voice saying: 'Typical fucking Boer: just wants to *bliksem* everything.' I rubbed my eyes to alleviate their blurriness and saw that I was headed to The Drop Off, and kept it this way. *He thinks I'm a Boer. He's wrong; I'm a vigilante. They're so quick to assume. Guess even on a night of disguise one's appearance is still substrate for judgement. I'm not taking this costume off, though. Bring their assumptions. I don't care.*

My vicious workout left me with a parched throat, so I took a glug of the *caragirumskeyvod* – my adrenaline-buzzed nerves were incapable of tasting it. I stuffed the moonshine into the lining at the front of my pants, and as I did so I saw that my courageous punishment enforcement upon Joe had resulted in a dull silver thread of his shirt twirled on my camo jacket. I plucked at this contaminant, but it was adhering stubbornly, so I rubbed it roughly until it stuck to my hand, then vigorously shook it off.

I went up the famously hazardous stairs with a burst of speed and joined the back of a short queue of monsters. While forced to stagnate in their stream, I watched the struggle of those descending. *Poor*

*little babies can't handle their adult juice yet.* The bouncer was asking some of the more youthful looking individuals for IDs. I felt for my wallet and realised it was missing. *Must've fallen out in my scuffle.*

'Thanks, Tyson!' said the slutty bear, three places in front of me, to the bouncer.

*Last time I came here they checked me. Do I still look so young?*

*No matter. I'll deceive him.*

'How's it going, Tyson!?' I said as I lifted my hand in anticipation of a greeting clap. He reciprocated it. 'Why aren't you in a costume?' I asked.

I could tell that he was attempting to remember a name to put to this mug that clearly knew him. He obviously failed and said: 'Ah, man, you know, my tutu is in the wash.'

'Ha-ha!' I laughed loudly. 'Ag, no matter, you're always wearing the costume of a legend!' I said as I was walking in. He just chuckled. *See? People are so stupid.* I walked into this cavern of doof-doof music, teeming with gross people: more of the usual, but plenty of slutty versions of things, like a slutty werewolf with fuzzy boobs. I started looking for more abandoned but unexhausted drinks to adopt – *Poor, lonely things.* While working my way through the humid horde to a forsaken third of a beer, I spied JP and his minions getting drinks at the bar. I rescued the deserted beverage, downed it, and made my way over to them. Carl, proving his being absolute devoid of any intellect, was clad in a ridiculous Christmas jumper his grandmother must have knitted, and had a red Christmas hat on too. Darren was some ancient Greek or Roman soldier, and Hope and Deon were dressed as a pair of soccer fanatics. Jan was not with them. JP, the person of interest, was also in an excuse of a costume; my mirth blossomed when I saw that the bastard had on a dark green tracksuit that I knew was a relic from his beloved schooldays, but he'd written **THE GREEN POWER RANGER** on the back.

Now virtually next to them, I simply stared at him, and soon he sensed my presence and stared back. We were locked like this for a good few seconds. I was calm and cool, he was agitated. 'And what the fuck do you think you're looking at? *Deserter?*' he eventually blurted.

I smiled. 'Oh, it speaks!' I laughed. 'That's a cute little costume you put together, you childish waste of flesh. Can my three-year-old nephew borrow it? He loves Power Rangers.'

'Frans!' he said, reddening in the face like a baboon's bottom, 'I'm going to fuck you up!'

'Please, do try!' and I beckoned him closer. He obliged, knocking down several defenceless drinks on his way in the process. I blocked his punch with my arms, reducing it to a mediocre thud (*When did I learn how to do that?*), and in his uncalculated charge he lost his footing, opening him and his reckless fury for me to knee his nose, possibly breaking it. His now even redder face was promptly wrenched away by two bouncers.

'Fighting again!?! Didn't we tell you that you were banned from this establishment, Mr Egar?' They escorted him and his cherry nose out, and appropriately, Christmas-Carl followed JP the red-nosed

retard. Meanwhile the nearest bartender had come over to me and asked if I was fine, and even offered me a free drink: ‘You like brandy, right?’

‘Brandy’s good, thanks!’

‘Sorry, that guy wants to fight everyone.’

*This is fantastic! The world rewards the expressions of my wrath!* I sipped my sweet nectar prize and gazed at my surroundings; the rest of JP’s mongrels stared at me with shock from a short distance. I zapped them as they left – Darren and Deon shaking their heads.

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I made quick work of my consolation gift, and was about to leave this noisy, humid grotto when I noticed Inze Kuhr – I’d not seen her since she’d been dumped. She was with a group of people I didn’t know, one of whom I deduced was her new boyfriend. *Already? I bet I’d still be able to smell Brentwyn’s eau de hypocrisy on you.* The new sap was a much older, chubby dude with a sombrero and a serape. Inze was dressed in a typical skank club-girl outfit that I’d never saw her wear while she was with Brentwyn. To make this appropriate for the night she’d simply drawn cartoon scars on around her neck and over her eye.

‘Hey, Inze!’ I said when I got close to her.

‘Oh, hey, Franbo,’ she said, unlike her old self, and tried to force a smile through the spasm of indignation she was plainly experiencing at the sight of me. *Oh, another person not keen on seeing me?* I asked her trivial questions and her answers were short, and she didn’t ask me any in return. *Is it because I’m associated with her ex? Does she think I convinced him to dump her? Does she think I’ve tagged myself into a turn in Brentwyn’s bed? Or is this the way she is to everyone now that that bastard broke her heart? Maybe it’s because she waited for a call from me to take Brentwyn’s place when she got dumped and I never did.*

*That must be it. Well, I suppose I must make it clear to her that I’m not interested in her sullied body. But how?*

*I’ll snag one of her new friends.*

*Sounds like a plan!*

‘Who are your friends?’ and I turned to them. ‘Hi, I’m Johannes!’ I told the group; all were nonchalant at making my acquaintance, and simply waved – *Probably the Boer outfit.* I selected one of the females to hunt: a girl dressed in black with a rainbow-spectrum of painted dots in a vertical line, beginning with a purple at her hairline, and ending, rather shockingly, with red at her crotch region – this laser pointer pointed at her pussy was probably what persuaded me to pursue her. I asked her name

but didn't bother to actually hear it. I gave her an acquaintance-making hug without warning. She was evidently relatively fine with this and hugged me back.

'What are you dressed as?' she asked – I was glad to make the observation that she was not quite sober.

'Can't you tell? Guess!'

'You're green so, uh... a leprechaun?'

'Ha-ha! Yes, dear, I'm a leprechaun,' I said sarcastically. I adopted an excessively Irish accent: 'Oh, I say, this is a funny pub here I did stumble me' self into, oh boyo! What are you supposed to be then, lass? A traffic light from the future?'

'Ha-ha! No these are the colours of the Chakras. It was Inze's idea! You know, because she's into yoga and that stuff. She wanted to do this herself, but Fred changed her mind.'

'Hey? What's a "chakra"? Can you drink it? And what's "yoga"? Is that the stuff I put into me' muesli in the mornin'? Oh, no wait, that'd be Guinness.'

'I don't understand you, Leprechaun man!' she slurred as I was laughing at my own comedic rambling, 'Or what are you *really* supposed to be?'

I dropped the accent and said earnestly: 'Isn't it obvious?! I'm a *Boer*! A horribly racist, chauvinistic, abusive bigot!'

'Jeez!' she said, clearly having become lost somewhere in that labyrinth of adjectives. The group as a whole then went to the dance floor, where the *doof-doofs* were loudest. I invited myself to join, ensuring my being next to the chakra girl. They shook about like apes on a washing machine, and I kept relatively immobile. I kept saying things to her ear, and she responded minimally, but wouldn't initiate conversation herself.

*Just go for it. You know the way.*

*But she must at least show some interest, right?*

*Do you think Bloomstein hesitated when he claimed Niksy for himself? Do you think he thought twice about defiling that holy artefact?* I saw Niksy in a vision: she was drunk and clawing like a begging feline at some inhumanly large man's back. I felt ill at her lust directed at some being so much greater than I. I didn't need to endure the nauseating image to see the great being reveal itself to be Bloomstein, so I opened my eyes and ended it.

*She never clawed at your back, because you never gave her a taste – never made her want it.*

*Yeah! Fuck this girl's interest – let's give her a taste!* I manoeuvred myself to be in front of the rainbow hussy and looked her in the eyes. She looked at me awkwardly. I went in for the kill at a speed that was too great for her to make any escape. I guess I was decticious. I half-expected my assault to be met with some defence or escape, but instead this girl kissed me back *passionately*. She clawed at my back, then tugged at my shirt collar, then caressed my hair underneath my cap; her tongue eager and

energetic. This felt like something entirely new; the promise was exhilarating! I wanted to carry on our incredible embrace, but even more I wanted to look at her – to see her – so I terminated my tongue’s myiasis and expectantly, I opened my eyes.

I was not met with what I wished to find: the face she had assumed was astonishing – it gave me gooseflesh. It was a letter of absolute hate: a communication of disgust, and yet somehow, at the same time it was an invite for me to dive right back into her gob. If I did, I knew I’d again be met with the same desiring hands. Hell, I could have probably taken her home!

I left – my mind so full of incomprehensible noise that it was effectively blank. I felt the dreaded warning in my temple that these thoughts needed to vent themselves. The perilous stairs were brimming with beasts – their talons slowly sliding on the railings. I frantically looked around and saw the fire escape. I opened the window without a care for who was looking and ascended it in hopes of finding peace and tranquillity, away from the chaos around and within me.

Once alone up there, I breathed in cool city smog and calmed down a bit, but that infernal face of the girl I’d forced my kiss upon wouldn’t leave my mind. *I understand that face*, I thought, lying on my back. *I’ve become fluent in hate, and that was hate. That look she gave me was the same I gave to JP and Christoff and Brentwyn. It was unreserved hatred.*

*I don’t understand! How could she kiss me so and hate me at the same time?! Did I not do it right? How would Bloomstein have done it differently? How would he have made her not hate him? Am I truly revolting then? Why did she let me?*

*Oh fuck me... I just did what I punished Joe for minutes prior...*

*NO!* came a strange impulse to halt these thoughts. *Calm yourself down. You still need to learn to control your new abilities, that is all.* This alternative thinking calmed me down for a few seconds, but then I was back at it: *No, no, she didn’t like me at all, and I just forced myself. I’m a monster too! Hideous wasp, bot fly, assassin bug! They all hate me – that girl, the jocks, Christoff, Brentwyn, Inze. I wanted their hate, and now they’ve given it to me...*

I didn’t want to cry, but I couldn’t help it. I covered my eyes with my hands like sponges, in the hope that ferocity and pressure would absorb my eyes’ shedding – I forced them to remain imprisoned in my skull – I pushed so hard that when I looked at the world again, with moist, crimson puffs for eyes, I saw fuzzy flashes.

*I finally get it*, I thought as the haze was subsiding. *As a child I wondered what depression was like, how it could work. Now I feel it - this joyless sink inside you that funnels all joy. A lifetime of this? I understand Emily. Maybe I also need those pills...*

*There he is again*, went the alternative voice once more, so steady and assured. *Mr Pathetic, revelling in his own misery. You enjoy it, don’t you? Sulking and accepting your lot. And why not? It’s so easy to just give in. Fighting against it is for those bound for greatness, not the pathetic. Guess that new*

*thing we saw tonight – whatever his name was – is already burnt out and dead. It's a shame – he had what it took.*

Without any more thought, I ceased my lounging on the roof and stood up, breathing in and out slowly, controlling my mind. I made my way to the edge and observed the monster meadow below. *I am above you all. I am superior in every way. I even exceed that metamorphic devil. Maybe not yet, maybe it's still mostly potential energy, but it will soon become kinetic. I made a mistake just now – I was too eager, too quick and too sensitive. I need to practise. This is still just the first night of my new, higher state of hatred.*

*I was sad because was being pathetic again. I don't need to be pathetic anymore. I don't want to be. This weakness keeps squirming its way back in. No more. I must hold on to that which gives me strength.*

As my wimp-relapse was slowly being cured, I actually saw the architect of my new “state” from my perch – I saw new Bloomstein. He was in the centre of the Square, dressed in a smart suit with a red tie – *He's Agent 47. Still a geek.* And of course, Niksy the desecrated was at his side, clutching his hand. She was yet another zombie, but her outfit must have been the most expensive I'd seen, complete with very realistic gashes – no doubt a fruit from Bloomstein's fat new wallet. I watched them for a few minutes, mingling with a large group of friends. Then they left the Square, arm in arm.

*Enjoy it, Bloomstein, and enjoy her. I'm not angry at you anymore: you're the one who has shown me the way – that it is possible. Soon I will be overtaking you though. Soon I will conquer one far greater than that dead girl I idolised.*

Suddenly, I heard a detonation coming from across the Square: it was like the voice of my new god, bidding me to come closer – promising a reward for my faith. They were brutal chords – a harmony of hatred – that became a chant, loudening until it stopped. *No, please, I need more!* I made my way down the fire-escape steps and the deity responded with approval – deep rumbles of applause, followed by crashes of devastating oceans shouting their tidal support. Then as I jumped the last section of the stairs, and made my way over the grounds of poor little deformed monstrosities, the applause became a fast, steady beat, and was joined by those fierce chords, and then the god's frightening voice – a song to welcome me to its sermon.

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The trail of sound stopped while I was somewhere in the Square. *No matter: such a racket could only be coming from Naglesse.* I looked at the tragic monsters as I passed them by with new eyes: no longer loathing, just pity at their weakness, knowing they were cursed to mediocrity. I was warm now from my brisk pilgrimage, so I shed my windbreaker and simply tossed it on the grimy floor. I was aware



that this partial moulting revealed my wife-beater, and so transformed my appearance to be that of a jock; to embrace this – the final of my abandoned skins – I discarded the cap as well, and then, to discipline my hat-hair, I got a cup of water from the quietest bar I could find and went outside the Square perimeter to use the reflective properties of someone’s car window. I wetted and sleeked back my frantic locks with my hands: *There we are! Now I look like the sworn enemy of the Naglesse frequenters.*

I entered the familiar old dump: the costumes here were particularly dark, with dominatrices and gimps, goat-headed individuals and even a dead Whitney Houston with a cocaine-decorated nose. I went to the area where tables were usually were and found them gone, and in their place an audience in front of the stage – an empty stage.

‘Where the fuck is the band I just heard?’ I asked no one.

‘That was just the sound check, they’ll be up soon,’ said a nearby skeleton-costumed girl, who was trying to seem cool, but I heard the excitement in her voice.

‘Sweet!’ I said, and began preparing for the service by taking communion from my hip flask.

‘Oh! Can I have some please?’ asked Miss Bones.

*Thou shalt be charitable to thy inferiors*, I thought. ‘Sure,’ I said offering her my wrath-wine, ‘it’s pretty awful, though.’

She coughed and pulled a face as my creation flowed into her gut. ‘Ugh, what is this?!’

‘It’s alcohol, what does it matter?’

She shrugged in agreement. ‘Hey, Susan! Come try this revolting drink.’

Susan, a stout grim reaper, came and did. She looked like she might spit out my beloved liquid. I lit a smoke as I watched her, then said: ‘Okay, I’m thirsty please,’ holding out a palm ready to receive what belonged to me.

But the insolent girl said: ‘No wait!’ took a grimaceless sip and said: ‘Jaco, come try this dude’s yummy drink!’

*Thou shalt not be taken advantage of.*

She was asking me: ‘What’s your name?’ just before I took hold of *my* possession, and harshly wrenched it out of her grasp, and without looking at her made my way into the crowd that was forming in anticipation for the band.

‘Not here, there’s this tall dude in the way,’ I heard a drunk individual say at my rear when I’d assumed place in front of the altar. *Are they referring to me?*

‘Which tall dude?’ asked another voice.

‘That jock *poes*.’

*Ah yes, it is me.*

*Thou shalt smite those who insult thee.*



I looked around and saw the one who had condemned me to the jock person-genre, glugging beer and repositioning. I noted that he was shirtless and wearing a cape. *This weak acolyte's blood will be my offering.*

The mayhem ministers, named *Fokoffamiliemotor*, came on minutes later, all dressed as dilapidated drag queens for the evening. The singer counted to four as if these were the names of his children that he was about to severely discipline, and then the lecture began. I listened earnestly with eyes closed, reflecting on my new creed of dominance. As their name heralded, they sang in Afrikaans, though their vocals were beautifully warped by the flames of rage to barks and growls, so that one could only barely distinguish them as that language every now and again. The majority of the time all was glorious, incomprehensible roaring.

*His voice sounds like that demonic voice I produced earlier – he is my brethren.*

I immediately connected with this band that I'd never before heard of; a song in, and my enthusiasm was too great to be content with merely observing the tremendous ire art – I needed to partake. A fellow zealot who had particular vigour was jumping and head-banging like a good maniac. I took this fanatic by the shoulder and jumped with him. 'This fucker seems alive!' I said, and he grinned at me. 'How about we start the mosh?' I asked, and pushed him into the people next to him, his silly, blessed mug still beamed as those he smashed into pushed him back. I sidestepped this man missile so that he thudded into different people, whose rage also increased.

And the glorious chain reaction was thus initiated, for some were unsure who shoved them, and in their beautiful blind anger pushed anyone close at hand, and the pushed did the same until there was a cacophony of movement. For a few seconds, I merely admired, and was thankful for, this body bedlam I could become a part of. And then entered it.

The familiar, painless turbulence welcomed me for the second time into its energetic bosom. I remained in this magnificent disorder, embracing the fact that I knew not where I was or how to get out, not even trying. I accepted my fate and surrendered to the will of the dynamic momentum, and donated my own energy unto it with passionate exertions of my muscles.

All too soon, our preachers and guides paused their sermon, and the congregation left the sight of havoc. I was left standing alone on this sacred ground. Out of respect for it, I too left. As I was wetting my dry throat with the *kyuminamelv* in my hip flask, the proceedings resumed, and immediately, those whose resentment overrode their fear, made impetus art once more.

I was eager to join myself, but I spied a few agnostics at the edge of our simple ceremony who were half partaking: pushing my brave comrades but not allowing themselves to be pushed. There were about three of these half-believers: I circled to them like an appointed disciple and one by one shoved their flesh into the fray, before joining my own, and felt great pleasure at the embrace of pandemonium.

At one point a keen expression of wrath sent me out the chaos cluster; looking from the outside, I saw that my caped insulter was in the mosh. *You may participate in the fury-festivities, but I cannot allow your affront to go unpunished.* I entered, and with my honourable cause I was granted the power to reach him in the tumult and respond to his malice with a smack to the lip. I saw him exit from the blooming madness with bleeding lips. *Now we are even. My gratitude for the anger exchange.*

Despite my trancelike state, I was aware that the mosh pit was getting rougher and rougher, just like the previous one I'd been in, which I had deserted when it got too crazy.

*Thou shalt not fear anarchy!*

I was no longer a little amateur of hatred, as I was then: this time I revelled in this rampant rise, urging it to not cease with my vehement sign language, putting my power to the test, knowing that I could endure the battering waves of what I myself produced so purely. This escalation led to fewer and fewer moshers, until only a handful of us siblings of the truest indignation were celebrating through the devastating dance; we compensated for the weaklings' abandonment by giving all we had to this swirling showcase of our fearlessness. I was near rapturous.

*I will not allow any form of weakness! No more patheticness, not even compassion. I will not fear any other human – all inferior to me. I am a grand entity, who on this very first night of transcendence has already lost crippling fear, addressed the wrongs of previously close ones, exacted justice and revenge on those who wronged him, and even gave a bint a good smooch. I will not allow the petty feelings of others to break me down! I won't allow any hurdle to slow my exponential growth into splendour. I will remain strong. I am powerful. I am superior. I am a m–*

My body, and my epiphanic thoughts, had been brought to a paralysis by some strike. All I remember is going blank for a few seconds, and when I came to, I was on my arse, just outside of the mosh pit with some monsters putting their paws on me. I become aware of a pain somewhere around my head.

*Ah! Ow... that fucking hurts... eina...*

I determined that the location of the pain was just next to my right eye when some pressure was put there, spiking the sting. I was lifted up, and I opened my eyes to observe concerned monsters asking me questions like "Are you okay?" but I didn't answer – I was too confused.

'Still bleeding badly?'

The napkins someone was holding over my wound were lifted for a second. 'Ja.'

'Must have been a bottle's rim, hey?'

'Probably.'

'Christ, it missed his eyeball by a ball-hair!'

'LET'S GIVE IT UP FOR THAT FUCKING LEGEND OVER THERE!' went the vicious vicar on his pedestal.

*Oh! The music stopped too, I realised, and a "whoop" was generated by the surrounding crowd of ghouls. I made the sign of the horns in response with my left hand while the right was holding the soaking napkins to show them all that I wasn't fazed. The music resumed, but the mosh didn't – not that I could re-join anyway. If I could transcribe my messy thoughts into words, they would have gone something like: *My blood? I can still bleed!? I can still feel pain!? What are all these leaks my temple springs?! Is this the price of my new anger activities? Or are these acts of bravery and power too much strain on the physical? Is it unable to contain the greatness within?**

*Yes. That must be it. It needs time to harden. Soon my exterior will be tough, like old leather.*

I was handed a beer by a monster – an actual leprechaun – who told me I was "a beast". Drinking this frothy homage, I speculated the source and manner of the strike: *Could have been a bystander on the outer ring, and my momentum met his or her bottle. But how could a coward impair me so? No, it must have been a master of hate. Yes: someone still in the pit toward the end, who sensed the freshness of my realisation. Yes, must be. Only an equal or one greater than I could damage me. Was this master jealous of the velocity of my increase?*

*No. He or she must know that I need more time and practice, and decided to teach me a lesson: teach me of my residual frailty – show me that I am not yet fully transformed.*

*But I will get there. I am a magnificent being.*

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I didn't like it, but I knew I had to leave – calm myself down – and this chapel of noise was not the place for that. I got a loaf of fresh serviettes from the bar and went out into the street. I saw Impalas across it and decided this would do as a fine location for calming down. I'd noticed that my clothes had splotches of blood – *Great, now I look like another one of the countless zombies tonight. Well, better than if they were to think me injured, I suppose.*

I saw Bes as I entered the old pub: I'd never seen her in such alluring apparel before – the tight pleather offered ample cleavage. I suppose the threads, or lack of them, had done their job, since Bes then began animatedly making out with a dude who had not bothered to put on any costume. *That's unlike Bes, I mused, seems I'm not the only one acting differently tonight.* I decided to let them conclude their intimacy before I greeted her, so lit a fag and suckled on the hip flask – all of which I still had to do one handed. Her man-friend said something to her, she nodded and he went off somewhere. She was about to go off into another direction when I jumped in front of her.

‘Hey!’ she said, drunker than I’d ever seen her, ‘What about your um... test tomorrow?’ She hugged me.

‘Fuck that.’

‘Ha-ha! Whooo! You’re a zombie, or what?’

‘What? Oh, no, this is my own blood.’

‘Good god! What happened!?’ I lifted the previously white sponge to show her my gestating scar. ‘Shit, Frans, it’s still bleeding!’ and she fetched me a replacement set of rags. ‘Who did this?!’

‘Nobody, I just moshed to hard at Naglesse,’ I said, annoyed. ‘It’s fine, really. So, was that making-out I just saw part of Black Widow’s crime fighting technique? Sexual seduction? Then you whip their ass once their guard is down and their willy is up?’

‘Ha-ha! No! He’s one of the good guys!’

‘Oh, so that’s what she does! Her power is rewarding the other superheroes’ heroics with sexual favours! Well done, Normal Human Being Man! Come get your snatch.’ She flung her cigarette at me, but wasn’t actually angry. I picked up her smouldering offal and finished it.

‘“Normal Human Being Man”?’ she asked, confused.

‘Because he’s got no costume on.’

‘Oh! I get it... Hey! Your cut! Let’s go to my commune and give it a plaster and stuff.’

‘Fine,’ I reluctantly agreed. *Best not destroy this vessel before it can toughen.*

‘Where did he go? Normal-Man?’ she asked after her commune mates were gathered.

‘I just saw him leave.’

‘Oh...’ she said, trying to hide her disappointment.

*Maybe the “good guy” had some crime to fight, dumbass.*

‘It’s morning, guys! It’s 12:30!’ said a girl of Bes’s commune as we were walking out into the streets; this monster was dressed as an angel.

‘Cock-a-doodle-doo!’ I went, and they all laughed.

A dude from Bes’s commune said, ‘Jeez, what worm do you want to get, early bird?’ He was dressed as an elf.

‘A magic one that heals cuts.’ They all chuckled again. I asked the long-eared questioner if he was any particular elf.

‘I’m Legolas!’

‘Thought so!’ *Shame, the shmuck hasn’t outgrown that phase yet.* ‘I’m Frans, by the way.’

‘Stefan – pleased to meet you!’

The rest started introducing themselves, and once I’d met them all, the one named Kwanele said: ‘I’m not tired yet, guys.’ He was dressed in a bloody overall.

‘We should swim!’ suggested Bes excitedly.

To which he responded: 'Yeah! I want to get this fake blood off.'

'And I want to get this *real* blood off!' They laughed once more, but the angel-monster told me to please wash in the bathroom and patch up before jumping into the pool. Bringing them laughter like this would have brought the sweet tingle of pride in the past, but now it was hollow – like impressing a child with silly antics, like pulling a silly face, except there was no reward of a child's cuteness.

Their commune was much larger than mine – these people were just a subset of the whole thing. Bes patched me up in the bathroom. 'This plaster is pretty strong,' she assured me after I'd cleaned my irksome leakage. She'd put salve and cotton wool onto the "*boo-boo*" as she put it. *I'm not a fucking four-year-old, just fix my squishy body already.* I'd swallowed this outburst down – *The peasants must just do their jobs. No point in insulting them, I suppose.*

We joined the rest, who were at the pool area. 'I dunno about you guys, but I'm too lazy to go get my swimming trunks,' said Stefan, and he rapidly got naked and made the water jiggle with his splash.

'Oh gosh, Stefan!' went the angelic girl.

'Oi, Kwanele, join me!'

'How cold is it?'

Wishing to get the girls to mimic Stefan's nude-transformation, I stripped completely and got in too. The water was cold, but I'd been very hot from the mosh and walk, so it was pleasant. 'Come on, you sissies! The water's great!'

Bes jumped in once she was down to her bra and panties, which were also removed once she was inside the water. *What's got into this girl? What's going to get into her!?* Then the other two joined with a similar technique – *Wussies.*

Mere minutes in, I got out to get my hip flask from my trousers. I noticed that Paul's keys weren't in any pocket; I remembered that these were in the *plaas* jacket I'd discarded. *Oh shit!* I thought with a laugh. *Ag, whatever. His car is safe in the commune.* With my booze-allsorts in hand I re-entered the water.

Though I tried to see, but saw only wobbly flashes of female embellishments (and tried to ignore the dark blurs around the middle of the other males), the experience was not actually a sexual one: much like the mosh pit, it too was primal. But where moshing was escaping *to* the prehistoric dangers of the predator and the hunt, this was escaping *from* the modern constructs of body ashamedness. This I tried to understand while still in the chilly pool, but like the images of breasts coming through the warping water, it was just beyond clarity, and thus, not satisfying.

We'd all been chatting and enjoying our Adam and Eve pretending for a few minutes, when my slim, still fragile vessel became exhausted of its ectothermic capabilities, and I began to shiver. This steady onset of coldness had another undesirable effect: a diminution in size where size is highly

revered. This meant that I would now not dare exit the water without covering up as I did before. *Catch up, you stupid physical prison! A demi-god needs an appropriate vehicle!*

Two other members of this commune, Johan and Victor, came to the water having heard its splashy retort to being livened so late. ‘You crazy fucks!’ they shouted down at us. These two chatted a bit about their night, and then announced that they’d just come to get some booze for a house party elsewhere. About five minutes after they left, Kwanele said he was getting too cold, but when he went to retrieve his undies from the pool-rim they were not there – all our clothes were missing.

‘Fucking Victor and Johan! Must have grabbed them and left!’

‘Oh no!’

‘Relax, friends. I’ll go get us some towels,’ said Stefan, whose wang, I noticed as he bravely got out, had also consequently suffered from the loss of heat that I feared to exhibit. *He doesn’t care. Is he a master of the hate-power? Doesn’t seem fiery at all to me. Maybe he’s just too much of an idiot to care. Yeah, probably that.*

I was annoyed by my embarrassment, but I couldn’t help it. I tried to channel this rage to my muscles, but heat would not generate. *Practise, practise, practise – that’s all there is to do. I will succeed.* I carefully got out of the pool once a towel was made available to conceal my miniaturized manhood. Bes was not as meticulous in her flesh covering, and I finally got an erotic glimpse unhindered by rippling liquid, but even this wouldn’t fertilise growth down there.

‘Shit, guys... those were the only clothes I had,’ I told them, trying to not sound as exposed as I felt, trying to shiver as little as possible. They found this funny.

‘Don’t worry, dude, you can borrow some of my clothes,’ said Stefan.

‘Sorry my light is busted,’ he told me as we walked into his room. He opened his wardrobe and quickly selected some threads for me. ‘There you go, man!’ and I was left in the dark commune cavity as he closed the door.

I tried to heat myself up with my new favourite emotions: I put the faces of Brentwyn, JP, and Christoff in my mind, and even tried to recall the face of that Liam Golpear. But all my wrath couldn’t make me warm: could not make my todger – all compacted and minute to resemble a toddler’s – expand from its shrivelled state of hiding from the hostile environment. I considered trying to envision Bloomstein vandalizing Niksy, but I didn’t want to. So, in the dark I had to remain.

I decided: *If blind imbeciles can manage, I’ll be fine.* I took a clothing item Stefan had laid out for me, and began an attempt to put it on, completely unaware what on earth I was being clothed with. I felt the material and deduced that it was definitely a shirt of some uncomfortable sort. I put my head through the biggest hole at the base and found a possible escape hole, but it was too small for a head. I found the head-hole nearby and made use of it. This led to the discovery that this was a collared shirt.

And of course, the 50% chance of getting it the right way round had been no match for the 50% chance that I got it wrong. So, I wriggled furiously to right the shirt of unknown colour – rendered a blob of almost blackness in the absence of light. Heaving, I got myself ready for the pants, which were soft and elasticated – *That’s not a good sign*. I was under the impression that this would be much easier when I quickly found the top and knew it was the right way around from the drawstring. I got on my half clothed back and attempted to pull both legs through simultaneously, but the stretchy drawstring turned out to be in a knot that had to be untied. I sat there, blind, with the pants around my knees, fidgeting excruciatingly to undo that godforsaken bond for a few minutes. Eventually I succeeded, and lay on my back – clothed, infuriated and fatigued in this grey world I’d managed to end up in.

‘Are you struggling in there?’ Stefan asked.

‘No, no, I’m winning. You can come in.’

He did, still in just his towel, and realised I had no shoes – I received a pair of his old tekkies. This – the most horrible footwear I could possibly have been given – further foreshadowed what I was to behold in the mirror a few seconds later. My lightless struggle now saw me dressed in a nerdy, plain-white, collared T-shirt and dorky blue shorts. It was like something old Bloomstein would have worn! As I was examining this awful attire that I had to be grateful for, my clothes donor put on a similar shirt and pants. Then, he poked his eyes, removing, and revealing, his contact lenses. Then he put on thick glasses.

*He’s a damn nerd, this Stefan! He resembles past Bloomstein, but he doesn’t act like he did, nor is he treated like he was.*

*Shame – he could perhaps also be a legend if he could give a damn, which he clearly doesn’t.*

Livid that I’d been forced into this ridiculous outfit, I wandered the commune. The other skinny dippers, now cured of their sick fetish with a pyjama treatment, were in the kitchen making coffee; I wasn’t in the mood to mingle because of these degrading threads, so I entertained myself by checking out the drinks cabinet. I got the hip flask, which I hadn’t let go of since it joined in our nudism dabble, and found that it was again about halfway depleted after I forced down a big sip. *What shall I replenish your tummy with, my little beauty?*

The choice was made simple when I spied a bottle covered in barbed wire – it was mampoer. I dumped its 88%-alcohol contents into the chaos already in the poor little silver canteen. A sip of this demonic beverage, making my throat a section of hell for a second, gave me clarity of situation: *Fuck what I look like. Clothing – it’s just like the body too. I’m too awesome to care what those infantile fuckwits think*. I was ready to resume Halloween proper, so went to the kitchen. ‘Want some coffee, bra?’ asked Kwanele.

‘No, dude, I want to go party more!’

‘Nooo, it’s bedtime,’ sang the ex-angel, slurping some coffee in pink PJs.



I looked at them, shaking my head. ‘Ja, guess babies need their rest, hey?’ They must have thought I was teasing since they smirked, so I elaborated on my hatred: ‘Pathetic. I don’t know why I even bother with people. Everyone’s a disappointment, and I actually thought *I* was the problem until now. But no! It’s everyone else – you’re all nothing and going nowhere!’ Now they were nice and shocked. ‘Sleep tight, weaklings! This superior being is going to revel in his reign.’

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The new *poeskykacarugi* in my hip flask was again administered with its associated pain, and already had severe effects as I stumbled and tripped my way out the silenced commune and back towards the bars – totally overcompensating with arrogant posture to try nullify the effect of the nerdy attire. *Boy, I wish that Stefan geek had given me a jersey or something too*, squeaked the remnants of my dissolving wimpness.

*I need practise, right? So into the deep end with my squishy body. COME ON!* I tensed all my muscles and summoned all my hate towards the cold – I began trembling with rage, and I finally felt the sweet warmth of numbness. *THERE! You see! It can generate all the resistance I need to conquer the environment.* But this anger surging couldn’t be kept up for long, and in pathetic, involuntary cessation, the icy bite of nature soon caressed me once more. And my woeful body’s pitiful arms disobeyed me: the arms came in and it solaced itself with a hug. I became infuriated with my external weakness. *How can I be cold!? How did I bleed!? Why did I... cry? How can I stop this fucking feebleness!?* I felt the mind – that which is important – being pulled down by its fleshy outer padding, and so I took action: *No. I am the master in this relationship – I control you. I cannot make you as strong as I, but I can defy your whimpering! I will succeed. I won’t crumble!*

‘I WON’T CRUMBLE!’ I sent into the late-night air, and with that, set off at a jog to Hatfield Square once more, blocking out my vessel’s tormented communications. The jogging and the ignoring were working wonders – I was generating heat and disintegrating distance – but in my fervour, I didn’t bother to notice the low tree branch that was rudely growing in my way. The wooden motherfucker collided with me, and it managed to snag on my bandage and rip it off. *Goeie donder!* Blood and pain blossomed once more.

‘Fuck you!’ I shouted at the tree – a purple Jacaranda. I grabbed the crummy bandage off the floor, which was purple with the tree’s droppings, smacked it back on my gash, and went right back to my jog – ignoring all bodily discomfort.

Soon I came to that exterior of the four-sided philistine-field. I didn’t have a plan further than just making my way to an entrance, but even this short-term plot was disrupted by the sight of Carl, still in his Christmas-costume, meandering on the same path.



‘Oi! Santa’s little helper!’ I said instinctively, ready to fight this ogre to the death if need be. But my verbal attack was nullified by the lout’s smile when he saw me. It was impossibly genuine, this mug, and made me want to laugh, but perplexed me too. *Is he just too witless to know that he’s supposed to hate me?*

‘Trieman! Eets goode 2 C U! Eye’ve bean thinkeeng about yew’. I couldn’t help but stare at him in disbelief. ‘Soree about JayPey, hees inn uh *bliksim* fase.’ He pointed to the eye-sore that was my right eye: ‘I’m kno fizzy-cist, buht thatt lukes laaik iht kneeds sum doktoring!’ And he showed my mute ass the way to the clinic just outside of the Square. He went in, greeted those on call, and helped himself to the free plasters and small ointment tubes. He proceeded to dexterously apply these medical items for me. When he was finished, I noticed that his hands had gotten a good bit of my blood on them, but he didn’t mind. He rinsed this caustic liquid off, wet some toilet paper and cleaned me too – all the while merry.

‘Um. Thanks a lot, Carl,’ I said, breaking my silence. He said that it was nothing, and told me he’d been on his way to get some chow, and asked whether or not I wanted some too. I realised that my brittle body was indeed famished.

‘Ja... but I lost my wallet...’ He said he’d stick me for a burger from *Uncle Foody* nearby. With shivering hands, I gorged on his fast-food gift. Noticing my hypothermia, he took off his Christmas jumper and gave it to me, leaving him in a plain T-shirt.

‘You look freezing! Here you go, man,’ he said as he handed it over. It still had his warmth clinging to it; I quickly pulled it over my body and felt bliss at this sudden and dramatic increase in comfort.

‘Thank you... Dude, why Christmas shit for Halloween?’

‘Because it’s funny!’ he said, and he began laughing like an idiot, and I burst out laughing too, nearly choking on my meal. Once our food was devoured – which took about three minutes – I simply had to ask this bafflingly benevolent creature: ‘Carl, why do you hang out with JP? He’s a *doos*, and you’re clearly not.’

‘We’ve been friends for very long; I know he’s a *lekker ou*, really, but he’s just a little confused now. I can’t tell him what to do, that always just makes things worse, so I think it’s my duty as friend to just be there for him. He’ll come around eventually.’

I shook my head, ‘How do you know he’ll stop wanting to fight all the time?’

‘He’s still friends with me, who doesn’t, that’s why. And as long as he wants to be my friend, I’ll be his.’

*Is this why he’s helping me? Wants me to “come around”? That’s cute, but I don’t expect this sweet moron to understand that JP is just a dumb jerk, but I have pulled myself to a higher plane of existence.* Food in my system and warmth on my skin, I felt truly ready for some more adventuring, and as reward I would let my patron tag along. ‘You going to join me at the Square, bro!?’

‘No thanks! I’m going to call it a night, Frans – class tomorrow and what not.’

‘Fine... Do you have some cigarettes?’ Obviously, the beautiful buffoon gave me a pack that had more than ten still inside, and his lighter too. We greeted and he went to his car, which was parked just down the street. I lit a post dinner (breakfast?) cigarette and walked the short distance to an entrance into the Square.

It was much less busy now, and most of those in there seemed to be leaving too – the annual monsters’ awakening was coming to a close. *No! I don’t want to sleep! Sleep is just the act right before my hangover, and before my test, which I’ll fail or miss. I must relish every moment of tonight: this glorious evening of self-discovery! My beautiful transformation into a psychopath that doesn’t feel anything but fury!*

The freaks walking past me at the entrance, facilitators of the ending of the festivities, were apt fuel for my rage, and soon there was a blazing outburst: ‘Why are you disgusting monsters leaving!? Aren’t you creatures of the night!?’ They just gave me frightened looks and then ignored me with a wide berth. I decided that this was not the place to be after all, so I wandered away from the Square without a conscious direction, which led me to the street that had Kingsley’s bar. *Come on, you godforsaken institution, show me some vitality!*

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My gut was aching from this brisk walk and the agonising glugs I’d taken from the hip flask whilst doing so. This ache was urging to be freed, so just as I came to Kingsley’s, I granted bail – decorated a bush with a retching.

‘Are you alright there, lieutenant?’ someone with a deep, cathedralic voice asked me.

‘I’m not in res anymore, you –’ and with a mean glance I saw who I was talking to, and who it was made me halt my insult. It was *him*: the Res Pope.

‘It’s you... R-Res Pope!’

He took a sip from of a coffee mug and said: ‘That’s what some call me, yes.’ He was alone at a corner table. ‘Mind if I join you?’ I didn’t wait for an answer – I jumped over the railing to enter the lapa, but fortunately he said “Go for it!” as I was about to take my seat. I sat opposite him and did so gingerly to not upset his peaceful meditating (*Or am I interrupting prayers?*), lest he bolt away, or summon bolts to smite me.

I checked myself: *Don’t be cautious around this man just because he’s folkloric.*

*Yes. His rank is meaningless to me. I am superior to all, including him, in all likelihood.* The Pope was not in costume, but rather in his apparently standard clothes: a plain green, buttoned-shirt, jeans and a brown leather watch. He still had the curly bob of brown hair, but now the stubble surrounding

his moustache was longer – almost as long as his lip garden. And surrounding all this facial hair was a warm smile. Due to the shock of seeing this mythical being up close, having him *talk* to me, and even *recognise* me as a former member of his res, I only half noticed that Kingsley’s had denied my wish that it still be busy, having exactly five other patrons.

‘Thanks,’ I said shaking his hand, supressing the urge to make the sign of the cross as I did so. ‘I can’t believe I’m actually meeting the Res Pope! I’m Frans, by the way.’

He chuckled and said: ‘I get that quite a lot. It’s good to meet you, Frans; in fact, I’ve actually been wanting to meet you for a while – ever since you piqued my curiosity after I saw you a few times at res and around the university.’

*REALLY?!*

*Of course he has. I’ve always been a magnificent person, I just kept it locked away until now.*

‘Why?’

He chuckled again. ‘Because you wore a totally different outfit about every second time I saw you.’

My stupid face-flesh went red. ‘Ja... Consider it a side effect of finding out how fucked up people are.’

‘I’m not sure I follow,’ he said with a frown.

I rolled my eyes in my embarrassment. ‘I changed clothing styles each time I started hanging out with new people,’ I said quick, like ripping off a plaster.

He nodded: ‘Oh, I see...’

‘... Ja,’ I said, getting annoyed that he was making me relive the pathetic past. ‘But I’m done with that: I’m a lone wolf from now on. I’m above *friends*.’

‘Right... so, is *this* what you’ll be wearing from now on?’

‘What? This Christmas and nerd shit!?! Hell no! I just lost my clothes and was given these. Besides, it’s Halloween – can wear whatever.’

‘Given by whom?’

‘Fr–... Just some people I know.’

‘I see. And what will the lone wolf be wearing from now on – after Halloween, which, if I look around, is very soon.’

*Curious little holy man, this.* ‘Jeez, I haven’t thought about that. Maybe suits. No! *Tuxedos!*’

He laughed. ‘Good luck with that – they’re expensive and they’re uncomfortable.’

‘But they’re fuckin’ badass, like me!’

He smiled. ‘I think I said something very similar to that back in my crazy years.’

I thought I noted a hint of scorn in his words, so I retaliated: ‘Why did you go all soft? Why aren’t you a crazy motherfucker anymore?’

‘Because I want to be happy.’

I snorted, and said: ‘I’ve only very recently become a crazy mofo, and let me tell you, it’s a hell of a lot better than being a pathetic pansy.’

‘Maybe you’re right: maybe it’s better to be mad than scared. But being mad didn’t work out for me.’

I almost wanted to vomit again from what I was hearing: a fellow legend that had fallen into mediocrity; this made me aware of the vomit taste in my mouth, so I indulged in my hip flask. ‘I’d offer you some of this crap, but it’s awful. Let me I buy you a drink instead.’ I suddenly now had an agenda: to reignite his magnificence.

‘No thanks, I–’

‘Dammit, I can’t, I lost my wallet...’

‘Don’t worry, I–’

‘I know – I’ll go steal a bottle of something from the bar! What do you like?’

‘I don’t drink anymore, Frans!’ he said loudly, then laughed.

‘Why!?’ I shouted, drawing the attention of all five other patrons.

He replied calmly: ‘I don’t want to anymore. It’s fallen out of my life.’

‘Well, I’ll go steal one for myself, then. I can do it, watch.’

I was halfway standing when he said: ‘I won’t be here when you get back, in that case.’

I stared at his content mug for a few seconds, then sat down and said: ‘I bet you stole a bottle or two back when you were my age?’ *I’ll bring on his relapse by getting him to relive that time.*

He looked up, recalling as I wished him to. ‘Just once actually, as far as I can remember; some random person then stole it from me after I’d only had a few gulps.’

*Yes, remember how great you were...* ‘I knew it! Come on, tell me more of your antics back then.’

He shrugged: ‘There’s not much to tell. It can be summed up like this: I drank like a kreepy krauly, I womanized like Casanova crossed with Genghis Khan, and I defied authority like Loki on cocaine.’

I laughed: ‘That’s so awesome!’

He shook his head. ‘Those days really weren’t awesome.’

‘Then what were they?’

‘Painful.’

*Dammit, so close...* ‘Granted, it’s tough on the flesh, but that’s the test to see if you’ve got what it takes. I’m going to endure until my hide is strong.’

‘I never adapted to that lifestyle – my body was a wreck at the end of it.’

*His vessel didn’t harden?*

*Well, maybe he just wasn’t chosen for that life, then.* ‘What was wrong?’

‘Liver problems, heart problems, anxiety, depression,’ he said, but his ever-present smile remained.

‘Oh...’

‘I’m fine now, though.’

I gave a fake smile. *Maybe if I anger him he’ll regain his former glory.*

‘You may be healthy, but I bet you’re bored all the time, now that you’ve become a *pansy*.’

‘Ha-ha!’ His laugh was sincere, to my amazement and disappointment. ‘Not at all! I’ve learnt that everything can be enjoyable if you find the joy in it.’

*Oh god, I’m going to be sick. Maybe I should just put him out of his misery.*

‘You sound like a fucking toddlers’ TV show, you know that?’

He did his infuriating laugh yet again. ‘I know, I know. It’s actually amazing how we insist on teaching kids things that are supposed to be fundamentally important, but once we’re old we think it doesn’t apply anymore.’

*Well, if I can’t pull him back up to my level, I’ll show him what he’s lost by showing him how weak he is now.* ‘You said you let go of your madness because you wanted to be happy. That was a mistake – you’re in denial. You chose an easy, comfortable life of patheticness because you couldn’t take the beating of becoming a master of hate. *Pussy*.’

His face remained serene while he closed his eyes, took a deep breath, opened them and said: ‘Do you really want me to argue with you?’

‘Absolutely!’ I said, as if he’d asked me if I wanted to get into a boxing ring with him.

‘*You* are actually in denial,’ he said, as kindly as ever.

‘Explain,’ I demanded.

He proceeded to, not angrily, but gently: ‘You think you’ve become stronger, but really you’re cowering in a suit of anger – it’s your armour.’

My “armour” gained several fiery layers from that sentence. ‘Oh really? And what the fuck is this nothingness that I’m defending against?’

‘In a word? Opinions.’

‘What?’

‘I know this, because everything I did was to get good opinions and fend off the bad ones. I was a slave to everyone’s view of me.’

‘Well, I’m not “cowering”. I really don’t give a *damn* what they think about me!’

‘I thought I didn’t care either, but all my antics were desperate attempts to convince people that I wasn’t totally insecure.’

‘No, but... *I used to be* insecure, *now* I’m not! And it’s thanks to my anger!’

He calmly shook his head: 'Anger is attack, and attack means you see danger, and danger implies that you're frightened.'

'...'

'But there's nothing to be afraid of!' His eyes were shining. 'Opinions are absolutely nothing if you just let them wash over you.'

I could say nothing. The magnificent lone wolf and his powers of hatred could not seduce the mediocre pansy, and was even left speechless by him. *And he doesn't even have the decency to revel in his victory. He just looks at me like I'm his child or something.* The bastard had taken my faith away, so I put my miserable head in my paws: 'Well then I don't fucking know anymore...'

'You'll figure it out.'

'I can't go back to how I was. I won't,' I said to the table. I started rubbing my temple, and then scratched the itchy plaster, which milked blood from the cut.

'Jeez, are you okay?' the old guru noticed my reddened head and hand.

'Don't worry, I've got some antiseptic.' I got out my beloved hip flask. 'This is some horrific shit I mixed in here!' and I poured some of the *ragavismomykkee* on the wound. 'And it doubles as an anaesthetic,' I said, taking a sip.

He shook his head. 'Why are you proud of your drinking?'

'What do you mean? Booze is awesome.'

'You wouldn't be proud of a crutch if you needed one to walk, would you?'

'No.'

'Then why do you have pride in this poisonous liquid-crutch?'

I just stared at him. His stare went to my gushing cut. 'Jeez... hang on, I'll go get some toilet paper.'

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*What? So now I can't drink anymore either?* I thought, as I sipped my blasphemous beverage – it required more will than ever to force it down. His Holiness came back baring a white tissue gift, which my blood immediately sullied. He sat in silence, calmly examining his surroundings. His peace contrasted with the silent cyclone of my thoughts; I needed to distract myself, so I decided to interview the legend while I could: 'Why did you stay in res all this time?'

'Well, since both my dad and grandad were in Geelhout I get a lot of discount, so it's the cheapest accommodation. Besides, I challenged myself to remain sane in that environment. And I can proudly say I've succeeded long enough to become the damn *Pope!*'

I couldn't help but smile. 'Okay. Another question: why don't we ever see you?'

He laughed. 'Well, I don't do res stuff anymore. I'm either working on my Master's or visiting my fiancée. Also, I'm nocturnal – I do my best work between 1 and 6 a.m. I took a break tonight and decided to come check out what Halloween looks like nowadays.'

'Well, I don't think I'm a very good example. Not many people would have survived the night I had,' I said, half-proudly.

'You'd be surprised by how many people there are like you – like how I was when I was in first year.'

'No way – if there were so many people like you, why are you so well-known?'

'I promise you. One of my crazy-comrades was even wilder than me, and he carried on after I decided to change.'

'If he was greater than you, why aren't there any stories about him?'

'Probably because he died in a drunken car crash in his third year of studies.'

'Christ...'

This made me anxious, so I decided to light some nicotine incense to calm down. I would've said something like "sorry about your friend", but the Pope was smiling, as usual, and I didn't feel it was any less genuine than before. I lifted the soaking red and white wad – the bleeding had stopped again.

'How did you manage to get such an injury, by the way?' the Pope asked examining it.

'I told the res Father to go fuck himself.'

He burst out laughing. 'Oh, you heard about that incident, hey?'

'It's true then?'

'It's true.' He took a deep breath and said: 'Well, Frans, like I said, these are actually my productive hours, and I think you've taken up enough of them already,' and he gave me a wink.

He got up and I shook his hand. As he was leaving, I felt a desperation to talk to him a little longer – I asked: 'Do you have an actual name?'

'Ag, what's wrong with "Res Pope?", hey? It's a fine noise to be known by.' Watching him leave made me sad, which confused me. *So why is he remembered while the other mad ones aren't, as he insists?* This was the topic of my thoughts after he'd left. After a little while it struck me: *I didn't want him to go... it's not just his exceptionally crazy years that have made him such an intriguing figure, it's how it contrasts with what he is now – he's the most bizarre, fascinating person I've ever met... and he's so... kind...*

I didn't want to, but I had to go to the bathroom – the disgusting, awful, public bathroom. The male monsters' latrine was actually okay, though. I did my thing, and on my way to rinse my blood off at the sink, I was met with my dilapidated reflection: a dorky, dirty hobo-Santa that had presumably lost in a fight. It was peculiar seeing myself like this – the scruffiest I'd ever been. It was *me* staring back, *me* that had lived through this chaotic night's events. I washed quickly and left.

No one was at Kingsley's anymore, and the staff were closing up. I took a napkin from a table and got a pen from a bartender. On it, I wrote what the Res Pope had said that had struck me: "anger didn't work for him"; "he was a slave to opinion"; "anger-attack-danger-frightened"; and at the bottom I wrote: "I was beaten by a man who has no hate". I stared at it when I was walking out the joint. When I got to the sidewalk, I folded the rag and put it in my pocket, even though a part of me insisted that it was surely a piece of garbage.

Once I was in the suburban streets, I wanted to know the time. In my tipsy, exhausted state, I forgot that my phone had been lost long ago, and mistook the hip flask's bulge in my pocket for the cellular device. I wrenched this out – my grip failed me, and it went high up into the air. I looked up to catch it, but saw that the inscribed serviette had been flung out as well.

I could only catch one.

The flask came crashing down on the rough pavement with a noisy skid; I gently refolded the white cloth and put it in its pocket again. I stared at the grey, now scratched, vessel of vileness, and before I had time to stop myself, I jumped on it with all my might. Waiting for the immense stinging in my injured ankle to subside, I watched the *whdkrguimnmpc* bleed out its shiny, cracked body.

*"poison liquid-crutch", he called it... well, I don't need a crutch... Whatever time it was, people were not partying anymore. Whatever, I don't need a party. I just can't go to bed yet. I have to think...*

*Then where to? I don't have a key to get into the commune.* I stared at the street – the lamps, the houses, the asphalt.

*I'm so sick of the city.*

*I need nature,* I decided when a handsome Jacaranda's musical shiver in the cold wind caught my attention. I considered leaving the city entirely, but then remembered that LC De Villiers offered pseudo-nature. *And even a little forest...*

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I kicked the alcoholic corpse out of my way and set off to the sports campus. About a minute in, I realised that I was actually quite enjoying myself – I was excited at the prospect of a walkabout. However, my good spirits were reduced a few minutes later when the LC gate came into view, reminding me of its existence. I wasn't going to give in without a fight though. I went up to it and saw it was so late that Imelela's morning shift had already begun, which meant access was guaranteed.

'Good morning!' I shouted to him.

He recognised me, despite the length of time since I last saw him. '*Hallo, slimkind!* You're so late it's early!' We laughed.

'I've lost my student card, Imelela! I'm afraid I'll have to sleep outside tonight!'



‘It’s okay, I’ll open for you,’ and he let the boom-gate open.

‘Thanks,’ I said as I entered, ‘I’m very tired now. Just going to go to my room and sleep.’

‘Hey? No man. I know you’re not in res anymore,’ he said with a seriousness that was foreign to him, as the gate was closing behind me. I was apprehensive – he saw right through me – I was already suffering the effects of losing my hate-confidence! But then he warmly said: ‘But I can tell you really need to get in, so I have let you. Just don’t make any *kak* and get me in trouble, *neh!*’

I beamed at him. ‘Thank you! I won’t get you in trouble, I promise!’

He chuckled. ‘I know – you’re a good boy.’ I shook his hand and walked towards the Geelhout building to have a nostalgic look at it. *Pfff, “good boy” – I’m definitely not good anymore. And a boy wouldn’t have survived a night this intense.* I’d drunk in my old home’s view for about five seconds when a tiny ember, dancing in front of it, caught my attention. I made my way towards it. Nearby, this glowing dot was revealed to be a cigarette, being smoked by none other than Jan.

‘Jan! It’s me!’ I said as I drew close, quite shocked by the fact that I was very glad to see him.

‘Frans?!’ he said, surprised and smiling his stupid, *platteland* smile. For Halloween he’d made use of his fishing waders for a costume, which didn’t surprise me.

‘I see you dressed as a fisherman tonight?’

‘Ja! I also had a toy hook with fake blood on it to make it more scary, you know?’ He inspected my “costume”. ‘Isn’t that Carl’s jumper?’

‘Yes... he gave it to me because I was cold.’

‘Ag, isn’t he *dierbaar*?’ He took a drag and asked: ‘Are you well, Treeman?’

I looked at him with a smirk and started laughing as I lit a cigarette myself. He started laughing too. ‘How honest do you want me to be, Jan?’ I asked through laughter that said everything already.

‘No, no, I think I get it, thanks. I’m not so great either. I miss the farm, man.’ He shook his head bitterly and said: ‘And I’m drinking too much, hey... It’s like I need the *dop* now. I think I’m slightly alcoholic...’

‘I’m definitely an alcoholic,’ I tried to console him.

‘I tried to stop, but I still wanted to hang out with the guys, and they just basically force you to drink – call you names when you refuse. It’s unbelievable! Especially JP. And it’s bloody expensive too,’ he shook his head bitterly once more.

I looked at his costume again; I knew what he would say, but I had to ask: ‘And that fishing rod you wanted?’

‘Still in the shop!’ he laughed, ‘Ja, no... I’ve spent about half my savings on partying this year...’

*Good fuck, that’s a lot.* ‘Don’t worry, I’m no better! I can’t tell you how much I’ve spent on drink and smokes. And I can’t begin to tell you what’s going on in my head. But I think I’m going to try something different now. I don’t know what, though.’

We stood in silence, smoking for a couple of seconds, then Jan announced: 'I think you'll remember: I usually wake up around this time – farm habit – and I go chat to poor old Imelela and share some cigarettes with him. Want to join?'

'Thanks, dude, but I came here to walk and think on my own, so that's what I'm going to do.'

'Oh!?' Sounds to me like you have a bit of the old *trekgees*,' he said with a grin while shaking my hand.

This remark was still sinking in and leaving its mark when I said: 'It was good to see you, Jan.'

*It really had been good to see him*, I thought as he went his way and I went mine. *What is this bizarre attraction to a member of my old tormentors?* I lit another cigarette – my third last. "*Trekgees*"... *I can't deny it: I was very excited to go on this ramble to the little forest next to the dam.*

*And trekgees is a most quintessential trait of the Boer.*

*Fucking hell... Was it all a lie? A futile attempt? Am I still just a plaasjapie?* I entered the sports section of LC, tossing my smouldering stump into a gutter. With its smell gone, I could smell the lawns, and it sent me back to the *plaas* where I was frequently tasked with mowing the lawn. I could picture it, and it made me feel things I didn't want to feel.

*Why did I enjoy seeing that plaas simpleton? I hate him like I hate all his kind! Why am I reminiscing over that hellhole I left? Why is this nostalgia making me feel this sick glee?*

'Why do I miss the farm?!' My turmoil got distracted by a moth or some other light infatuated critter flying into my face – I swung in rage at it to no avail. I remembered my chat with the Pope and breathed – tried to calm myself down.

*Could I hate Jan?* I asked myself once the fury had subsided. I thought for a while, but as far as I could tell, the poor fool had never done anything wrong: not to me, nor anyone else. I could think of no moral infringements. *I had sentenced him to that person-genre prison.*

*Jan is plaas, but Jan – Jan Jacobus Nicolaas Volschenk – is good. Jan Jacobus Nicolaas Volschenk gives cigarettes to Imelela. He is a Boer, but he will not use a grey belt on his children – Jan Jacobus Nicolaas Volschenk will not grey belt any Imelela. He will not langarm dance to the echoes of the past.*

*He's not evil just because he's their kin. He's one of them, but he's not bad.*

I was now walking past the rugby stadium, lighting the penultimate gwaai.

*But am I a Boer?*

*I miss the farm. I miss the quiet; the wildlife; the fresh, early mornings; good old Bob; and I miss my bluegum forest.*

*Do I miss my family?*

*Well, I miss Ma... and I do miss Sussie a bit...*

*And I miss some aspects of Pa...*

*No. I'm not a Boer. I can't be one because I never really was one. The wind picked up, and I held out my arms and allowed the gust to take me back to my youth on the farm; always playing when the wind was strong. What am I, if I'm not a Boer? Or any of those other things I tried out this year? Am I a "magnificent being", as I insisted several times this evening? Or am I a slave to opinion, like the Pope was?*

*Emily...*

*It was them. It was their opinions! They made Emily go mad: they blinded her and hurt her with their opinions until all she could do was kill herself. They gave her the anorexia and the depression. They did it: all those people she went to school with, all those people on TV, in magazines and all those strangers who looked at her funny when she walked by! First too fat, then too skinny, with the brief period of acceptance, now on Sussie's wall. They've nearly done the same to me. But I won't let them!*

*Anger was growing once again, out of my control. I almost completely lost myself in the slavery, almost drowned myself in their opinion, and it's their fault! Motherfuckers!*

The forest and dam came into view.

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*My life has become a swaddle of chaos, I thought as I tried to admire it. I put the final cigarette into my mouth. Well, there's the thing that excited me – the location that ignited my trekgees. As I got close to the dam, I noticed its markedly colder atmosphere. By this time, my eyes had made peace with the darkness – had opened up their pupils in a gesture of good will – and could therefore see quite well through the gloom. This enhanced sight meant that I could finally confirm that the forest consisted entirely of pines – their tall, fuzzy, triangular shapes forming a jagged canopy.*

*Just like my bluegum playground – another invasive they probably wanted to get rid of because it drinks up all the water, retarding the growth of native plants. But the trees are innocent! Other people brought them here in the first place! But they think they're better dead: as firewood or building material, so they kill them and process the corpses. This little collection has somehow survived though, and I will make proper use of it.*

I saw the lightless clubhouse on the far side of the dam, and I began smelling the aromatic giants I was hiking towards. I realised that my final cigarette, half-smoked, had gone out. I didn't want to relight it, and I didn't want to litter in this oasis in the awful city, so I stuffed it into my pocket.

The chill surrounding the lake broke through my warmth defences: I tucked the Christmas jumper into the elasticated pants, and pulled my arms into it too, hugging my middle. *The water of the lake has sucked up all the heat... the trees suck up all the water... and I, simply suck... Is that why we've all*

*congregated here?* The forest's outer members were mere steps away. I paused for dramatic effect, and then I slowly entered their realm.

The wind was clearly not allowed to race in their domain, but the wind's whistling protest could be heard as it marched through the forest exteriors. *But it's beautiful, this whine. Maybe it's not a protest, but rather a song to convince the trees to let the wind speed through.* I got so deep that the outside world was generously obscured by the sessile natives, removing me from the stresses of that place. Here, I inhaled their fresh aroma, a token of their ever-present hospitality, and I wanted to return the gift in kind. *But what can I offer?* I decided that it was rude of me to assume that these old life forms expected anything in return, and instead kept the peace of their territory by walking quietly and considerately as possible over the graveyard of their leaves.

*Boy, that was a juvenile little fantasy, I thought. What? Did you fancy that this was Fangorn forest? Where do these youthful urges come from? Is it such opinions I've succumbed to?*

*Well no more. I am an adult. I don't believe in their opinions anymore – these impulses of immaturity will soon cease.* At this moment a battalion of wind temporarily triumphed over the tree's barricade and barraged the interior with its vigorous movement. In its victorious rush it inflicted an icy coldness over my whole body. In desperate retaliation I crouched, pulled the merry sweater over my legs, and even snuggled my face in the neck hole as far as I could – cocooning myself from the cold.

*It's like that time when we went camping when I was nine, and I huddled in my jumper same as now. It was such fun, for some reason! I pretended I was some rock creature, defending myself against my enemies.*

I began doing the same now, for a few seconds, then: *No, no, no! Now you must stop being this child in a grown body!* In my frustration I stood up, de-cloaking my legs and face. My arms, however, remained in their warm-womb – they refused to brave the chill. In my anger I forgot the pact I'd made to quietly visit the forest, and noisily meandered through it. The speed of this wander meant cool air was draining my body heat even more. Shivering, I came to a small clearing in the canopy that allowed the heavens to slightly illuminate the earthen floor. In this blob of lighter darkness, I noticed a stick – a pine tree amputation. There was a familiar feeling at its sight – *That's a damn good stick*, my stupid youth-brain couldn't help but notice: just the right size, and straight as can be.

*Sword like.*

I pretended that this thought had not been created in my mind. I simply walked past to the centre of the brightened area. But that drive – that will to pick the pine shard up – remained, strong as ever. I felt strange: almost sick, but full of energy. Beyond my control, the Res Pope's sermon began ringing in bits and pieces. Bloomstein and Emily were once again dancing in my mind's eye. Then came other flashes too: of bigorexia, of fashion, of relationships. Added to this I also smelt the nauseating mixture of nostalgic *plaas* aromas, smouldering nicotine, and the poison that had been in my hip flask. And then

I felt the soft mush of flesh that I was bruising with a strike of my knuckles. All this was in my head, and yet, over all this madding neural activity stood out that drive to pick up the stupid stick. It was urging me, imploring me: “Just obey me”.

Finally, my arms eclosed from the jumper at this irrepressible, instinctive longing.

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*He takes up the sacred blade of the ancient Forest of Elseede Vilheers – holds it at arm’s length so that the surrounding ring of Heart Pines might bestow their power upon it. He feels their magical presence tremor within the magnificent wooden blade: he thanks them in their primal tongue of P’haain, and promises to vanquish the evil turbulence that is known as the Winds of Ångêhr, conjured eons ago by the evil climate Warlock Ínsykürity, that has driven out the old, kind currents of wind that the Heart Pines were friends with.*

*He sees the malevolent wind compact into creatures of foul air around him. They are invisible, but he can see them. With his dexterity and focus, he sets about battling these spectres of dark magic. He slices the closest one, deftly dodges its counter, spins and strikes another coming to attack his back. He returns to the first and stabs its transparent crown. A third comes with a flurry of strikes: he blocks these with his weapon, and once the foul being is drained of its wicked power, he decapitates it with a swift stroke.*

*As the possessed air vaporises, the leader of the breeze-beasts comes forward and asks him: “What is your name?”*

*He replies: ‘I have many. I am known as “The Tree Man” to the noble village of Jawk. In the misunderstood tribe of Skahtir, the call me “Effshendd”. And the kind, nomadic Hi-Pi call me “Frann Boh”. There are more names still. They are all terms of endearment. But I have one true name.’*

*“Tell it to me!”*

*But he sees through the creature’s falseness: this spirit knows that with his true name it can cast the dark sorcery known as Óh-Pin-Eyon, which would drain his power. ‘Very well, pawn of Ínsykürity. I shall tell you,’ and he leaps with a downward slash: ‘I am not “Treeman”!’ An upward slash: ‘I’m not “F-Shend”!’ A horizontal one: ‘And I’m not “Franbo”!’*

*He rolls to evade the leader’s deadly lighting attack. ‘And I’m not “Boet”! Or “Fransie”! Or “Hon”!’*

*Slash, slash, slash!*

*‘And I’m not “Gogga” either!’ he shouts as he drives the blade into the spectre’s imperceptible heart.*

*‘And I’m NOT “Francois Johannes Terblanche Knollenhoven”, as I was named at birth,’ he says as he twists the blade.*

*He leans to the air-demon's terminating ear and whispers: 'My name, is not even "Frans".'*

*And the creature is vanquished.*

*"Well done, One-with-many-names," says Rēzpōwpē, the Oldest of the Heart Pines, "our gift of thanks to you is the knowledge of how to be immune to the dark spell of Óh-Pin-Eyon. It is simple: one need merely not fear the spell. So, climb to my crown and shout your true name without fear."*

*Without a moment's hesitation, he sheaths the sword into the ground and ascends the great elder Heart Pine. His body, so designed for climbing and completely barren of fear, makes quick work of the journey to that great height. After mere seconds, he reaches the enchanted canopy of Elseede Vilheers, hugging the conical peak of the ancient tree.*

*He draws the aromatic air into his lungs and expels it as loud as he can:*

*'I don't have a name! My name is NOTHING! I just am who I am! AAAAHHHH!!!'*

With a still mind, I looked at the spectacular view for a few minutes – pine tops, dim fields, and street lit suburbia.

Eventually, I began to laugh out loud. I laughed so hard my throat stung. Then, I descended the tree. 'But "Frans" is a fine noise to be called by,' I said to no one in a hoarse voice once at the bottom again. I picked up the neat stick I'd left on the ground, and happily spun it in my fingers. My spectacle – my entertainment to thank the forest – had generated sufficient warmth, so I had no need to huddle into the charity clothes anymore – and I'd probably burnt away some of that nasty booze too.

I saw that my walking was leading to where the pines met with the dam's shore. I began walking around the edge, admiring the water.

*Guess you really do like walking, "Franbo". And you climbed the fuck out of that tree, "Treeman". And lord knows what "F-shend" means, but it's an acceptable noise too! I laughed with my croaky voice again. Ah, man. The monsters – no, the people – they've got it all wrong. We mustn't let go of youth. We must not let go of joy!*

I sat down at the dam edge to bask in my ecstasy. My thoughts began to go to the unbelievable night I'd had. The Res Pope, skinny dipping, moshing, fighting, cop evading, bouncer evading and being a REALLY big fat jerk to many friends. And I remembered that I had a test scheduled in mere hours, but I wasn't worried. I knew that I would go on to fail it, but this sleepless orgy of emotions – this ridiculous revolution – had been worth it. I felt like myself again – like I hadn't in a long time.

I reclined in my seated position to lie down, and as I did, I was greeted by a most spectacular view: the Milky Way. I saw it for the first time since I'd said goodbye to it over 10 months earlier. I'd never expected to see it in the city, but here, in this abnormally dark and isolated section smack in Pretoria, the farm feature somehow said hello to me again.

Stunned, silent and satisfied, I stared at it.

*That's our Galaxy, it struck me after a while, not some faraway structure! This little rock is part of it! And this rock has life on it – it can comprehend its home! We gave it a noise to be called by! The Milky Way – a stupid term, yes, but a term of endearment! We are a vital piece of this glorious Galaxy puzzle!*

I could have cried, and I wanted to, so I did – with a big smile.

'Whooo!' I shouted in my raspy voice. As I did, a light in the nearby clubhouse went on. *Must have been a party there – all my shouting must have awoken them.* Grey figures emerged from this structure across the lake. They looked like they were trying to find the source of the racket. That I would allow external beings to tarnish this clarity and joy was preposterous, so in the infantile light, I presented my tear-wetted face. I didn't think they could see me, but I wished they could behold my nectar of bravery.

The figures soon returned inside, and the light went out. I reclined once more. The tears in my eyes didn't blur my sight of the stars: if anything, they'd cleaned them, for I saw an even more beautiful galactic glow. I don't know how long I thoughtlessly admired the stars, but at some point, birds started singing, and the Sun's glow heralded its entrance.

END

Mini-Dissertation:

***“Sal jy my verstaan?”*: The  
representation of post-apartheid  
Afrikaner repudiation in  
Fokofpolisiekar lyrics.**



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the journalism article section of her Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies, L. Loubser describes a Fokofpolisiekar show at the Voortrekker Monument that she attended as follows:

Two young women stand on a low wall in front of us. Squeezing her eyes shut, one of them sings with religious fervour. “*Reguleer my, roetineer my, plaas my in ‘n boks en merk dit ‘veilig’.*” (Regulate me, routinise me, place me in a box and mark it ‘safe’<sup>1</sup>.) (Loubser 2014: 25)

There are similar reports of this “religious fervour” in fans of this controversial group of artists: in her Literature and Social Sciences Master’s dissertation, A. E. Klopper (2009) recounts how she got goosebumps when she first heard their song “Hemel Op Die Platteland”. Klopper also describes her experiences as a freelance journalist in the mid-2000s; she states:

*In my werk as vryskut-musiekjoernalis sedert 2004 het dit al hoe duideliker begin word dat Afrikaanse rock ontplof en dat duisende Afrikaanse jeugdige tydens rockkonserte die lirieke van Fokofpolisiekar kon saamsing (2009: 5).*

[In my work as a freelance music journalist since 2004 it became ever clearer that Afrikaans rock was exploding and that thousands of Afrikaner youths could sing Fokofpolisiekar lyrics at their concerts.]<sup>2</sup>

I myself first gave proper attention to the band in 2011 when I was 17 years old: a friend of mine, another passionate fan, explained to me that my ill-informed opinion of them was incorrect. I had only really heard my older brother listen to their song “Brand Suid-Afrika” before, and through the lyrics that I’d picked up in fragments, I assumed that they were saying that South Africa was “burning” because of poor governance of the post-apartheid regime. But at 17, my friend told me that the exact

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by L. Loubser.

<sup>2</sup>Afrikaans translated here and elsewhere by the author, R. Cruywagen, unless noted otherwise.

opposite was in fact true – that the song was an insult to those who complained about the country.

So, I began to pay attention, and found that this was the first music I had heard that expressed concepts and feelings that were directly related to how I felt in *my* situation as a “born-free” Afrikaner; the first at least that was in a format that I was drawn to – punk rock. By the time of my undergraduate years, I had familiarised myself with Fokofpolisiekar’s whole discography, and I went to many of their live performances and experienced this so-called “religious fervour” first-hand – and to some extent participated in the rites.

Fokofpolisiekar were almost certainly the first Afrikaans punk band who expressed the turmoil that post-apartheid Afrikaner youth were feeling, at least the first act that had a notable impact on their society; as Klopper states:

*[D]ie lirieke van Fokofpolisiekar [word gebruik] as gevallestudie en belangrike onlangse draaipuntmerker in Afrikaanse (en Suid-Afrikaanse) musiek (2009: 1).*

[[T]he lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar [are used] as a case study and important recent turning point in Afrikaans (and South African) music.]

The band can also be argued to have been influential on other musical acts who came after them, who also express the identity struggles of post-apartheid Afrikaners, such as Straatlig Kinders, Bittereinder and Die Heuwels Fantasties.

When the work of an artist, or group of artists in this case, connects so with their audience, it begs the question: what does the art express? As is illustrated in Klopper’s dissertation (2009), Fokofpolisiekar’s lyrics pertain heavily to their socio-political situation – Afrikaners born near the end of the Apartheid regime, faced with the guilt and reality of Apartheid as well as the imposed religious and Afrikaner culture values. Klopper identified the following major themes in their lyrics:

*Simptomaties van hierdie temas van identiteit en verlossing, kom die volgende temas ook voor in hul lirieke: geloof, vertwyfeling, verwarring, woede,*

*angstigheid, vasgekeerdheid, loutering deur vernietiging . . . asook ontnugtering en 'n verganklikheidsbewussyn (2009: 124).*

[Symptomatic of these themes of identity and liberation, the following themes are also apparent in their lyrics: religion, doubt, confusion, anger, angst, entrapment, purification through destruction . . . as well as disillusionment, and an awareness of transience.]

With regards to identity, Klopper states in her concluding chapter:

*[Dit is] duidelik dat die kwessie van verlossing en identiteit 'n brandende kwessie is wat ondersoek word in die lirieke van [Fokofpolisiekar] en dat dit teruggevoer kan word na die posisie van die Afrikanerjeug na afloop van die magsverlies van die Afrikaner (asook die fragmentering van identiteit in 'n postmoderne samelewing) (2009: 192).*

[[It is] clear that the issue of liberation and identity is a burning subject that is explored in the lyrics of [Fokofpolisiekar] and that it can be brought back to the position of the Afrikaner youth after the abolishment of apartheid and the power loss of the Afrikaners (as well as the fragmentation of identity in a postmodern society).]

Klopper's analysis deals extensively with the broad theme of identity, but makes little direct reference to the phenomenon of identity crisis, and how it may be present in the lyrics, though it is clear from her general analysis that the speaker of the lyrics struggles greatly with his identity and may very well suffer from a crisis of identity. A good example of lyrics that suggest this comes from the track "Tevrede?" from the album *Lugsteuring* (2004):

- 9 Die probleem is net dat
- 10 ek nie weet wie ek is nie
- 11 Hierdie gaan nog lank vat
- 12 Hierdie gaan nog seermaak

Translation:

- 9 The problem is just that
- 10 I don't know who I am
- 11 This is still going to take long
- 12 This is still going to hurt<sup>3</sup>

In her analysis of this song, Klopper observes:

*Te midde van hierdie postmoderne kits-era, beleef die spreker 'n identiteitskrisis . . . [wat 'n] uitgebreide en moeilike proses gaan wees . . . gee hy hom ook oor aan die omhelsing van sorgelose jonkwees (2009: 159).*

[In the midst of this postmodern instant-era, the speaker experiences an identity crisis . . . [which] will be extensive and difficult . . . he also gives himself over to the embrace of carefree youth.]

The group themselves have stated that they started the band because they were “no longer part of anything else” (“*nie meer deel van iets anders was nie*”)<sup>4</sup> (quoted in Retief 2006:10).

The term “identity crisis” was coined by renowned psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson; it comes from the fifth of his eight stages of psychosocial development of a healthy individual from infancy to late adulthood, which occurs during adolescence – these stages were first presented in his 1950 work *Childhood and Society*, and expanded upon in later works, notably in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) and *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (1986) (see Figure 1 for all the stages). Erikson states that the fifth stage involves “basic tensions between the development of a sense of psychosocial identity and its interplay with an unavoidable identity confusion” (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 35). Each of these stages’ successful completion results in what Erikson terms “adaptive strengths”. In the case of the fifth stage one acquires fidelity, which he describes as follows:

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<sup>3</sup>Here and elsewhere, unless stated otherwise, Fokopolisiekar lyrics are translated by the author, R. Cruywagen.

<sup>4</sup>Original newspaper article by Retief (2006) in Afrikaans, translated here and elsewhere by the author, R. Cruywagen.

[T]he ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems. It is the cornerstone of identity and receives inspiration from confirming ideologies and affirming companionships (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 35).

Erikson also theorises that these stages can be unsuccessfully navigated, leading to either maladaptation or malignancy (see Figure 2). He states:

Each of the major stages of development propose two seemingly contrary dispositions, which here are called syntonic and dystonic . . . [I]f there is a tendency to overdo and to overdevelop the syntonic predisposition in an attempt to let the dystonic wither away, the result may lead to maladaptation; and in the case of an overemphasis of the dystonic with a threatening loss of the syntonic, the result may be a turn toward malignancy (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 33, 40-41).

In other words, the maladaptation is a state of overdoing the virtue one is to gain, and malignancy is not gaining it at all, and developing the opposite of it. The maladaptive tendency Erikson ascribes for the adolescence stage is *fanaticism* and the malignancy is *repudiation*; he states that the adolescent must “repudiate some foreign values in order to focus his or her beliefs on some chosen ideology” and that “at stake in it all is a core of functioning fidelity, which must not disintegrate into maladaptive fanaticism or a malignant repudiation of otherness” (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 43).

Erikson’s term has since caught on in popular culture, and as a result has gained slightly different meanings, depending on the context. Oxford Reference defines it more broadly as “[a] state of confusion arising from an inability to reconcile conflicting aspects of one’s personality” (Oxford Reference 2021). Similarly, Collins Dictionary gives a definition not limited to adolescence either, but also not even limited to a person:

If you say that someone or something is having an identity crisis, you mean that it is not clear what kind of person or thing they are, or what kind of person or thing they would like to be (Collins English Dictionary 2021).

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the lyrics of select Fokofpolisiekar songs using the Eriksonian definition of identity crisis and repudiation; subthemes within the theme of identity, such as guilt, self-destructive behaviour and confusion are also given attention to, as well as how these themes relate to the social situation that the lyrics deal with. Erikson's theoretical framework is used because, despite being over 50 years old, it is still widely applied to this day; the title of Côté's 2018 research article sums this up perfectly: "The enduring usefulness of Erikson's concept of the identity crisis in the 21st century: An analysis of student mental health concerns". In it, Côté states that "Erikson's influence on the study of identity formation is undisputed" (2018: 1) and he finds that "Erikson's writings about the identity crisis can shed considerable light on what is commonly referred to as the student mental health crisis" (2018: 10).

Erikson's framework for identity is apt for this study because it illustrates the potential repercussions associated with repudiation and wherefrom it could stem. Furthermore, focusing on his concept of repudiation provides the necessary focus for this mini-dissertation of limited scope.

The central argument of this dissertation is that the speaker in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics has an identity crisis – that he has developed the Eriksonian malignancy of repudiation; as will be shown in this study, he openly rejects and devalues the traditional Afrikaner values, such as Christianity and conformity, that he was born into, and tells of the damage such an upbringing has caused him and rejects the idea of conforming to what society thinks he should. He has therefore unsuccessfully navigated the adolescence stage and extended the crisis of identity.

In his Master of Arts dissertation in Sustainable Communities, M. Timms (2017) explored how "the works of Fokofpolisiekar deconstruct a homogeneous and nationalist Afrikaner identity and reconstruct a post-Apartheid, New South African, Afrikaner identity and narrative" (Timms 2017: 10). He found that "the works of

Fokofpolisiekar greatly deconstructed this identity, but “to a much lesser extent reconstructed” a new identity (Timms 2017: ii). Timms’ findings support the idea that the speaker in their lyrics displays fanatical repudiation, and has not successfully navigated Erikson’s fifth stage of development.

The analysis of these lyrics with regard to identity crisis and repudiation is valuable in that it paints a portrait of a significant subset of the Afrikaners born around the end of Apartheid, and provides insights into what they struggle with, how they view the world, and where they may take the Afrikaner culture in the future. In his book *The Troubled Afrikaner-tribe of South Africa*, Gabriel Louw states:

After the collapse of White rule in 1994, certain dogmatic views on Afrikaners and apartheid were formulated and propagated in a completely one-sided manner (2020: ii)

The findings in this study will therefore also contribute to the correction of this “one-sided” view of the Afrikaner culture, shedding light on the alternative Afrikaner subculture that Fokofpolisiekar represents.

L. Loubser conducted interviews with Afrikaners born after 1993 and found that Apartheid’s end resulted in a “profound dislocation in Afrikaner identifications” (2015: 46). Many participants stated that they still identify strongly as Afrikaners and see the Afrikaans language as worth protecting. She also found that the Christian faith was still very important to them, though there seems to be a strong trend of moving away from the more traditional Dutch Reformed Church towards newer, more charismatic Churches. Some participants admitted to struggling with racism.

At the time of writing this mini-dissertation, Fokofpolisiekar’s discography (ignoring live albums) comprises three full length albums, six extended plays (EPs) and a standalone single, which were released between 2003 and 2020. The band’s first release thus came about a decade after the end of Apartheid, when the members were in their twenties. As the band gained fame – as well as infamy with the controversies they stirred – and the members grew from their twenties to being



middle aged, the lyrics naturally underwent changes. These changes are also discussed in the analysis.

Following this introduction, the analysis of the lyrics with a focus on identity crisis will commence with a background chapter, in which the band's origins and career will be outlined, as well as the socio-political situation they found themselves in, as this is crucial to understanding the lyrics. Then, in the third chapter the analysis proper will be given. Finally, the fourth chapter is the conclusion, where the findings are reflected upon.

Before continuing, a case will briefly be made to justify the analysis of these lyrics, since some may doubt their validity as a form of literature. In an M.A. in Afrikaans, W. D. Nell (2014) analysed the lyrics, or "song texts", of Karen Zoid, Fokofpolisiekar, The Buckfever Underground (and Toast Coetzer) and Bok van Blerk to determine their function and impact on South African youths' search for cultural identity; a side aim being to determine whether these lyrics are "significant works of literary quality" (Nell 2014: 3). In her findings she states:

*Dit is duidelik dat die bogenoemde kunstenaars se musiek en lirieke 'n groot bydrae gelewer het tot die ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse musiekbedryf (2003: 103).*

[It is clear that the abovementioned artists contributed significantly to the development of the Afrikaans music industry.]

And with regards to the question of literary quality of lyrics, she concludes:

*In baie van die genoemde artikels wat die moontlike insluiting van lirieke in die literêre sisteem ondersoek, is daar dikwels vraagstellings . . . : Is roksangers ons nuwe digters? (2003 109).*

[In many of the abovementioned articles which investigate the possible inclusion of lyrics in the literary system, there are often questions . . . : Are rockstars our new poets?]

Klopper investigates the status of lyrics as literature: she finds that common arguments for the role lyrics play in the South African literature system are “relevance, accessibility and articulation of the socio-political period” (2009: 85) and in her conclusion states:

*Deur die polisisteamteorie in te span, is daar bewys dat lirieke vanuit ’n teoretiese oogpunt as deel van die literêre sisteem beskou kan word. Lirieke moet egter nie afgespeel word teen poësie nie, maar lirieke moet beskou word as sigself (2009: 85).*

[Through the polysystem theory it is proved that lyrics can be regarded as part of the literature system, from a theoretical point of view. However, lyrics must not be compared to poetry, but should be regarded in their own right.]

Like the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar, my own novel, *Holo Meta Bolus* – the creative component of this M.A. in Creative Writing – addresses the theme of post-apartheid Afrikaner identity crisis; it describes episodes in the life of a 19-year-old who has become disillusioned with conservative Afrikaner culture, and adopts several different identities.

### PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES OF LIFE

8: Old age								Integrity vs. Despair. WISDOM
7: Adulthood								Generativity vs. Self-Absorption. CARE
6: Young Adulthood								Intimacy vs. Isolation. LOVE
5: Adolescence								Identity vs. Confusion. FIDELITY
4: School age								Industry vs. Inferiority. COMPETENCE
3: Play age								Initiative vs. Guilt. Purpose
2: Early Childhood								Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt WILL
1: Infancy								Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust. HOPE

**Figure 1.** Reproduced from Chart 1 in *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 36). Each stage has a conflict that is to be resolved as well as the virtue gained upon the successful completion of the stage.

<b>Maladaptive Tendency</b>	<b>Adaptive Strength</b>			<b>Malignant Tendency</b>
I. (Sensory Mal adjustment)	Trust	HOPE	Mistrust	(Withdrawal)
II. (Shameless Willfulness)	Autonomy	WILL	Shame / Doubt	(Compulsion)
III. (Ruthlessness)	Initiative	PURPOSE	Guilt	(Inhibition)
IV. (Narrow Virtuosity)	Industriousness	COMPETENCE	Inferiority	(Inertia)
V. (Fanaticism)	Identity Cohesion	FIDELITY	Role Confusion	(Repudiation)
VI. (Promiscuity)	Intimacy	LOVE	Isolation	(Exclusivity)
VII. (Over Extension)	Generativity	CARE	Stagnation	(Rejectivity)
VIII. (Presumption)	Integrity	WISDOM	Despair	(Disdain)

**Figure 2.** Reproduced from Chart 2 in *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 45). This figure enriches the information of Chart 1 with the addition of a maladaptive and malignant tendency for each stage.

## Chapter 2: The band and their environment

As is observed in Klopper's general analysis of Fokofpolisiekar's lyrics, they relate strongly to their social situation; she states:

*Daar is in hierdie studie bewys dat die spesifieke sosiopolitieke konteks waarin die Afrikaanse musiek van die afgelope anderhalf dekade geskep is, gemanifesteer het in dié musiek [Fokofpolisiekar s'n] se lirieke (2009: 192).*

[It has been proved in this study that the specific socio-political context wherein Afrikaans music of the past decade and a half was created, manifested itself in this music's [Fokofpolisiekar's] lyrics].

It is therefore important to give an overview of this socio-political context – their environment. The band members, all from Afrikaans households in Belville, Western Cape (Klopper 2011) are Francois Van Coke (lead vocals), Johnny de Ridder (lead guitar), Hunter Kennedy (rhythm guitar and back-up vocals), Wynand Myburgh (bass) and Jaco "Snakehead" Venter (drums) ("About - FOKOFPOLISIEKAR", 2021). The lyrics were, at first, written by both Kennedy and Van Coke (Wiechers 2005), but from *Monoloog In Stereo* (2005) onwards Kennedy became the primary lyricist (De Villiers 2008). Venter is the youngest, born in 1982, and Myburgh the oldest, born in 1978 (Klopper 2011), thus all were between 12 and 16 when apartheid was officially abolished in 1994. Being in their teenage years when a massive shift in the power structure of their home country occurred had a profound impact on these individuals and their peers; in the documentary *Johnny en die Maaiers* (Kapp & Beukes 2008) Van Coke says:

*In Suid-Afrika is daar seker baie dinge wat... mens weet nie wat die future in hou nie. Alles het al verander teen die tyd wat ons groot geword het.*

[In South Africa there's probably many things that... one doesn't know what the future holds. Everything had changed by the time we had grown up.]

In the same film Karen Zoid, another popular musician and contemporary of the band, puts it so:

*Wat gebeur het is, toe die poletiek veranderinge gebeur, toe moes ons actually ons identiteit gaan soek, want voor dit was mense se identitiet vir hulle gegee.*

[What happened is, when the politics changed, we had to actually search for our identity, because before that people's identities were given to them.]

Her words, "people's identities were given to them", allude to the authoritarian nature and censorship of the National Party that was in power during the Apartheid years, which was well-known for its measures to try and manipulate and control the general public; here are the key statutory provisions of The Publications Act, 1963 passed under their rule:

- 5 (2) A publication or object shall be deemed to be undesirable if it or any part of it-
- a) is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals;
  - b) is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic;
  - c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt;
  - d) is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic;
  - e) is prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order (quoted in McDonald 2010)

Despite these measures, however, near the end of their rule, in 1989, a music movement called Voëlvry began, whose lyrics were anti-apartheid and Afrikaans. This was quite revolutionary; as Grundlingh puts it in his essay:

[F]or the first time full blown rock and roll with biting social commentary was seen to challenge the generally perceived staid and shackled Afrikaans cultural and political world (2005: 3).

The movement had the agenda of promoting an Afrikaner identity that was different from the traditional one; in her M.A research report, Pienaar writes:

The Voëlvryers publicly expressed the view that they were there to challenge the more restrictive aspects of mainstream Afrikaner identity and culture. [Koos Kombuis] said that he was “trying to clear out some of the negative kak [crap] that exists in our culture”. These musicians consciously sought to show that the non-Afrikaner view of Afrikaners as right wing, oppressive and oppressed purists was very limited and that the reality was that there were many people who considered themselves as Afrikaners but were not right-wing, stringent Calvinists (2012: 18).

The National Party banned the musicians, which backfired and made them very popular among the Afrikaner youth of the time; as primary member of the movement, Koos Kombuis, puts it in *Johnny en die Maaiers*:

*Toe die Voëlvry toer begin het was dit net 'n klomp ouens wat simpel songs sing, en daar was altyd die gevaar dat ons deur die woodwork gaan val. Toe maak die regering 'n moerse fout en begin ban ons van kampusse, en die publicity het... die volgende oomblik was dit op die oorsese TV (quoted in Kapp & Beukes 2008).*

[When the Voëlvry tour began it was just a group of guys that sang stupid songs, and there was always this danger that we'd fall through the woodwork. Then the government made a massive mistake and started banning us from campuses, and the publicity it... the next moment it was on international TV.]

The movement was thus a source of respite from the identity confusion that many Afrikaners were experiencing as Apartheid was falling apart and the truth about what was going on in the country was setting in: here was music in Afrikaans that had a

message of equality – they showed that it was still acceptable to be Afrikaans. As is stated in Grundlingh’s essay:

The ‘Voëlvry’ tour indirectly paved the way for us – the generation that still played marbles in the eighties while the country was burning – to tackle the future without the chains, the stresses and the angst of the past (2005: 21).

Unsurprisingly, members of Fokofpolisiekar cite the movement as highly influential on their music. Kennedy states:

*[D]it het dit moontlik gemaak vir mense soos ons om . . . die taal te kan gebruik op nuwe maniere* (quoted in Kapp & Beukes 2008).

[[I]t made it possible for people like us to . . . be able to use the language in new ways.]

Similarly, Myburgh also says:

*[A]s hulle nie bestaan het nie sou ek nooit . . . gedoen het wat ek nou doen nie* (quoted in Kapp & Beukes 2008).

[[I]f they didn’t exist I would never have . . . done what I now do.]

Despite the Voëlvry movement, as teenagers the members of Fokofpolisiekar did not turn to music, but rather turned to religion first in their search for the identity loss that came with the end of Afrikaner nationalism; they left the more traditional Dutch Reformed Church (a.k.a. NG church) in favour of the more charismatic Focal Point Church, where most members met each other (Wiechers 2005). In an interview, Van Coke states:

*[T]oe was daar hierdie revival. Groot paarties waar moerse baie kinders bekeerd geraak het. Christen death metal en punk bands* (quoted in Wiechers 2005).



[[T]hen there was this revival. Big parties where many kids got converted. Christian death metal and punk bands.]

To this Kennedy adds:

*[O]ns was heavy involved. Ons het worship gelei in die kerk . . . dit was 'n full-on mense-gooi-hulle-hande-in-die-lug, praat-in-tale, healings tipe van vibe. As ons jou toe ontmoet het, sou ons jou probeer bekeer het* (quoted in Wiechers 2005).

[[W]e were heavily involved. We led the worshipping in the church . . . it was full-on people-throw-their-hands-in-the-air, talk-in-tongues, healings type of vibe. If we met you then, we would have tried to convert you.]

Van Coke and Kennedy started one of the Christian punk bands that was associated with this revival – New World Order – this is how Van Coke “got into punk” (quoted in Brümmer 2004). Their identities as enthusiastic Christians were, however, abandoned after three years in this scene, and they were left spiritually harmed; as Van Coke puts it:

*Ons praat nogals baie daaroor, oor hoe daai kerk ding ons spiritualisme 'n dip gevat het. Hoe ver dit ons van die pad af gelei het* (quoted in Wiechers 2005).

[We talk quite a lot about it, about how that church thing made our spirituality take a dip. How far it led us off the path.]

In the documentary *Fokofpolisiekar: Forgive Them For They Know Not What They Do*, Kennedy says that they “felt cheated”, and “wanted to drop any sort of Calvinistic indoctrination”, and in the same film Myburgh goes on to say that after that scene let them down they “weren’t happy with anything at all” (quoted in Little 2009).

With this mindset, in April 2003 Fokofpolisiekar was started. Van Coke states: “[I]t was always a joke that we were going to start an Afrikaans band” (quoted in Little 2009), but despite this attitude the band quickly gained significant attention: their first single “Hemel op die platteland” was the first Afrikaans song to receive considerable

playtime on long-established radio station 5FM, which music journalist Theunis Engelbrecht calls a “breakthrough for Afrikaans music” (2004).

Like the music of Voëlvry that came before them, their controversial lyrics regarding the Church and traditional Afrikaner values gained much media attention, and gave voice to how many of their contemporaries felt; as musician Valiant Swart puts it:

*Daar was mense wat gewag het vir iemand om uit te kom en te sê, ‘dit is hoe dit is vir ons’* (quoted in Little 2009).

[There were people who had been waiting for someone to come out and say, ‘*this* is how it is for us’.]

This meant that the band quickly gained a cult following; in *Fokofpolisiekar: Forgive Them For They Know Not What They Do* their friend Arno Kruger states:

*Op hierdie stadium, ek dink ken mense die musiek op so level dat hulle harder as die musiek somtyds saam sing* (quoted in Little 2009).

[At this stage, I think people know the music on such a level that they sometimes sing louder than the music.]

Along with many references to their rejection of Christianity in their lyrics, part of the band’s aesthetic presentation has always included using warped Christian imagery; at their first shows the band already sold shirts depicting a Christ-figure with bats flying around it (Figure 3), and at their performance at the 2004 KKNK festival they gave songbooks similar to what one would receive at South African Calvinistic churches, but with their lyrics in them – and Van Coke imitated a pastor when using these (Klopper 2009).

Their lyrics and aesthetics were never outright anti-Christian; as artist manager Dominique Gawlowski puts it:

Fokofpolisiekar had really done a brilliant tight rope act of . . . not committing to anything about how they felt about that particular department (quoted in Little 2009).

This changed however, in 2006 with what has become to be known as the “Fok-God” incident. After a show in Witbank, as usual the members partied at the venue and got drunk. Myburgh began having a discussion with fellow musician Bobby van Jaarsveld about religion in the early hours of the morning. Myburgh states: “We got a bit irritated with each other and the way that we believe” (quoted in Little 2009). Soon after this, Bobby’s friend gave Myburgh his wallet to sign; annoyed with the prior discussion, he wrote “*FOK GOD*” (“FUCK GOD”) on the wallet instead of his signature (Klopper 2009). In Little’s documentary, van Jaarsveld states:

*Toe ek daar wegry was dit vir my klaar – ons het klaar gefight, dit was vir my verby ek wil nooit weer van die storie hoor nie* (quoted in Little 2009).

[When I drove away from there it was done for me – we were done fighting, it was over for me, I never want to hear about the story again.]

However, when Bobby’s mother was told, she sent an e-mail “just to pray for them” (quoted in Little 2009). Very quickly the major newspapers got hold of the story and gave it significant coverage and that led to much debate around them and the issue (see Burger 2006; Jackson 2006; Nel 2006a; Nel 2006b; and Retief 2006). This led to uproar amongst many members of the Christian community; there were attempts to cancel their shows (Nel 2006b), burning of CDs and even death threats (Little 2009). Kennedy claims:

We got . . . people phoning Wynand [Myburgh] and saying . . . ‘We’ve got recce friends who are fighting in Iraq, and we’ll get them to come and kill you’ (quoted in Little 2009).

The controversy took its toll on the band; their publicist, Liny Kruger, states that “it actually made them very tired – it emotionally drained them” (quoted in Little 2009). Wynand does however claim to have learnt from the incident and its repercussions:

If I think back now it was a positive thing. I think . . . that it changed me as a person, you know, the way I think about people . . . Put me in my place and made me realise that there's a lot of stuff you've got to keep to yourself (quoted in Little 2009).

Being exhausted from touring excessively from 2003 until 2007, as well as the stress of the Fok-God incident, the band decided in 2007 to go on hiatus for an “undetermined amount of time” (Klopper 2011). All members went on to start new bands, namely Die Heuwels Fantasties, aKING and Van Coke Kartel, and they were not sure if the hiatus would ever end. However, they soon found that this would not be the case; in a biography of the band by Klopper, Myburgh explains:

*Ná vyf jaar se harde werk kon ons gaan stil sit en sien hoe Fokofpolisiekar vanself operate. Ek dink dit het ons confidence gegee in die projek en ons het gesien ons kan nog steeds bietjie stilsit en shows doen it enjoy* (quoted in Klopper 2011: 208).

[After five years of hard work we could go and sit still and see how Fokofpolisiekar operates on its own. I think it also gave all of us confidence in the project and we saw that we can still take a break for a bit and do shows and enjoy it.]

Spurred on by this revelation, the band briefly returned from hiatus to release the EP *Antibiotika* in 2008; in the video *Antibiotika – Making the EP* Myburgh states:

*Ek personally is nogal excited om die nuwe songs te gaan gig, jy weet, en om die mense se reaksies te sien* (quoted in The African Attachment 2008).

[I'm personally quite excited to go and gig the new songs, you know, and to see the people's reactions.]

The next release by the band was in 2014 – a standalone single named 'Paranoia'. Of the song, Kennedy says:

We've spent our careers breaking down previously held opinions and stereotypes of Afrikaners to establish a new identity. That identity is not fully formed yet and I think a big part of forming that identity will be for Afrikaners to accept their 'Africanness'. Afrikaners are the ones alienating themselves. Paranoia is one of the side-effects of not understanding who you are and where you fit in (quoted in "Fokofpolisiekar surprises fans with new single and free download", 2014).

With this quotation we already have direct evidence from the band's primary lyricist that their work aims to reconstruct the Afrikaner identity. This also implies that the members are not satisfied with the more traditional, stereotypical Afrikaner identity, at least not as an identity they wish to follow.

In the same interview, Kennedy goes on to say that the song "will set the concept of the album", implying another LP was in the works. The next album, *Selfmedikasie*, only came three years later in 2017, however. Prior to its creation, the band launched a crowdfunding campaign to determine whether "fans would be interested in a traditional full-length album at all", according to Kennedy (quoted in Lotz 2017). Their goal was R500 000, but they ended up getting over R1 000 000 from their dedicated fanbase (Watkykij 2017). Of the album Kennedy says:

*Ons . . . probeer ietsie anders doen as wat ons normaalweg gedoen het . . . gaan vir n bietjie van 'n meer grungerige vibe (quoted in Watkykij 2017).*

[We . . . are trying to do something different to what we normally did . . . going for more of a grungy vibe.]

Reviews of the album tend to agree that it is less aggressive and angry compared to their previous work, with it being described as "much softer than the previous" albums (Brown 2017) and having a "more mature feel to it" (Beetar 2017). The following release, the EP *Droom Hoog* (2018), saw reviewers also stating that like *Selfmedikasie* it is not as heavy as their pre-hiatus work (Hughes, 2018), with one reviewer remarking that it had a "smoother, poppier sound" ("Fokofpolisiekar - Droom Hoog", 2019). Of the EP, Myburgh says:

It all happened very fast and we just kept on trusting each other and the process. We are proud of the new songs and I hope that people will enjoy it as much as we do (quoted in "FOKOPOLISIEKAR: New Music / New Fokof Lager Box / New Exhibition" 2018).

The band's latest release, at the time of writing this, is the *Kajuitkoors* EP (2020). The title translates to "Cabin Fever", and most of the tracks on it refer to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic; Kennedy says: "Initially I didn't want to write about the glaringly obvious situation, but then I gave in" (quoted in Strydom 2020). The sound of the EP harkens back to their "punk roots" according to reviews (Strydom 2020; Ciolfi 2020); Kennedy elaborates:

During the lockdown my hatred for authority was reignited . . . I feel like we are free-range people living on a tax farm. It reminded me of high school, so I'm glad that the EP has a '90s punk-college rock sound (quoted in Ciolfi 2020).

His words imply that, prior to the lockdown, he'd come to some level of peace with authority at some point; indeed, the less aggressive tone of the band's later albums can be seen as evidence of their letting go of some of the anger that was so evident in their early work. This is also illustrated in the epilogue of Klopper's biography of them, where Kennedy says:

*Ek dink regtig daaroor, bands soos Slayer of so. Hoe fokken bly jy so kwaad? . . . Maar ek dink dis wat befok is van Fokopolisiekar . . . want ons was half kwaad en toe doen ons die Monoloog-ding en dis net soos whatever dit is (quoted in Klopper 2011: 214).*

[I really think a lot about it, bands like Slayer or so. How the fuck do you stay so angry? . . . But I think that's what's so fucking cool about Fokopolisiekar . . . because we were half-angry and then we did the *Monoloog*-thing, and it's just like whatever it is.]

The general consensus among reviewers that the band's sound became less angry after their hiatus, as well as the quotation above where Kennedy reveals that he could not perpetuate the anger that he felt in the past, both suggest that the band may have overcome their repudiation and identity crisis at some point during their careers. Indeed, I will provide evidence in the following chapter, through the analysis of their lyrics, that this is likely indeed the case.



**Figure 3.** Shirt with same logo as this was sold at early shows, depicting Christ with bats flying behind. Named “Classic Logo” on the band’s website (“Shirts & Tops — FOKOFPOLISIEKAR”, 2021).

### Chapter 3: Repudiation in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics

In his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Erikson theorises that “childhood proper comes to an end” as the fifth stage of development begins (around puberty), after the “establishment of good relationship to the world of skills and to those who teach and share new skills” (1959: 94). What he terms “youth” supposedly begins then with the individual becoming aware of society for the first time; he states:

The growing and developing young people, faced with this psychological revolution within them, are now primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating their social roles. They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are (Erikson 1959: 94).

It was during this fifth stage that the members of Fokofpolisiekar were faced with the stresses of Apartheid coming to an end: the shift in power in their country and having to question the morality of their culture – their society. As is observed in chapter two of this study, the members sought comfort in religion in the form of a charismatic Christian church, but this did not help and instead “made [their] spirituality take a dip” (quoted in Wiechers 2005).

According to Erikson’s framework, the sixth stage, Intimacy vs. Isolation, is around young adulthood, when we start to “work or study for a specified career” (Erikson 1959: 100-101). It was during this stage that the members started Fokofpolisiekar. I argue here that due to the stresses of their social-political circumstances, the members did not successfully navigate the fifth stage, which resulted in the malignancy of repudiation, as Erikson’s theory predicts. To support this claim, I will provide evidence from the band’s lyrics, that were, no doubt, an outlet for the way they felt.

This analysis aimed toward providing evidence for repudiation is organised into four subheadings, namely *Rejection of traditional Afrikaner values*, *Self-destructive behaviour*, *Feeling of not belonging*, and *Mental turmoil*.



A second argument of this chapter is that the speaker eventually overcomes his repudiation, and enters Erikson's sixth stage proper, and I will provide evidence for this by analysing lyrics largely from the later part of their career – from *Selfmedikasie* onwards. This analysis is organised into the following four subheadings: *The Fok-God incident's influence*, *Healthier psychological state*, *Intimate relationships* and *Acceptance of society*.

It must be noted that the analysis in this mini-dissertation takes the lyrics in isolation from the music that accompanies it, not because the instrumental section of the art is not important to the interpretation of the lyrics, but rather for simplicity's sake and to focus on the meaning of the text in its pure form. All that will be made note of is that the vocal delivery of the lyrics is mostly in the form of angry shouting; the songs are mostly in the minor key, i.e. they generally sound sad or angry; and the instrumentation is usually loud, energetic and rough, with softer sections in between. These aspects link with the idea that the speaker is undergoing inner turmoil. It must also be noted that the lyrics come either from the physical release's booklet or from the band's official website.

Finally, it must be noted that for the translation of the lyrics into English, I tried to keep as close to the original meaning of the lyrics as possible. In other words, the translation subordinates rhyming, metre, or other poetic devices to meaning.

Songs were selected on the basis of evidence for identity crisis / repudiation and overcoming these, as well as the uniqueness of this evidence. Another, less important factor was whether or not Klopper analysed the song in her M.A. dissertation – songs she did not analyse were given preference in order to compliment her analysis.

## Evidence for Repudiation

### Rejection of traditional Afrikaner values

Showing a desire to not take part in key aspects of one's culture is strong evidence of repudiation; as Erikson states:

The loss of a sense of identity often is expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the roles offered as proper and desirable by one's family or immediate community (Erikson 1959: 139).

The first song's lyrics I will analyse is their first hit, "Hemel op die platteland", from their debut release, the EP *As jy met vuur speel sal jy brand* (2003); in it the speaker exemplifies this "snobbish hostility" towards the traditional Afrikaner mindset.

### **Hemel op die platteland**

- 1 kan jy my skroewe vir my vasdraai?
- 2 kan jy my albasters vir my vind?
- 3 kan jy jou idee van normaal by jou gat opdruk?
- 4 kan jy apatie spel? kan iemand dalk 'n god bel
- 5 en vir hom sê ons het hom nie meer nodig nie
- 6 kan jy apatie spel?
- 7 reguleer my, roetineer my
- 8 plaas my in 'n boks en merk dit veilig
- 9 stuur my dan waarheen al die dose gaan
- 10 stuur my hemel toe ek dink dis in die platteland
- 11 dis hemel op die platteland

Translation:

### **Heaven in the countryside**

- 1 can you tighten my screws?
- 2 can you find my marbles?
- 3 can you stick your idea of normal up your ass?
- 4 can you spell apathy? can someone perhaps phone a god
- 5 and tell him that we don't need him anymore
- 6 can you spell apathy?
- 7 regulate me, routinise me
- 8 put me in a box and mark it safe
- 9 then send me where all the boxes/jerks go
- 10 send me to heaven I think it's in the countryside
- 11 it's heaven in the countryside

This song has no rhyming whatsoever, and no discernible structural pattern; this could be because the lyricists wanted as little as possible to distract from the message of the lyrics. As we will see, this is a common tactic used in Fokofpolisiekar's repertoire.

The lyrics open with six rhetorical questions. While the first two of these – “*kan jy my skroewe vir my vasdraai? / kan jy my albasters vir my vind?*” (“can you tighten my screws? / can you find my marbles?”) (lines 1 and 2) – imply the speaker's unsound mental state, the remainder of the rhetorical questions deal with rejection of their immediate community.

The third rhetorical question – “*kan jy jou idee van normaal by jou gat opdruk?*” (“can you stick your idea of normal up your ass?”) (line 3) – is aggressive and anti-establishment: the speaker rejects what is perceived as normal – likely by their society, the Afrikaners.

The following question – “*kan jy apatie spel?*” (“can you spell apathy?”) (line 4) – could at first seem like a non sequitur, but there are plausible links. By asking if one can spell apathy, the speaker implies that he is apathetic, which gives us further insight into what mental struggles he is dealing with. Another implication is that whomever the speaker is asking is apathetic; this would probably be society, keeping the preceding question in mind. Yet another implication is that the speaker is mocking the intelligence of the one he is asking, or his own, being unable to spell the somewhat highfalutin word.

The fifth rhetorical question – “*kan iemand dalk 'n god bel / en vir hom sê ons het hom nie meer nodig nie*” (“can someone perhaps phone a god / and tell him that we don't need him anymore”) (lines 4 and 5) – is the first to span more than one line, emphasising it. The question includes a statement that is quite obviously anti-religious – he states that they don't need “a god” anymore. We know that prior to starting the band, the members had decided to cut Christianity completely out of their lives, so it seems highly likely that the Christian God is one of the gods they are ambiguously referring to, but it is worded in such a way that it can be open to different interpretations through the inclusion of the word “*n*” (“a”) (line 4).

Finally, the sixth rhetorical question, in line 6, is a repetition of the fourth (line 4). Now the apathy must be related to religion; a conclusion one could draw is that the speaker is apathetic towards religion – this is in agreement with the preceding line, however it could also imply that the speaker’s general apathy towards life, a form of depression, is due to religion.

An effect of using rhetorical questions in these opening lines is that it causes the speaker to seem mocking and gives the impression that he feels he is superior, perhaps because of his rejection of normal society.

After these rhetorical questions, lines 7 to 10 are all requests by the speaker; they are probably sarcastic, because they involve the “normal” and conformist things that he challenges in line 3. Furthermore, regulation, routinisation (line 7) and placing one in a box (line 8) are all forms of taking away the freedom and individuality which, as we have determined from lines 3-5, are clearly important to the speaker. The words “*merk dit veilig*” (“mark it safe”) (line 8) may allude to the authoritarian Apartheid regime the members of the band were born into, which went to great efforts to suppress anyone they considered dangerous to their authority, as well as the generally strict and conservative parenting one tends to find in traditional Afrikaner households.

Line 9 – “*stuur my dan waarheen al die dose gaan*” (“then send me where all the boxes/jerks go”) – features wordplay: instead of using the word “*boks*” (“box”) again, the synonym “*doos*” is used, which is also an insult that translates as jerk; “then send me where all the boxes go” can also be translated as “send me where all the jerks go”. This, in conjunction with the line that follows it – “send me to heaven” (line 10) – is again an insult to religious people (albeit with plausible deniability with the ambivalence of the word “*doos*”) – implying that all who follow the Christian lifestyles, to gain access to a supposed heaven, are jerks. The final two lines can be seen as mocking the Boer’s love of the countryside, while also claiming the nonreality of the Christian heaven by inferring that the countryside is all we have, in reality.

The speaker’s proclamation that the countryside is heaven, i.e. very pleasant, is somewhat ironic: he seemingly rejects his society – the Afrikaners – and their values such as conformity and religion throughout the lyrics, however he still shares their love

of nature and the rural areas. This implies that he has not abandoned his birth culture completely. Whether the speaker is aware of this contradiction is unclear. If he does not, it is indicative of the inner turmoil he discloses in lines 1 and 2. If he is, however, it can be seen as a statement that he wishes to salvage what he deems worthy from his society and discard that which he doesn't – that traditional Afrikaner society doesn't own the countryside. If love of nature and the countryside are things he wishes to hold on to, another Afrikaner aspect that he does not wish to do away with is quite clearly the Afrikaans language itself; these lyrics, as with those in their other songs, respect the language in that they use correct Afrikaans: their lyrics boast an impressive lexicon, and almost never include any English slang, which is common in Afrikaans pop music.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the speaker is strongly opposed to conformity and religion – two very important values to traditional Afrikaner culture. These views are expressed again in the band's release following *As jy met vuur speel sal jy brand, Lugsteuring* (2004); the song "Bid vir my" is the example I will analyse next.

### **Bid vir my**

- 1 ek voel veilig as ek verlore is
- 2 ek voel bang as ek lê
- 3 vir daai man sonder naam
- 4 wat op elke drumpel van elke deurkosyn staan
- 5 fok jou
- 6 fok jou
- 7 ek fokkin weet ek is verkeerd
- 8 ten minste probeer ek om my self te oorreed
- 9 dat daar iets beter vir ons is
- 10 ek wil spontaan aan die brand slaan
- 11 ek word konstant bewus gemaak
- 12 waarheid en vrede het jy lankal uit my woordeskat gekrap
- 13 ek fokkin weet dit is verkeerd
- 14 bid vir my
- 15 bid vir weerlig in die reën

Translation:

## Pray for me

- 1 I feel safe when I'm lost
- 2 I feel afraid when I lie down
- 3 to that man without name
- 4 that stands on every threshold of every door frame
- 5 fuck you
- 6 fuck you
- 7 I fucking know I am wrong
- 8 at least I'm trying to convince myself
- 9 that there's something better for us
- 10 I want to spontaneously set alight
- 11 I'm constantly made aware
- 12 truth and peace you long ago scratched out of my vocabulary
- 13 I fucking know it is wrong
- 14 pray for me
- 15 pray for lightning in the rain

This song, like “Hemel op die platteland” lacks structure, but differs in that there are instances of rhyming and alliteration, albeit sparse and without pattern. Furthermore, unlike in “Hemel op die platteland”, the speaker in “Bid vir my” shows self-awareness when it comes to his feelings and mindset; that he is not simply indulging in his anger and lack of satisfaction with his society – he tries to explain himself better.

The opening line – “*ek voel veilig as ek verlore is*” (“I feel safe when I’m lost”) seems paradoxical, however line 2 – “*ek voel bang as ek lê*” (“I feel afraid when I lie down”) – serves to offer some explanation to it: the speaker may imply that he cannot simply accept his birth culture – he cannot lie down and ignore the wrongs of his society, and so feels more at ease being lost than following their ways.

Lines 3 and 4 – “*vir daai man sonder naam / wat op elke drumpel van elke deurkosyn staan*” (“to that man without name / that stands on every threshold of every door frame”) – contain imagery of man that is blocking the way through a doorway – this nameless man is possibly a personification of authority dictating who can go where – closing

“doors” – taking away opportunities and freedom. Lines 5 and 6 that follow – “*fok jou*” (“fuck you”) – make clear what the speaker thinks of authority like this.

With lines 7 to 9 – “*ek fokkin weet ek is verkeerd / ten minste probeer ek om my self te oorreed / dat daar iets beter vir ons is*” (“I fucking know I am wrong / at least I’m trying to convince myself / that there’s something better for us”), the speaker shows that he is aware that he does not have a healthy mindset, but he simply cannot conform to the old ways, and this is the only alternative to seeking a different way.

In her analysis of the lyrics, Klopper observes many instances of the image of purification and rebirth through fire – the phoenix metaphor (2009); line 7 – “*ek wil spontaan aan die brand slaan*” (“I want to spontaneously set alight”) – is an example of the use of this metaphor. It links with both the speaker’s desire to self-destruct as well as his desire to completely reform the Afrikaner culture. The following line – “*ek word konstant bewus gemaak*” (“I’m constantly made aware”) (line 8) – implies that these are things that constantly prey on the speaker’s mind – he is obsessed with it.

In line 12 – “*waarheid en vrede het jy lankal uit my woordeskat gekrap*” (“truth and peace you long ago scratched out of my vocabulary”) – the speaker is likely addressing the older generation: telling them that he cannot act any other way because of their lies and his upbringing at their hands. Line 13 – “*ek fokkin weet dit is verkeerd*” (“I fucking know it is wrong”) – is a repetition of line 7, except the word “*ek*” (“I”) is replaced with “*dit*” (“it”); this could change it to mean that the speaker knows the older generation is wrong as well, in their supposedly erroneous and controlling ways.

Line 14 is the titular “*bid vir my*” (“pray for me”); this links with the traditional Afrikaner being a devout Calvinist and the church often implores its members to pray for others, like irreligious individuals such as the speaker. An obvious interpretation is that the speaker is sarcastic, but perhaps there is a part of him that still clings to the possibility of religion. He is aware that his mindset is destructive to himself, but he cannot do otherwise, so he asks for those who are still religious to pray for him, because he is unable to.

The final line – “*bid vir weerlig in die reën*” (“pray for lightning in the rain”) – has strong farming connotations, prominent in Boer culture: Afrikaner farmers are known to pray for rain, but to pray for lightning in the rain is possibly to ask for excitement in their bland, conforming life. Another possibility is that the speaker wishes the one who prays to be struck by the lightning, because of his dislike of him or her.

The speaker’s repudiation in the form of rejection of his immediate society is once again clear in “Bid vir my”, however the fact that he shows some awareness of his repudiation is a sign that he is perhaps not doomed to this so-called malignancy, and indeed it foreshadows the evidence that will later be provided that he overcomes it.

“Bid vir my” is the opening track on *Lugsteuring*, and the next song I will analyse is “Tiny Town”, which closes the album. It also exhibits the speaker’s rejection of his immediate society, albeit in a somewhat different manner.

### **Tiny Town**

- 1 in wrede woede het ek die
- 2 hand wat beheer gebyt
- 3 verwyd myself op harder en harder grond neer gesmyt
- 4 dis nou ek wat die leiband lei
- 5 te veel verskeur om sulke argumente ernstig op te neem
- 6 miskien is niks soos wat ek dink dit is nie
- 7 my greep op my geloof glip gereeld
- 8 my wonde wonder waar genesing kom vandaan
- 9 soet slaap sonder sonde vanaand
- 10 miskien is niks soos wat jy dink dit is nie
- 11 jou greep op jou geloof glip gereeld
- 12 jou wonde wonder waar genesing kom vandaan
- 13 soet slaap sonder sonde vanaand

Translation:

### **Tiny Town**

- 1 in fierce anger I
- 2 bit the hand that controls



- 3 reproached threw myself on harder and harder ground
- 4 it's now me that leads the leash
- 5 too torn to take such arguments seriously
- 6 maybe nothing is as I think it is
- 7 my grip on my faith slips regularly
- 8 my wounds wonder where healing comes from
- 9 sweet sleep without sin tonight
- 10 maybe nothing is as you think it is
- 11 your grip on your faith slips regularly
- 12 your wounds wonder where healing comes from
- 13 sweet sleep without sin tonight

It is probable that the speaker is in his teenage years in this song; the song has youthful connotations, including its being very short and having lullaby-like qualities: its calm musical nature, use of more rhyming and alliteration than most other Fokofpolisiekar songs, and its reference to “sweet sleep” (*“soet slaap”*) (lines 9 and 13). Furthermore, the song details the speaker becoming disillusioned with his society and questioning his reality, suggesting that he is still in the process of becoming fully repudiant.

Lines 1 and 2 – *“in wrede woede het ek die hand wat beheer gebyt”* (“In fierce anger I / bit the hand that controls”) – use a biting metaphor to show us that the speaker decided to intensely reject authority. This metaphor may intend to evoke imagery of a dog attacking its owner, which implies that the speaker feels he was treated as a pet rather than a human in his upbringing.

Line 3 – *“verwyf myself op harder en harder grond neer gesmyt”* (“reproached threw myself on harder and harder ground”) – however, shows that this retaliation led to his self-deprecating and self-harming tendencies – that he began to “reproach” and “threw [himself] on harder and harder ground”, meaning he put himself down psychologically and possibly also refers to his turning to the abuse of alcohol that will be evident in the song “Vernietig jousef”.

Line 4 – *“dis nou ek wat die leiband lei”* (“it’s now me that leads the leash”) – seems like a consolation for this anger and unhealthy state of mind: he is at least in control. The

fact that he still wears the “leash”, however, implies that he is not actually free, and that it is a farce. Finally, line 5 – *“te veel verskeur om sulke argumente ernstig op te neem”* (“too torn to take such arguments seriously”) – may disclose the apathy that he has developed, which previous songs like “Hemel op die platteland” also mentioned. The speaker is clearly outspoken in the song, but does not argue probably because he sees no point – his apathy means he can’t be bothered to try to bring about change. An argument of this mini-dissertation is that the speaker indicates that he wishes to revolutionise the Afrikaner culture. This line apparently contradicts this. This may be because he is still young and has not yet developed this desire.

Line 6 – *“miskien is niks soos wat ek dink dit is nie”* (“maybe nothing is as I think it is”) – is perhaps a representative thought of the speaker in the process of becoming disillusioned with his society, and line 7 – *“my greep op my geloof glip gereeld”* (“my grip on my faith slips regularly”) – illustrates his gradual loss of Christianity. In line 8 – *“my wonde wonder waar genesing kom vandaan”* (“my wounds wonder where healing comes from”) – the speaker’s wounds are personified: they are able to “wonder”. This possibly implies that the speaker identifies with his pain as a teenager, and foreshadows his repudiation. Line 9 – *“soet slaap sonder sonde vanaand”* (“sweet sleep without sin tonight”) – may imply that the speaker, having discarded Christianity, is effectively sinless, because sin is a concept in that religion. There is an irony here, because to become without sin is a striving point for those of the Christian faith, and the speaker implies that he has achieved this goal by abandoning it altogether.

Lines 10 to 13 are a repetition of lines 5 to 9, except that they switch from the first person to the second person. With this the speaker possibly implies that he is not alone in this, that many of his peers are in the same predicament, even if they don’t act the way he does.

With this analysis in mind, the title likely refers to his growing up in his small, isolated town, ignorant of the realities of his culture, and as he has become older, he has become increasingly disillusioned – he is leaving this “tiny town”, which represents ignorance, and going into the real world.

From the three songs examined above, it is clear that the speaker vehemently opposes traditional Afrikaner values such as religion and conformity. Perhaps because these songs are early in the band's career, they seem to speak against the speaker's traditional Afrikaner upbringing in a more outright manner than later releases. Later songs also have this theme, as we will see, but shift focus to other themes, possibly in an attempt to avoid repeating what has already been said.

### Self-destructive behaviour

Psychologist C. G. Boeree elaborates on Erikson's theory, stating of individuals that suffer from the malignancy of repudiation:

They may become involved in destructive activities, drugs, or alcohol, or you may withdraw into their own psychotic fantasies. After all, being "bad" or being "nobody" is better than not knowing who you are! [sic] (Boeree 2006).

We can therefore take self-destructive behaviour, such as indulgence in drugs and alcohol, as evidence for repudiation in the speaker, especially since it accompanies other evidence for repudiation. Self-destructive behaviour is a common reoccurrence for the speaker in *Fokofpolisiekar*, but perhaps it is best exemplified in the song "Vernietig jousef" from their debut EP *As jy met vuur speel sal jy brand*.

#### **Vernietig jousef**

- 1 kom ons sing oor kuier op Stellenbos
- 2 met rooiwyn en sigarette sit ons in 'n minimumveiligheidstronk
- 3 kom ons sing oor presteer in 'n sisteem van gehoorsaamheid
- 4 kom ons sing oor jou verleppende persoonlikheid
- 5 vernietig jousef
- 6 daar is 'n drang in my, 'n instinktiewe haat
- 7 vir instansies van die bewussyn, kondisioneer my
- 8 die Bybel van pyn
- 9 ons almal pak die kole, ons almal stook die vuur
- 10 ons almal bou die mure wat idees bestry
- 11 ons is die rebellie wat misluk het
- 12 ons almal kak die reëls uit waaraan ons almal verstik het

- 13 vernietig jouself
- 14 dis moeilik om die kettings af
- 15 hulle maak dit aan ons binnegoed vas
- 16 dis moeilik om die kettings af te breek

Translation:

**Destroy yourself**

- 1 let's sing about partying at Stellenbosch
- 2 with red wine and cigarettes we sit in a minimum-security prison
- 3 let's sing about success in a system of obedience
- 4 let's sing about your wilting personality
- 5 destroy yourself
- 6 there is an urge in me, an instinctive hate
- 7 for institutions of the consciousness, condition me
- 8 the Bible of pain
- 9 we all pack the coals, we all stoke the fire
- 10 we all build the walls that combat ideas
- 11 we are the rebellion that failed
- 12 we all shit out the rules on which we all choked
- 13 destroy yourself
- 14 these chains are tough to
- 15 they tie them to your insides
- 16 these chains are tough to break

In this song's lyrics, the speaker shamelessly discloses his self-destructive behaviour, and implores others to do the same. Structurally, the lyrics can be divided into three sections; lines 5 and 13 – the titular “*vernietig jouself*” (“destroy yourself”) – are the choruses, so lines 1-5 are verse one, lines 6-13 are verse two, and lines 14-16 are the coda. This structure that is akin to the classic verse-chorus song structure, which is a rare thing for early Fokofpolisiekar songs. This could be to contribute to the festive tone of this song that deals with partying and non-conforming. However, as is common in the band's repertoire, there is very little rhyming and alliteration.

Verse one repeats “*kom ons sing*” (“let’s sing”) three times; to sing something here can be taken to mean to glorify it, but also to bring it to people’s attention. The first subject to be sung about is partying at the university town of Stellenbosch (line 1) – which conjures imagery of young people just freed from their parents’ authority, now indulging in partying at the expense of studying. The second thing to be sung about – “*presteer in ’n sisteem van gehoorsaamheid*” (“success in a system of obedience”) (line 3) – can be taken as sarcastic, because that success implies lack of freedom. The word “success” links with the University of Stellenbosch from the previous lines – it may allude to the false idea that one can only be successful if one attains a degree. The third and final subject to be sung about is “*jou verleppende persoonlikheid*” (“your wilting personality”) (line 4) – this implies that studying and being obedient make one dull and the same as everyone else. In the chorus that follows the speaker implores us to “destroy” ourselves, instead of conforming to society’s idea of success; with the established theme of partying, what is meant by destroy is likely to indulge in alcohol, and perhaps drugs, to an excessive extent.

Verse two starts with the speaker’s only personal disclosure: he states his hatred for “institutions of the consciousness” (“*instansies van die bewussyn*”) (line 7), which possibly refer to schools and universities. Line 7 and 8 – “*kondisioneer my / die Bybel van pyn*” (“condition me / the Bible of pain”) – has this song’s only reference to religion; the speaker may imply that religion (specifically Christianity most likely) is another way of taking away one’s personality and harming one in the process.

The remainder of the verse, lines 9-12, is an example of how “we” are complicit in our own losing of ourselves through conformity. A metaphor is used where fire is compared to this process of taking away our individuality, and the speaker claims that people “pack the coals” (“*pak die kole*”) (line 9) ourselves – that we aid in this process. A second metaphor is used next, where the effect of conformity is compared to “walls” (“*mure*”) that “combat ideas” (“*idees bestry*”) (line 10), suggesting that conformity hinders innovation. A third and final metaphor is used, where he compares people allowing themselves to conform to a “rebellion that failed” (“*rebellie wat misluk het*”), which may imply that these now-conformists were once also against conformity, as the speaker is.

With these the second instance of the chorus possibly takes on a new meaning: the speaker implies that we “destroy” ourselves by conforming. The final three lines of the song are a metaphor where societal constraints are likened to chains. Line 14 – “*dis moeilik om die kettings af*” (“these chains are tough to”) – is an incomplete version of the final line – “*dis moeilik om die kettings af te breek*” (“these chains are tough to break”). The exclusion of the word “*breek*” (“break”) likely emphasises the difficulty of removing the constraints of society – that it requires repetitive effort. The fact that these “chains” are fixed to their internal organs implies that they are painful, unhealthy and will cause damage if removed, but could also imply that these constraints even have a genetic element to them – that it is part of who they are.

“Vernietig jouself”, which is 16 lines, contains 11 instances of the word “*ons*” (“we”), while only two instances of personal pronouns – both “*my*” (“me”) in lines 6 and 7 – which imparts a strong sense of camaraderie and group identity. Repudiation implies isolation, however this song illustrates the phenomenon where those who develop this malignancy will form strong bonds with one another; Boeree notes:

Some adolescents allow themselves to “fuse” with a group, especially the kind of group that is particularly eager to provide the details of your identity: religious cults, militaristic organizations, groups founded on hatred, groups that have divorced themselves from the painful demands of mainstream society (2006).

The band could be seen as a one of these groups. Indeed, in their interview with Wiechers (2005), Kennedy remarks:

*Ja, aan die begin het ons altyd gejoke dat ons nou ons eie sekte gaan begin. Vir Afrikaanse mense wat wil weghardloop.*

[Yes, in the beginning we always joked that we would now start our own sect. For Afrikaans people who want to run away.]

The band thus offered the members a sense of belonging – their shared dislike of their society offered them a warped form of identity. In the already-analysed “Tiny town” there is also plausible evidence for this group identification, where the speaker switches from

personal pronouns to the second person when disclosing his disillusionment, implying that there are others like him.

While “Vernietig jouself” has a what might be described as a light-hearted tone, with its allusions to partying, the next song I will analyse, “Wintersdag By Die Seer” – from *Monoloog In Stereo* (2005) – is strikingly melancholic, and shows us that the speaker is not merely an angry, confused and ungrateful individual, but that he has medically diagnosed psychological problems.

### **Wintersdag By Die Seer**

- 1 skepe van eensaamheid sink
- 2 verdrink die dae van die week
- 3 die warm smart wat somer bring
- 4 sing
- 5 kriewelend, spasties, kruipend
- 6 ek is honger en my klere stink
- 7 jy skyn
- 8 welkomend, heilig basuin
- 9 jy jou lokvalle uit
- 10 as ek wou
- 11 sou ek my koers huis toe vind?
- 12 ek is honger en my klere stink
- 13 en die rooi branders breek
- 14 oor 'n swart strand van seer
- 15 en die wit lyne sny
- 16 reguit deur my
- 17 my dokter het vir my
- 18 pille voorgeskryf
- 19 dit hou my kalm
- 20 as omstandighede my bedreig
- 21 dit laat my droom
- 22 en ek was vir 'n lang ruk
- 23 siek gewees daarvoor
- 24 ek is dommer, maar ek lewe nog

- 25 en die rooi branders breek
- 26 oor 'n swart strand van seer
- 27 en die wit lyne sny
- 28 reguit deur my

### **Winter's Day By The Sore**

- 1 ships of loneliness sink
- 2 drown the days of the week
- 3 the warm sorrow that summer brings
- 4 sings
- 5 fidgety, spastic, crawling
- 6 I am hungry and my clothes stink
- 7 you shine
- 8 welcoming, you holy trumpet
- 9 out your traps
- 10 if I wanted
- 11 could I find my course home?
- 12 I am hungry and my clothes stink
- 13 and the red waves break
- 14 over a black shore of sore
- 15 and the white lines cut
- 16 straight through me
- 17 my doctor
- 18 prescribed pills for me
- 19 it keeps me calm
- 20 if circumstances threaten me
- 21 it lets me dream
- 22 and for a long while
- 23 I was sick because of them
- 24 I am dumber, but I'm still alive
- 25 and the red waves break
- 26 over a black shore of sore
- 27 and the white lines cut



## 28 straight through me

Where the self-destruction apparent in “Vernietig jouself” is rebellious and anti-conformity, the self-destruction described in “Wintersdag By Die Seer” seems more a means for the speaker to cope with his mental turmoil, which stems in part from his repudiation, presumably.

We have seen that Fokofpolisiekar songs from their first two albums often do not follow conventional songs structures, and use little rhyming. From their third album, *Monoloog In Stereo* (2005), songs more often have the classic verse-chorus structure, and “Wintersdag By Die Seer” exemplifies this. There is also slightly increased rhyming compared to songs from their first two albums. This may reflect the steady decrease in repudiation that the speaker shows with later releases – their songs too start to conform to conventional, established structures.

The song uses a maritime theme and a deep metaphor throughout the song: being lost at sea is equated to the feelings associated with depression, drug dependence and being spiritually lost. The title makes use of word play: “seer” (“sore”) sounds very similar to the word “see” (“sea”) so the former replaces the latter, establishing the abovementioned metaphor.

Lines 1 and 2 – “*skepe van eensaamheid sink / verdrink die dae van die week*” (“ships of loneliness sink / drown the days of the week”) also contribute to the deep metaphor: the speaker equates himself, and possibly others like him, to lone ships at sea that sink because they “drown” themselves with alcohol to get by “the days of the week”. “[S]ink” in this context likely means these individuals go deeper into depression and substance dependence.

While the title refers to winter, the only season the lyrics reference is summer: “*die warm smart wat somer bring*” (“the warm sorrow that summer brings”) (line 3). This contradiction could mean that speaker’s inner state makes it winter for him, regardless of the time of year.

Line 5 – “*kriewelend, spasties, kruipend*” (“fidgety, spastic, crawling”) – is presumably a description of the way the speaker feels, which implies that he is suffering from withdrawal. At this stage it is unclear from what but possibly some recreational drug. The last line of verse one is a description of the speaker: “*ek is honger en my klere stink*” (“I am hungry and my clothes stink”) (line 6). It contributes to the deep metaphor of being lost at sea, but also implies that the speaker, because of his depression and substance abuse, is not taking proper care of himself.

Verse two uses a lighthouse as a metaphor for one or more people trying to lead the lost speaker away from his depression and lifestyle. In lines 7 to 9 – “*jy skyn / welkomend, heilig basuin / jy jou lokvalle uit*” (“you shine / welcoming, you holy trumpet / out your traps”) – the speaker equates the person trying to help him to a lighthouse (“you shine / welcoming”), who plays a “holy trumpet”; this may imply that this person is religious and wants to bring religion into the life of the lost speaker. The speaker, however, claims that this holy trumpet clearly indicates the “traps” that this idea contains – presumably the traps of Christianity and conformity apparent in previous songs.

Following from this, in lines 10 and 11, the speaker muses “*as ek wou / sou ek my koers huis toe vind?*” (“if I wanted / could I find my course home?”); “home” here is likely either a resolution to the state of feeling lost, or the society he abandoned. He wonders if he even could conform to that life if he wished to, implying that he is not yet so desperate but fears that he may come to that point.

The first instance of the chorus, lines 13 to 16, follows after a repetition of line 6 at line 12. The chorus describes a beach with unnatural colours – (“the red waves break / over a black shore of sore”) (lines 13 and 14); the waves being red imparts a violent feeling to them, the shore being black a feeling of bleakness – these unusual/surreal colours are in line with the unexpected description of the season discussed above. The “white lines” (line 15) likely refer to the foam of the red waves, but could also suggest the use of cocaine, and the fact that they “cut / straight through” (lines 15 and 16) may refer to the damage such drugs cause.

In verse three the speaker discloses his seeking medical help for depression, and/or his drug dependence. This disclosure uses simple, conversational language, which makes

the lines very stark and real. The fact that the speaker was “sick because of them” (line 23) for “a long while” (line 22) implies that he endured the medication’s negative effects until his body became used to it, illustrating the extent of his desperation. Line 24 – “*ek is dommer, maar ek lewe nog*” (“I am dumber, but I’m still alive”) – could imply that without these pills he would have committed suicide, or overdosed on narcotics.

“Wintersdag By Die Seer” shows clear self-destructive behaviour, and paints a bleak picture of the negative effects such behaviour can have. It also shows the speaker’s repudiation in that he rejects the aid offered by his forsaken society, despite his desperation.

James S. Fleming states that “[r]epudiation can take the form of defiance of authority or of resignation and despair, which Erikson termed **diffidence**” (2004); the speaker in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics is shown to be both defiant of authority, as well as despairing.

Feeling of not belonging

In his book *100 Years of Identity Crisis: Culture War Over Socialisation*, F. Furedi states:

[I]ndividuals require a sense of belonging in order to gain a feeling of security through which they can cultivate their identity . . . the loss of the sense of belonging [weakens] the self, which in turn [encourages] people to develop an obsessive interest in cultivating an identity (2021: 162).

A sense of not belonging can therefore be taken as a consequence of repudiation and identity crisis. The song “Tieneraksie Einde”, from the EP *Brand Suid-Afrika*, illustrates the sense of isolation the speaker feels in spite of the camaraderie he has shown with others who share his repudiation. It also suggested that the speaker has stagnated in the teenage mentality.

### **Tieneraksie Einde**

- 1 tienerangs was 'n hoë muur om teen uit te klim
- 2 net om weer vas te sit in die hakkiesdraad
- 3 wat die naiwiteit is

- 4 dit raas al fokken jare
- 5 wit kinders van Afrika
- 6 dankbaar wees dat jul nog leef
- 7 wat maak jul hier
- 8 en waar kom jul vandaan?
- 9 ek neem aan dat ek altyd alleen sal staan
- 10 dis makliker om mense so
- 11 in die oë te staar
- 12 die weer is plesierig hier
- 13 daar's net geen plek vir my
- 14 om my kop neer te lê nie
- 15 selfmoord het baie van ons weggedra
- 16 drank en die duiwel het gesorg vir die res
- 17 massiewe koopkrag, maar wanaangepas
- 18 viva!
- 19 viva die middelklas!
- 20 die waarheid lê daar buite
- 21 maar al die leuens bly hier binne in ons
- 22 kwaadaardige gewas
- 23 ek neem aan dat ek altyd alleen sal staan
- 24 dis makliker om mense so
- 25 in die oë te staar
- 26 Die weer is plesierig hier
- 27 daar's net geen plek vir my
- 28 om my kop neer te lê nie

Translation:

**Teen Action End**

- 1 teen angst was a high wall to climb over
- 2 just to again get stuck in the barbed wire
- 3 that is the naivety
- 4 it's been racketing for fucking years
- 5 white children of Africa
- 6 be thankful you're still alive
- 7 what are you all doing here
- 8 and where do you all come from?
- 9 I assume that I'll always stand alone
- 10 it's easier that way
- 11 to stare people in the eye
- 12 the weather is pleasant here
- 13 there's just no place for me
- 14 to lay down my head
- 15 suicide carried away many of us
- 16 booze and the devil took care of the rest
- 17 massive purchasing-power, but maladapted
- 18 viva!
- 19 viva the middle class!
- 20 the truth is out there
- 21 but all the lies stay here in us
- 22 malignant tumour

- 23 I assume that I'll always stand alone  
24 it's easier that way  
25 to stare people in the eye  
26 the weather is pleasant here  
27 there's just no place for me  
28 to lay down my head

As we saw with “Wintersdag By Die Seer”, this song has a more conventional structure and slightly more rhyming than songs from the band’s first two releases.

In lines 1 to 3 – *“tienerangs was 'n hoë muur om teen uit te klim / net om weer vas te sit in die hakkiesdraad / wat die naiwiteit is”* (“teen angst was a high wall to climb over / just to again get stuck in the barbed wire / that is the naivety”) – the speaker is likely implying that he essentially still feels the same way he did as a teenager; this is strong evidence of having not successfully navigated the adolescent stage. Furthermore, “naivety” (line 3) is a trait commonly associated with teenagers, so the fact that the speaker is still “stuck in” (line 2) it now that he is an adult also implies that he has not gained any wisdom from his teenage years.

In lines 4 to 6 – *“dit raas al fokken jare / wit kinders van Afrika / dankbaar wees dat jul nog leef”* (“it’s been racketing for fucking years / white children of Africa / be thankful you’re still alive”) – the speaker likely illustrates the guilt he feels for his parental generation’s / culture’s deeds during apartheid. The words “racket” and “for fucking years” indicate that this feeling is unavoidable, unpleasant and has been present for a long time. The fact that he claims that he and his peers should be “thankful” that they aren’t dead, implies that he feels it is simply by grace that he is still around.

Lines 7 and 8 that follow – *“wat maak jul hier / en waar kom jul vandaan?”* (“what are you all doing here / and where do you all come from?”) – illustrate the sense of homelessness and unbelonging to his country of birth. The lyrics are written as if someone is asking, but it is possible that it is the speaker’s own conscience that tells

him these things, considering the unsound mental state established in above analysed songs.

The first instance of the chorus is lines 9 to 14. In previously analysed songs, like “Vernietig jousef”, it is apparent that the speaker has found a warped form of identity and belonging in others who show repudiation like him, however, line 9 – “*ek neem aan dat ek altyd alleen sal staan*” (“I assume that I’ll always stand alone”) – serves to illustrate that this camaraderie is not sufficient to combat the speaker’s sense of isolation completely. The speaker goes on to explain that by being alone “it’s easier” (line 10) “to stare people in the eye” (11): this implies that the speaker finds it harder to connect with people when he feels he is related or bound to them in some way. Line 12 that follows – “*die weer is plesierig hier*” (“the weather is pleasant here”) (“here” being his alone state) – likely refers to the comfort of not putting oneself out there by trying to engage with others. These lines possibly illustrate that the speaker is afraid to make meaningful connections with people, reinforcing the idea that he is engaging in behaviour suggestive of repudiation. The two final lines of the chorus – “*daar’s net geen plek vir my / om my kop neer te lê nie*” (“there’s just no place for me / to lay down my head”) (lines 13 and 14) – are metaphorical: the speaker implies that he has no home; home here probably means somewhere where he feels he belongs – i.e. he has a lack of identity.

In “Wintersdag by Die Seer” the speaker may imply he has been suicidal before; line 15 of this song – “*selfmoord het baie van ons weggedra*” (“suicide carried away many of us”) – shows that “many” of his peers have indeed succumbed to such feelings. The line that follows – “*drank en die duiwel het gesorg vir die res*” (“booze and the devil took care of the rest”) (line 16) – likely implies that the rest survived by resorting to alcohol abuse, and possibly “the devil” (line 16) is representative of indulging in other vices, such as drugs. This line is of course further evidence for the speaker’s self-destructive tendencies.

The band members were all brought up in middle-class households (see chapter two of this mini-dissertation); in lines 17 to 19 – “*massiewe koopkrag, maar wanaangepas / viva! / viva die middelklas!*” (“massive purchasing-power, but maladapted / viva! / viva the middle class!”) – the speaker expresses what is undoubtedly sarcastic middle-class

pride, and his description of the bourgeoisie as “maladapted” “purchasing-power” implies that he believes they use their wealth incorrectly – presumably too selfishly.

Lines 20 to 22 – “*die waarheid lê daar buite / maar al die leuens bly hier binne in ons / kwaadaardige gewas*” (“the truth is out there / but all the lies stay here in us / malignant tumour”) – illustrate that although he has become disillusioned, the lies of the past and the harm they caused cannot be erased with this truth. The comparison to a “malignant tumour” implies that these lies are killing him, and their effects are ever-growing.

From the above analysis, a sense of isolation and not belonging with any group of people is clear in the speaker in “Tieneraksie Einde”. In contrast to this song, the title track off the 2008 EP *Antibiotika* applies the same sense of not belonging to the Afrikaner culture in general.

### **Antibiotika**

- 1 dit was 'n geluuskoot
- 2 volksmoord vermy
- 3 wie sê Afrikaans is dood?
- 4 jammer meneer, ek het my les geleer
- 5 die goddelose het geen heenkome
- 6 ruik soos tienergees
- 7 'n bleeksiel tussen die spoke
- 8 'n donker afrika is net donker vir die met oogklappe aan
- 9 hy wat nie kan dink
- 10 wie se harsings hard en stowwerig is
- 11 mik vir my hart
- 12 dit pomp wildernis hier binnekant
- 13 ek's net 'n toeris
- 14 in my geboorteland



- 15 gekwesde dier in 'n hok
- 16 op antibiotika
- 17 dis die waarheid wat my geweld aandoen
- 18 ek leef in ongeloof
- 19 my leed is eindeloos
- 20 wil jy stilstaan as ek voortgaan?
- 21 wil jy stilstaan as ek voortgaan?
- 22 hoe kan mens dink as jou hande altyd vasgebind is?
- 23 mik vir my hart
- 24 dit pomp wildernis hier binnekant
- 25 ek's net 'n toeris
- 26 in my geboorteland
- 27 gekwesde dier in 'n hok
- 28 op antibiotika

### **Antibiotics**

- 1 that was a lucky shot
- 2 genocide avoided
- 3 who says Afrikaans is dead?
- 4 sorry sir, I've learnt my lesson
- 5 the godless have no havens
- 6 smells like teen spirit
- 7 a pale soul amongst the ghosts
- 8 a dark africa is just dark for those with blindfolds on
- 9 he that cannot think

- 10 whose grey matter is hard and dusty
- 11 aim for my heart
- 12 it pumps wilderness here inside
- 13 I'm just a tourist
- 14 in my country of birth
- 15 wounded animal in a cage
- 16 on antibiotics
- 17 it's the truth that does me violence
- 18 I live in non-belief
- 19 my pain is endless
- 20 do you want to stand still when I go forth?
- 21 do you want to stand still when I go forth?
- 22 how can you think if your hands are always bound together?
- 23 aim for my heart
- 24 it pumps wilderness here inside
- 25 I'm just a tourist
- 26 in my country of birth
- 27 wounded animal in a cage
- 28 on antibiotics

“Antibiotika” uses a deep metaphor: the speaker, as well as the Afrikaner culture he represents, is compared to an animal that has been shot, caged and kept alive in this state with antibiotics. This metaphor likely implies that the speaker and/or the Afrikaner culture is close to death, and it would be a mercy to let it die. The imagery of the animal in a cage could imply that the speaker believes that the culture is dangerous and needs to be contained. If the speaker is the caged animal, it could refer to the restrictive nature of traditional Afrikaner culture.

With the opening two lines – “*dit was 'n geluuskoot / volksmoord vermy*” (“that was a lucky shot / genocide avoided”) – the speaker is possibly suggesting that the Afrikaners got off easy with the abolishment of Apartheid, and should count themselves as fortunate for avoiding being wiped out. The word “*geluuskoot*” (“lucky shot”) in line 1 also establishes the motif of the hunted animal.

Line 3 that follows – “*wie sê Afrikaans is dood?*” (“who says Afrikaans is dead?”) – could be a response to the speaker’s above statement that Afrikaans is lucky to still be a living culture. Line 4 – “*jammer meneer, ek het my les geleer*” (“sorry sir, I’ve learnt my lesson”) – would then be the speaker’s own words again, and reveals that the speaker in line 3 is a male authority figure - perhaps a teacher. This interaction alludes to the strict nature of Afrikaner schools, as well as the fact that some Afrikaners are very concerned with the possible downfall of their culture (Bornman 2005), and react to such claims with anger or denial.

In lines 5 to 7 the speaker describes himself and his circumstances; he refers to his own irreligiousness in line 5 – “*die goddelose het geen heenkome*” (“the godless have no havens”) – and implies that because he is not a believer, he cannot rely on his fellow Afrikaners for safety or respite, because they shun those who don’t share their faith. The line that follows – “*ruik soos tienergees*” (“smells like teen spirit”) (line 6) – is a reference to the song “Smells Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana, which has been described as an “anthem for apathetic kids” (“Winners of 1991 - TIME”, 1992), and line 7 – “*n bleeksiel tussen die spoke*” (“a pale soul amongst the ghosts”) – could suggest that the speaker sees himself as an anxious and troubled person, but at least he is not a “ghost” like other people around him, who are not truly living due to ignorance and conformity.

Line 8 – “*n donker afrika is net donker vir die met oogklappe aan*” (“a dark africa is just dark for those with blindfolds on”) – features word play: “*donker afrika*” is a saying that dates back to colonial times, and refers to the supposedly poor, primitive and underdeveloped conditions in African countries, usually used with racist undertones that imply it is because of poor governance by black individuals; the speaker likely means that believing this is ignorance, and that it is people’s ignorance that makes them see things this way. The two lines that follow further describe the ignorant individuals: “*hy*

*wat nie kan dink / wie se harsings hard en stowwerig is* (“he that cannot think / whose grey matter is hard and dusty”) (lines 9 and 10). The description of the brain as “hard and dusty” links with the arid African environment.

The first instance of the chorus is lines 11 to 16; it contains the deep metaphor described above. With line 11 – *“mik vir my hart”* (“aim for my heart”) – the speaker asks to be put down, possibly implying that he does not think the Afrikaner culture should continue.

The line that follows – *“dit pomp wildernis hier binnekant”* (“it pumps wilderness here inside”) (line 12) – suggests that he is wild and untamed, and so he does not wish to live in the cage, unable to be free – in other words he believes the current state of the Afrikaner culture is too restrictive. He could, in addition, imply that he loves nature and feels connected to it.

Lines 13 and 14 – *“ek’s net ’n toeris / in my geboorteland”* (“I’m just a tourist / in my country of birth”) – convey the speaker’s sense of not belonging in South Africa, even though it is his homeland, and perhaps even a sense of guilt for his culture’s colonization of South Africa. The word *“net”* (“just”) conveys the lack of identity that the speaker feels.

The final two lines of the chorus are the aforementioned deep metaphor of the song: *“gekwesde dier in ’n hok / op antibiotika”* (“wounded animal in a cage / on antibiotics”) (lines 15 and 16).

The opening three lines of the second verse – *“dis die waarheid wat my geweld aandoen / ek leef in ongeloof / my leed is eindeloos”* (“it’s the truth that does me violence / I live in non-belief/ my pain is endless”) (lines 17 to 19) – are similar to what has been shown in previously analysed songs: the speaker suggests that he cannot ignore the facts that his people were wrong and mislead him, so he has had to discard identity and religion and lives in turmoil as a result.

Lines 20 and 21 are a repetition – *“wil jy stilstaan as ek voortgaan?”* (“do you want to stand still when I go forth?”) – the speaker is imploring listeners to follow him toward progression. This contradicts the opening line of the chorus: *“mik vir my hart”* (“aim for my heart”) because it likely implies giving the Afrikaner culture a rebirth, while the latter

implies ending it completely. Possibly, these two lines together can be taken to mean that the speaker wishes to reform the culture to such an extent that it is essentially reborn.

The final line of the second verse – *“hoe kan mens dink as jou hande altyd vasgebind is?”* (“how can one think if your hands are always bound together?”) – is another metaphor where the speaker is placed in handcuffs (or similar). Like the animal in the cage, that implies that the traditional Afrikaner culture is too restrictive, and can be taken as motivation to change the culture.

“Anitibiotika”, like other songs by Fokofpolisiekar, refers to a desire to both do away with, but also to change the Afrikaner culture. Klopper’s analysis notes that Fokofpolisiekar lyrics regularly use the phoenix metaphor – rebirth through fire; she states:

*Saam met die tema van vuur, skemer die mitologie van die feniks deur en, soos ek bewys, kan dit van toepassing gemaak word op die lirieke* (Klopper 2009: 130).

[Together with the theme of fire, the mythology of the phoenix comes through and, as I prove, it can be applied to the lyrics.]

This recurring metaphor supports the above postulation that the speaker’s view is that the Afrikaner culture must change so drastically as to be considered a rebirth – keeping only certain key aspects. These aspects are not listed as such but from the lyrics strong candidates include the language and the love of nature. This fervent desire to revolutionise their birth culture is strong evidence for repudiation in the speaker.

A desire to revolutionise the culture is a logical effect of repudiation and a sense of not belonging to any culture: if you feel like you don’t belong to any recognised society, but have strong opinions, you would naturally want to create a new society that you approve of.

Mental turmoil

Mental turmoil supports the presence of repudiation: the presence of this so-called malignancy from Erikson's framework means that the individual has not developed a healthy state of mind from that particular stage and, as Erikson puts it, this lack of identity "disturbs young people" (Erikson 1959: 97).

Mental turmoil is apparent in songs already analysed. In "Hemel op die platteland" the speaker implies his mental instability with the opening two lines: "*kan jy my skroewe vir my vasdraai? / kan jy my albasters vir my vind?*" ("can you tighten my screws? / can you find my marbles?"). The speaker compares his psyche to a mechanical device that has loose screws – i.e. isn't in proper working condition – and the second alludes to the idiom: losing one's marbles. The remainder of the song scorns conformity and religion, and so presumably the speaker implies that his upbringing where those values were forced on him lead to this instability.

In "Wintersdag By Die Seer" the speaker discloses his depression, and that his mental struggles have presumably led to drug-taking – exacerbating his struggles. Fierce anger in the speaker is clear in most of the songs analysed above, evidenced by his outrage at his treatment, scorning others and by the liberal use of curse words. In the song "Bid vir my" the speaker shows self-awareness of his unhealthy mental state, but claims he is incapable of being any other way.

In the song "Vir Altyd 07 November" from *Swanesang*, the speaker discloses mental turmoil arising from grief – an emotional state not readily apparent in any of the above analysed songs.

### **Vir Altyd 07 November**

- 1 al jou vriende sê vir my
- 2 dat jy baie teleurgesteld sou gewees het in my
- 3 ek kan jou nie so goed soos wat ek wil
- 4 onthou nie
- 5 maar dit voel nou asof jy
- 6 'n bietjie beter na my kyk

- 7 jy't net soveel gedrink
- 8 en ook jou hele lewe lank
- 9 probeer weg hardloop
- 10 ek weet nie hoe jy as kind was nie
- 11 jy't ook elke aand uitgegaan
- 12 ek het geweet dit gaan gebeur
- 13 ek het geweet dit gaan gebeur
- 14 al die geskreëery
- 15 was toe verniet gewees
- 16 ek het jou vergewe
- 17 en jy
- 18 en jy vir my
- 19 ek sien jou in meisies raak
- 20 en dan gaan soek ek jou daar
- 21 ek weet dis fokken simpel van my
- 22 soos 'n baarmoeder
- 23 dun gesmeer
- 24 oor elke wegkruip plek
- 25 en trappie van my sosiale leer
- 26 als van jou wat in my gis
- 27 gee my hoendervleis
- 28 as dit November is
- 29 dis al wat ek wil sê
- 30 dis al wat ek kan sê

Translation:

**Forever 07 November**

- 1 all your friends tell me
- 2 that you would have been very disappointed in me
- 3 I can't remember you as well as I would have
- 4 liked to
- 5 but it feels as if you now
- 6 look after me a bit better
- 7 you drank just as much
- 8 and also your whole life tried
- 9 to run away
- 10 I don't know how you were as a child
- 11 you also went out every night
- 12 I knew it would happen
- 13 I knew it would happen
- 14 all the shouting
- 15 was for nought
- 16 I forgave you
- 17 and you
- 18 and you me
- 19 I see you in girls
- 20 and then I go look for you there
- 21 I know it's fucking stupid of me
- 22 like a womb
- 23 spread thin



- 24 over every hiding place  
25 and step of my social ladder  
26 all of you that brews in me  
27 gives me goosebumps  
28 when it's November  
29 that's all I want to say  
30 that's all that I can say

In her biography of the band, Klopper writes of this song:

*Sowat 'n dekade na sy ma se dood, skryf Hunter [Kennedy] die woorde van "Vir Altyd 07 November" . . . 7 November is Lavonne [Kennedy's mother] se verjaarsdagdatum"* (2011: 36).

[About a decade after his mother's death, Hunter [Kennedy] writes the words of "Vir Altyd 07 November" . . . 7 November is Lavonne's [Kennedy's mother] birthday.]

The cause of death was a car accident when Kennedy was 14 years old. With the opening two lines – "*al jou vriende sê vir my / dat jy baie teleurgesteld sou gewees het in my*" ("all your friends tell me / that you would have been very disappointed in me") – we see the speaker addresses his mother directly, as he will throughout the song. It also establishes a major theme of the song: the speaker ponders the possibility that he may be a disappointment to his mother if she were still alive – these two lines provide support that she would indeed be.

However, with lines 3 and 4 – "*ek kan jou nie so goed soos wat ek wil / onthou nie*" ("I can't remember you as well as I would have / liked to") – the speaker may imply that he is not necessarily convinced. These lines may also illustrate the speaker's concern that he is forgetting his mother as time passes. With the following two lines, 5 and 6 – "*maar dit voel nou asof jy / 'n bietjie beter na my kyk*" ("but it feels as if you now / look after me a bit better") – the speaker implies that she was not a very present mother while alive,

and if he is a disappointment, it is her own fault. With lines 5 and 6, and the fact that he addresses her directly, the speaker implies that he may believe in an afterlife of some sort, and so again alludes to half-believing in religion still – perhaps it is vestigial belief remaining from his youth, or an inability to completely let go of religion.

With lines 7 to 9 – *“jy’t net soveel gedrink / en ook jou hele lewe lank / probeer weg hardloop”* (“you drank just as much / and also your whole life tried / to run away”) – the speaker provides evidence that his mother would not have been disappointed in him – why would she be disappointed when he is acting just as she did? However, he undermines this evidence with line 10 – *“ek weet nie hoe jy as kind was nie”* (“I don’t know how you were as a child”) – admitting that he does not perhaps know her well enough. His admitting this is rather tragic – it implies that he didn’t have enough time to learn about her past.

In line 11 – *“jy’t ook elke aand uitgegaan”* (“you also went out every night”) – the speaker identifies the third similarity between himself and his mother; with repudiation in mind, all these comparisons with her behaviour can be seen as a means to mend his identity. The fact that lines 12 and 13 – *“ek het geweet dit gaan gebeur / ek het geweet dit gaan gebeur”* (“I knew it would happen / I knew it would happen”) – are repetitions perhaps indicates that the speaker feels guilt that he should have somehow stopped her going out every night so that she might be saved.

Lines 14 to 18 – *“al die geskreëry / was toe verniet gewees / ek het jou vergewe / en jy / en jy vir my”* (“all the shouting / was for nought / I forgave you / and you / and you me”) – indicate that, whilst she was alive, the speaker’s mother and he argued, but that he no longer has any reason to do so, having forgiven her. These lines are the first to suggest that the speaker has a positive outlook on the situation, implying that he is not completely lost to his unsound mental state.

The speaker discloses with lines 19 to 21 – *“ek sien jou in meisies raak / en dan gaan soek ek jou daar / ek weet dis fokken simpel van my”* (“I see you in girls / and then I go look for you there / I know it’s fucking stupid of me”) – that he has tried to replace his deceased mother with girlfriends, and as in “Bid vir my”, he shows self-awareness of his

own unsound psyche with these lines – he knows it’s “stupid of [him]” to try and replace her, but he seems unable to help himself.

Lines 22 to 25 – “*soos 'n baarmoeder / dun gesmeer / oor elke wegkruip plek / en trappie van my sosiale leer*” (“like a womb / spread thin / over every hiding place / and step of my social ladder”) – continue this theme of trying to replace her: with the simile comparing a womb to his social life, he implies that he searches for motherly comfort in other experiences and people, but the fact that it is “spread thin” implies that it is diluted and ineffective, and he knows this.

Lines 26 to 28 – “*als van jou wat in my gis / gee my hoendervleis / as dit November is*” (“all of you that brews in me / gives me goosebumps / when it’s November”) – makes use of a metaphor: his biological and spiritual relation to his mother is compared to yeast, brewing. The word “brews” implies growth, as well as microorganisms which imply life – that she lives on through him. “[G]oosebumps” implies excitement or a rush, which implies that he at least is not depressed by this phenomenon.

The final two lines – “*dis al wat ek wil sê / dis al wat ek kan sê*” (“that’s all I want to say / that’s all that I can say”) (lines 29 and 30) are identical save for “*wil*” (“want”) being replaced by “*kan*” (“can”); the former can almost be seen as sarcastic, because he has said many varied things to his mother in these lyrics. The latter, “can”, is a word that points out the limiting nature of his communication with his mother – the only way he can tell her anything is through this song.

More so than previously analysed songs, “Vir Altyd 07 November” is very personally related to Hunter Kennedy, who is the main lyricist of Fokopolisiekar. It is also unique in that it offers a cause for the speaker’s repudiation other than the abolishment of apartheid during his formative years and the traditional Afrikaner mentality.

In “Vir Altyd 07 November”, the speaker shows that he is aware of his mental turmoil, and expresses surprising clarity in relation to his situation. The metaphors and imagery used imply that he has psychoanalysed himself to some extent. These are strong signs that he is attempting to overcome what may be referred to as his repudiation, and serve

to anticipate the argument in the next section that the speaker eventually overcomes this so-called malignancy.

### Evidence for overcoming repudiation

From the evidence illustrated above there is a strong case to be made that the speaker in the lyrics from the early half of the band's repertoire has developed the Eriksonian malignancy of repudiation. In the next section, I will argue that the speaker eventually overcomes his repudiation.

### The *Fok-God* incident's influence

In chapter two of this mini-dissertation the events surrounding the infamous *Fok-God* incident are described; I would argue that the way the members reacted to this incident illustrate that their repudiation was not extreme. individuals who repudiate unapologetically would not have backed down from their deeds as they did. I believe it was a shock to them, and made them more aware of what their attitudes and lifestyles were leading to, and so they took quite drastic action and put the band – their careers – on indefinite hold.

The title track from their 2006 album *Swanesang* serves to illustrate the feelings the band had with regards to the *Fok-God* incident and its aftermath.

#### **Swanesang**

- 1 die plafon bereik
- 2 die laaste toneel
- 3 van die eerste bedryf
- 4 deurlopende verdowing
- 5 wanorde en deurmekaar gesigte
- 6 dis al tradisie vir my
- 7 die oop pad
- 8 het sy tol geëis

- 9 om vinniger daar te kom
- 10 sal jy vinniger moet ry
- 11 om vinniger te lewe
- 12 maak jou vinniger dood
- 13 windgat
- 14 nikswerd
- 15 selfvoldaan verwerp
- 16 slagoffer van jou eie verbeelding
- 17 die droom het 'n nagmerrie geword
- 18 skuldig bevind
- 19 morele verkragting
- 20 10111
- 21 my brein krimp
- 22 en my hande vibreer
- 23 ligsku
- 24 en besig om te dehidreer
- 25 gistraand het 'n aborsie geraak
- 26 'n wettige verwydering
- 27 van potensiaal
- 28 my innige simpatie
- 29 goddank vir klank
- 30 windgat
- 31 nikswerd
- 32 selfvoldaan verwerp
- 33 slagoffer van jou eie verbeelding

34 die droom het 'n nagmerrie geword

35 skuldig bevind

36 morele verkragting

Translation:

**Swan Song**

1 the ceiling reached

2 the final scene

3 of the first act

4 continuous anaesthesia

5 disorder and bewildered faces

6 by now it's tradition for me

7 the open road

8 took its toll

9 to get there faster

10 you'll have to drive faster

11 to live faster

12 makes you die faster

13 braggart

14 worthless

15 complacently rejected

16 victim of your own imagination

17 the dream became a nightmare

18 found guilty

19 moral raping

- 20 10111
- 21 my brain shrinks
- 22 and my hands vibrate
- 23 lucifugous
- 24 and busy dehydrating
- 25 last night became an abortion
- 26 a legal removal
- 27 of potential
- 28 my sincere sympathy
- 29 thank god for sound
- 30 braggart
- 31 worthless
- 32 complacently rejected
- 33 victim of your own imagination
- 34 the dream became a nightmare
- 35 found guilty
- 36 moral raping

The title “Swanesang” translates to “Swan Song” and was also used for the album it appears on; with this the band implied that it was likely their last – a swan song being a symbol for the last act before something ends or dies. The lyrics deal with the events leading up to, and those after the *Fok-God* incident.

With line 1 – “*die plafon bereik*” (“the ceiling reached”) – the speaker is likely stating that the band has reached its peak, and things can only go downhill from here. It is for this reason that in line 2 he claims this will be “the final scene” – they will quit. In lines 2 and 3 – “*die laaste toneel / van die eerste bedryf*” (“the final scene / of the first act”) – a

metaphor is used: the band's career up to this point is compared to a theatre production; this comparison could refer to the fact that the band received a fair amount of media attention from the start due to their controversial lyrics and behaviour, and so were a sort of spectacle for the South African public. These lines also make use of juxtaposition ("final" in line 2, and "first" line 3), which emphasises the fact that an era is coming to an end.

Lines 4 to 12 possibly refer to the touring the band did. Line 4 – "*deurlopende verdowning*" ("continuous anaesthesia") – could refer both to the fact that the music was a way of coping with their issues, but also to the indulgence in alcohol and drugs, and line 5 – "*wanorde en deurmekaar gesigte*" ("disorder and bewildered faces") could refer to the chaos that goes with touring. Line 6 – "*dis al tradisie vir my*" ("by now it's tradition for me") – is ironic because Afrikaner tradition is not something they value, as has been seen in previous songs.

Lines 7 and 8 – "*die oop pad / het sy tol geëis*" ("the open road / took its toll") also likely refer to touring, and the draining nature of it. Lines 9 to 12 – "*om vinniger daar te kom / sal jy vinniger moet ry / om vinniger te lewe / maak jou vinniger dood*" ("to get there faster / you'll have to drive faster / to live faster / makes you die faster") – refer to the speed with which the band became popular, but also to the fact that they indulged too heavily in vices, and pushed the boundaries of society too hard. The repetition of the word "*vinniger*" ("faster") contributes to this sense of speed.

Lines 13 to 19 are the first instance of the chorus. The opening two lines – "*windgat / nikswerd*" ("braggart / worthless") – are likely insults that their critics used in reference to them after the *Fok God* incident, and line 15 – "*selfvoldaan verwerp*" ("complacently rejected") – is what they did to them; their detractors did not consider that they might be wrong as well. Line 16 – "*slagoffer van jou eie verbeelding*" ("victim of your own imagination") – may refer to the bandmembers now suffering from paranoia: thoughts of what their detractors may do to them – that their threats may be carried out. It is probably because of the backlash against them that the speaker says "*die droom het 'n nagmerrie geword*" ("the dream became a nightmare") in line 17: being able to make music for a living is a dream come true, but it has become awful. The chorus ends with "*skuldig bevind / morele verkragting*" ("found guilty / moral raping") (lines 18 and 19),



which could mean they feel that they have been judged and are facing the punishment. “[M]oral raping” is an oxymoron, and emphasises the ridiculous fact that their detractors justify their violent reactions to the incident as being moral – having the support of God, supposedly.

The second verse opens with “*10111 / my brein krimp / en my hande vibreer*” (“10111 / my brain shrinks / and my hands vibrate” (lines 20 to 22). 10111 is the emergency police phone number in South Africa; the speaker implies that he is afraid and resorts to contacting the police for protection. This is ironic considering their name and anti-authority lyrics, and illustrates the extent of their fear.

Lines 23 and 24 – “*ligsku / en besig om te dehidreer*” (“lucifugous / and busy dehydrating”) – refer to the fact that they are now hiding for their safety and sweating from fear. With lines 25 to 27 – “*gistraand het 'n aborsie geraak / 'n wettige verwydering / van potensiaal*” (“last night became an abortion / a legal removal / of potential”) – the band are comparing their ending to an abortion – they imply that it is a morbid event that involves death, but also that they are innocent. By comparing themselves to a foetus, the speaker implies that there was still much growth for the band to come – still much “potential”.

Lines 28 and 29 – “*my innige simpatie / goddank vir klank*” (“my sincere sympathy / thank god for sound”) – are the final lines before the repetition of the final chorus. The lines are ambiguous in who is speaking: a possibility is that it is a fan speaking to the band, offering his or her condolences, and showing appreciation for the music – the “*klank*” (“sound”). Another possibility is that the speaker is a bandmember and offers his sympathies to the fans for their taking a break.

In “Swanesang” one can clearly feel the speaker’s exhaustion and negativity with his situation. I would argue that this is the turning point for the speaker in terms of his repudiation. The band pushed boundaries until their situation became dire, and then they decided to reassess their outlook on life.

Healthier psychological state

After their hiatus which began soon after the release of *Swanesang*, the band did not return with a full-length album until 2017 with the release of *Selfmedikasie*. I argue here that that decade of little band activity (compared to their pre-hiatus schedules) was a period in which the members alleviated their repudiation, and this is apparent in their lyrics from 2017 onwards.

There are songs on *Selfmedikasie* whose lyrics are notably different from anything the band released prior; these songs have a far more positive tone, and the speaker seems to have found a mindset that is much healthier and this supports the argument that the speaker has eventually overcome his repudiation to some extent, and finally developed Erikson's virtue of fidelity. The first of these songs is "Ek glo in die son".

### **Ek glo in die son**

- 1 ek glo in die son
- 2 dat hy môre weer opkom
- 3 ek glo in my vrou
- 4 ek glo in my kind
- 5 ek glo in die wind
- 6 ek glo in die reën
- 7 ek glo jy moet alle mense hanteer
- 8 soos wat jy hanteer wil word
- 9 ek glo in die berge
- 10 ek glo in die seer
- 11 ek glo daar is mense wat nog omgee
- 12 ek glo in ons
- 13 ek glo in die son
- 14 ek glo in swem
- 15 ek glo in my hond

- 16 ek glo in die son
- 17 dat hy môre weer opkom
- 18 ek glo in luister
- 19 ek glo in my vriende
- 20 ek glo in die wind
- 21 ek glo in die reën
- 22 ek glo jy moet ander mense hanteer
- 23 soos wat jy hanteer wil word
- 24 ek glo in die berge
- 25 ek glo in die seer
- 26 ek glo daar is mense wat nog omgee
- 27 ek glo in ons
- 28 ha-halleluja
- 29 halleluja
- 30 halleluja
- 31 halleluja
- 32 halle-fokken-luja
- 33 vervelig en kort
- 34 ure is wonde
- 35 die laaste een dodelik
- 36 dis later as wat jy dink
- 37 dis onredelik
- 38 en dan's dit verby

Translation:

**I believe in the sun**

- 1 I believe in the sun
- 2 the he'll rise again tomorrow
- 3 I believe in my wife
- 4 I believe in my child
- 5 I believe in the wind
- 6 I believe in the rain
- 7 I believe you must treat others
- 8 as you want to be treated
- 9 I believe in the mountains
- 10 I believe in the sore
- 11 I believe there are still people who care
- 12 I believe in us
- 13 I believe in the sun
- 14 I believe in swim
- 15 I believe in my dog
- 16 I believe in the sun
- 17 that he'll rise again tomorrow
- 18 I believe in listening
- 19 I believe in my friends
- 20 I believe in the wind
- 21 I believe in the rain
- 22 I believe you must treat others
- 23 as you want to be treated
- 24 I believe in the mountains

- 25 I believe in the sore
- 26 I believe there are still people who care
- 27 I believe in us
- 28 ha-hallelujah
- 29 hallelujah
- 30 hallelujah
- 31 hallelujah
- 32 halle-fucking-lujah
- 33 boring and short
- 34 hours are wounds
- 35 the last one deadly
- 36 it's later than you think
- 37 it's unreasonable
- 38 and then it's over

The majority of the lines (23 out of 38) in “*Ek glo in die son*” start with the phrase “*Ek glo*” (“I believe”). The phrase has obvious religious connotations, especially considering the common theme of religion in the band’s repertoire. The speaker does not mention God or other religious entities in any of these lines. Instead, he lists natural objects: the sun, wind, rain, mountains, and ocean<sup>5</sup> (and also the predictable patterns that nature follows such as the sun rising and falling); he also lists family-related things: his wife, child and dog; and he lists social-related things: friends, swimming and “us”.

Lines 7, 8, 22 and 23 – “*Ek glo jy moet ander mense hanteer / Soos wat jy hanteer wil word*” (“I believe you must treat others / As you want to be treated”) – and lines 11 and 26 – “*Ek glo daar is mense wat nog omgee*” (“I believe there are still people who care”)

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<sup>5</sup> “*seer*” (“sore”) in lines 10 and 25 is almost certainly a reference to their song “Wintersdag By Die Seer” where, as mentioned earlier, “*seer*” is word play with the word “see” (“sea”)

– are declarations of the speaker’s trust in society, implying he approves of this. These lines are a form of The Golden Rule: “treat others as you would like others to treat you” (Spooner 1914). This is a maxim that is “found in some form in almost every ethical tradition” (Blackburn 2001: 101) including Christianity (Spooner 1914). The speaker’s endorsement of such a universal and fundamental ethic reinforces the idea that he has become far more accepting of society in general.

By listing what he believes in, the speaker implies that he is still irreligious, but has found meaning in life elsewhere, namely nature, family, friends and, importantly, society. This stands in marked contrast to previous songs and is evidence that the repudiation that was so apparent in their earlier work has diminished.

Lines 28 to 32 are repetitions of the well-known interjection “Hallelujah” – a “Hebrew liturgical expression meaning ‘praise ye Yah’ (‘praise the Lord)’ that “early Christians adopted . . . in their worship services” (“hallelujah | religious music”, 2021). Within the context it is likely implied that the speaker has replaced religion with nature, family, friends and society, and praises them instead of the Christian God.

The final six lines of the song – “*Vervelig en kort / Ure is wonde / Die laaste een dodelik / Dis later as wat jy dink / Dis onredelik / En dan's dit verby*” (“Boring and short / Hours are wounds / The last one deadly / It’s later than you think / It’s unreasonable / And then it’s over”) (lines 33 to 38) – stand in sharp contrast to the rest of the song, and hark back to the tone of earlier songs. Possibly the speaker is implying that ultimately life is transient, short and not fair, comparing hours to wounds that eventually kill us. With these lines he likely wishes to make it clear that while he has improved his mental state, he is still a staunch realist.

These final lines aside, “Ek glo in die son” marks the band’s first venturing into a hopeful tone for lyrics, and implies that the mental turmoil that the speaker exhibited in older songs has eased. Since an unhealthy psyche supports the malignancy of repudiation, we can assume that this healthier mental state indicates that his repudiation has lessened.

Intimate relationships

According to Erikson's theoretical framework, the developmental stage after Adolescence is Young Adulthood, of which he states:

[I]t is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real *intimacy* with the other sex (or, for that matter, with any other person or even with oneself) is possible [italics in original] (Erikson 1959: 101).

Forming intimate, meaningful relationships can therefore be seen as evidence that one has successfully navigated the Adolescence stage, and therefore is not a victim of the malignancy of repudiation.

In the above analysed "Ek glo in die son" the speaker states: "*ek glo in my vrou / ek glo in my kind*" ("I believe in my wife / I believe in my child") (lines 3 and 4); these lines indicate that he is married with children, and the words "I believe" have many possible implications, including that he trusts his wife and child, that they bring him a sense of purpose and that they provide his life with a sense of spirituality. All of these imply that the relationship he has with his family is positive and healthy, indicating that he has indeed formed meaningful relationships, supporting the theory that his repudiation has lessened.

Besides "Ek glo in die son", *Selfmedikasie* has another song – "Komma" – where intimate relationships are also apparent.

### **Komma**

- 1 in jou gesig is 'n sterrestelsel
- 2 ek is 'n kind wat na die sterre kyk
- 3 as jy jou hande deur my hare vryf
- 4 in die donker voel ek weerloos
- 5 voel ek weer klein
- 6 as die storm weer begin sanik
- 7 die berg brand

- 8 en die boom omwaai
- 9 en as die vlamme aan my gordyne lek
- 10 dan skryf ek vir ons 'n nuwe plek
- 11 want as die weer weer kom
- 12 sal dit kom om te bly
- 13 ek ken die skaamte en die kwesbaarheid
- 14 ek onthou ons het hardop gebid
- 15 en ek onthou ons het in ons skoolklere gevry
- 16 so, ek skryf maar vir my 'n wegkruipplek
- 17 want ek weet die weer sal weer kom om te bly
- 18 maar
- 19 komma
- 20 kom maar
- 21 komma
- 22 kom maar weer
- 23 hierdie keer is ek gereed
- 24 ek sal 'n byl in my hand hê
- 25 partykeer moet jy iets oopbreek
- 26 ek ken van in die hoek geskop word en gil
- 27 jou teen die ruit stamp en ons albei kraak
- 28 ek skryf maar vir my 'n wegkruipplek
- 29 daars 'n berg houtpiele wat brand in pleks van my verstand
- 30 maar
- 31 komma
- 32 kom maar



33 komma

34 kom maar weer

35 hierdie keer is ek gereed

36 in jou gesig is 'n sterrestelsel

37 ek is 'n kind wat na die sterre kyk

38 as jy jou hande deur my hare vryf

39 in die donker voel ek weerloos

40 voel ek weer klein

Translation:

**Comma**

1 in your face is a galaxy

2 I am a child that looks at the stars

3 when you rub your hands through my hair

4 in the dark I feel defenceless (weather-less)

5 I feel small again

6 when the storm starts to moan again

7 the mountain burns

8 and the tree blows over

9 and when the flames lick my curtains

10 then I'll write us a new place

11 because when the weather comes again

12 it will come to stay

13 I know the shame and the vulnerability

14 I remember we prayed aloud

15 and I remember we kissed in our school uniforms  
16 so, I just write myself a hiding place  
17 because I know the weather will come again to stay  
18 but  
19 comma  
20 just come  
21 comma  
22 just come again / just come weather  
23 this time I am ready  
24 I'll have an axe in my hand  
25 sometimes you have to break something open  
26 I know about getting kicked in the corner and shrieking  
27 hit yourself against the window and we both crack  
28 I just write myself a hiding place  
29 there's a mountain of wooden dicks that burn in place of my mind  
30 but  
31 comma  
32 just come  
33 comma  
34 just come again / just come weather  
35 this time I am ready  
36 in your face is a galaxy  
37 I am a child that looks at the stars  
38 when you rub your hands through my hair  
39 in the dark I feel defenceless (weather-less)

#### 40 I feel small again

Some lines from the lyrics of “Komma” do not translate well into English. The song has many instances of Afrikaans-specific wordplay: the title for example translates directly to “Comma”, but the Afrikaans phrase “*kom maar*” (lines 20, 22, 32, 34) (roughly translated to “just come”) can be shortened to also be “*komma*” (lines 19, 21, 31, 33). Furthermore, the word “*maar*” can mean “but” or “however” in certain contexts, however in other contexts, such as in lines 20, 22, 32 and 34, the word does not have a perfect English counterpart – the closest word, I believe, is “just”, as used in the translation. The Afrikaans word “*weer*” is also a homonym: it means both “again” and “weather”, and the lyrics play with this double meaning – the weather’s repetitive nature, always coming *again*, is emphasised in this way.

“Komma” can be seen as a love song of sorts – a type of song that is not found in their work before *Selfmedikasie*. In the first 5 lines – “*in jou gesig is 'n sterrestelsel / ek is 'n kind wat na die sterre kyk / as jy jou hande deur my hare vryf / in die donker voel ek weerloos / voel ek weer klein*” (“in your face is a galaxy / I am a child that looks at the stars / when you rub your hands through my hair / in the dark I feel defenceless (weather-less) / I feel small again”) the speaker most likely addresses an intimate partner, probably a girlfriend or wife; he states that she makes him feel like a child again. Childhood in general has happier, carefree connotations, but for this band’s lyrics in particular, it also represents the time before the speaker became disillusioned with his society and developed the repudiation and inner turmoil apparent in earlier songs.

The lover’s face is compared to a galaxy (line 1), which implies that he finds it beautiful and grand. The word “*weerloos*” in line 4 has a double meaning, and can be translated to both “defenceless” and “weather-less”; as will be shown later in the analysis, the stormy weather and other dangerous natural phenomena are used as symbols for hardships, so the speaker could imply that this individual makes him feel both open and without hardships, as he did as a child.

The weather as a metaphor for tough times is established in the next few lines. Lines 6 to 9 – “*as die storm weer begin sanik / die berg brand / en die boom omwaai / en as die vlamme aan my gordyne lek*” (“when the storm starts to moan again / the mountain

burns / and the tree blows over / and when the flames lick my curtains”) – describe bad weather and natural disasters affecting the speaker, and line 10 – “*dan skryf ek vir ons 'n nuwe plek*” (“then I’ll write us a new place”) – possibly describes the speaker’s reaction to these hardships that are supposedly coming. The line can be interpreted in a number of ways: “*skryf*” (“write”) could mean a song, implying the hardships are emotional and he will overcome them through expression in his art, or it could perhaps mean he will make more music to finance a “new place”.

Lines 11 and 12 – “*want as die weer weer kom / sal dit kom om te bly*” (“because when the weather comes again / it will come to stay”) – imply that the next time hardships come they will stay. Possibly the speaker is suggesting that change needs to come – to not merely prepare for the weather, i.e. hardships, but rather avoid them completely by going to “a new place” – change their circumstances.

Lines 13 to 15 – “*ek ken die skaamte en die kwesbaarheid / ek onthou ons het hardop gebid / en ek onthou ons het in ons skoolklere gevry*” (“I know the shame and the vulnerability / I remember we prayed aloud / and I remember we kissed in our school uniforms”) – reveal that this partner was a schoolmate, and indeed the two were intimate at least at this time. The fact that they “prayed aloud” together implies that they were both religious and were a source of comfort and spiritual support to one another. Lines 16 and 17 that follow – “*so, ek skryf maar vir my 'n wegkruipplek / want ek weet die weer sal weer kom om te bly*” (“so, I just write myself a hiding place / because I know the weather will come again to stay”) are a variation of lines 10 to 12, but the speaker says he’ll write *himself* a *hiding* place, not for them both this time. This could imply that they are not together anymore, and the fact that this place is now for seclusion implies that he is afraid, possibly because he no longer has his partner’s support.

Lines 18 to 23 – “*maar / komma / kom maar / komma / kom maar weer / hierdie keer is ek gereed*” (“but / comma / just come / comma / just come again / just come weather / this time I am ready”) – are the first instance of the chorus, and contain the above discussed wordplay. The repetitions and the double meaning of the word “*weer*” (“weather” or “again”) emphasise the recurring and inevitable nature of both weather and hardships. The speaker’s beckoning to the “weather” to come, and his declaration that he is “ready” for it, can be seen as him being determined to overcome the hardships

this time. Another possibility is that he is now asking his lover to return – that this time will be different. If we take it that the speaker has overcome his repudiation, he could mean that he is no longer suffering from repudiation and is now ready for an intimate relationship.

Lines 24 and 25 that follow – “*ek sal 'n byl in my hand hê / partykeer moet jy iets oopbreek*” (“I’ll have an axe in my hand / sometimes you have to break something open”) – could link directly with the chorus; the speaker provides detail as to how he is prepared for the weather – he has an axe, implying he will use violence. Applied to the weather, this tactic is obviously useless and implies that he is not actually ready at all. The weather taken as hardships implies that the speaker will not face them healthily, but rather with anger. A more positive interpretation is that he will destroy old, unhelpful mentalities, and the symbol of the brutish axe implies that he is very determined to do so.

Line 26 – “*ek ken van in die hoek geskop word en gil*” (“I know about getting kicked in the corner and shrieking”) – is probably another reference to the speaker’s school days – he implies that he’s had physically violent hardships since then. Line 27 – “*jou teen die ruit stamp en ons albei kraak*” (“hit yourself against the window and we both crack”) – contrasts with lines 24 and 25: the speaker implies that he is in fact aware of the futility of using violence against the weather / hardships.

With line 29 – “*daars 'n berg houtpiele wat brand in pleks van my verstand*” (“there’s a mountain of wooden dicks that burn in place of my mind”) – perhaps the speaker implies that he finds solace in a large fire; recreational or therapeutic imagery of fire such as this is suggestive of braaiing – a beloved pastime of the Afrikaner culture and very associated with it. This could be another example of something that the speaker holds on to from his repudiated culture. The word “*houtpiele*” (“wooden dicks”) here likely refers to the firewood, but the sexual imagery could suggest masturbation.

Lines 30 to 35 are a repetition of the chorus, and lines 36 to 40 are a repetition of the first five lines of the song, giving it a bookend. With the other lyrics in mind the second instance of these lines could be understood to be a memory – the speaker is reminiscing

over a past relationship – or it could indicate that he has rekindled the love he and his partner had when younger.

In this song we still see the emotional turmoil present in earlier songs, but the speaker does not seem as lost and as identified with it. He seems more determined to overcome his hardships. We also see an individual who is allowing himself to fall in love with someone – a phenomenon absent in previous songs.

The fact that the speaker is forming intimate relationships is an indication that he has developed a healthy sense of identity, and he may now be seen as being in the sixth stage of development and may well have successfully navigated the stage of adolescence.

#### Acceptance of society

With the Eriksonian malignancy of repudiation being defined as the opposite of Erikson's virtue of fidelity, evidence of having attained this virtue is strong evidence of having overcome repudiation. Fidelity is broadly defined as “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems” (Erikson *et al.* 1986: 35). In other words, fidelity can be seen as accepting society despite its flaws.

In the title track from the 2018 EP *Droom Hoog* the speaker shows a greatly lessened antagonism towards society, and even shows a level of care and admiration for it.

#### **Droom Hoog**

- 1 moenie treur dat dit verby is nie
- 2 wees bly
- 3 want dit het gebeur
- 4 wees mooier binne as buite
- 5 geloof, hoop en liefde
- 6 ja, wees net jousef
- 7 fok ander

- 8 dit is die sleutel tot 'n befokte lewe
- 9 vlieg groot
- 10 droom hoog
- 11 vir so lank as wat ek kan onthou
- 12 staan en staar na die see
- 13 en ek wonder oor die ritme
- 14 die onderliggende wiskunde
- 15 en of ons harte elektromagneties is
- 16 en of die heelal 'n vlies is wat nog 'n heelal wag hou
- 17 vir so lank as wat ek kan onthou
- 18 sit en staar ek na die vuur
- 19 moenie treur dat dit verby is nie
- 20 wees bly
- 21 want dit het gebeur
- 22 wees mooier binne as buite
- 23 geloof, hoop en liefde
- 24 ja, wees net jouself
- 25 vlieg groot
- 26 droom hoog
- 27 vir so lank as wat ek kan onthou
- 28 staan en staar na die see
- 29 en ek wonder oor die ritme
- 30 ek wonder oor die verganklikheid van besittings
- 31 ek wonder oor die verganklikheid van idees
- 32 god is groot

- 33 bier is goed  
34 en die mense is mal  
35 god is groot  
36 bier is goed  
37 en die mense is mal  
38 afrikaner moet sy nonsens los  
39 'n boer maak 'n plan  
40 die lewe is 'n reeks foute  
41 en ons almal is verkeerd  
42 fokkit

Translation:

**Dream High**

- 1 don't grieve that it's over now  
2 be happy  
3 because it happened  
4 be prettier inside than outside  
5 faith, hope and love  
6 yes, just be yourself  
7 fuck others  
8 that is the key to a fucking great life  
9 fly big  
10 dream high  
11 for as long as I can remember  
12 I've stood and stared at the sea



13 And I wonder about the rhythm  
14 the underlying maths  
15 and if our hearts are electromagnetic  
16 and if the universe is a fleece that's guarding another universe  
17 for as long as I can remember  
18 I've sat and stared at the fire  
19 don't grieve that it's over now  
20 be happy  
21 because it happened  
22 be prettier inside than outside  
23 faith, hope and love  
24 yes, just be yourself  
25 fly big  
26 dream high  
27 for as long as I can remember  
28 stand and stare at the sea  
29 and I wonder about the rhythm  
30 I wonder about the transience of belongings  
31 I wonder about the transience of ideas  
32 god is great  
33 beer is good  
34 and these people are crazy  
35 god is great  
36 beer is good  
37 and these people are crazy

- 38 afrikaner must leave his nonsense  
39 a boer makes a plan  
40 life is a series of mistakes  
41 and we are all wrong  
42 fuck it

“Droom Hoog” opens with several positive affirmations: lines 1 to 3 – *“moenie treur dat dit verby is nie / wees bly / want dit het gebeur”* (“don’t grieve that it’s over now / be happy / because it happened”) – could be seen as a positive way of looking at the end of something such as a relationship; line 4 – *“wees mooier binne as buite”* (“be prettier inside than outside”) – is likely a positive statement that physical looks are not that important; line 5 – *“geloof, hoop en liefde”* (“faith, hope and love”) – is a common motivational phrase; and lines 6 to 8 – *“ja, wees net jousef / fok ander / dit is die sleutel tot ‘n befokte lewe”* (“yes, just be yourself / fuck others / that is the key to a fucking great life”) – probably express the common life advice of not overly worrying what others think of one and accepting oneself. It is not clear whether these lines are lessons the speaker has learnt, or if he is being sarcastic.

The first instance of the chorus follows; its first two lines – *“vlieg groot / droom hoog”* (“fly big / dream high”) (lines 9 and 10) – take two common phrases with connotations to success – dream big and fly high – and swop them around; this could imply that the speaker tries to understand but doesn’t quite get the idea, and also implies that in life he tries to be successful but he makes mistakes applying the advice of others. With this in mind, the opening lines can be understood as the speaker trying to apply the common positive phrases, but not being very successful.

Lines 11 and 12 – *“vir so lank as wat ek kan onthou / staan en staar na die see”* (“for as long as I can remember / I’ve stood and stared at the sea”) – could imply that the speaker has instead found nature to be a more effective mentor and comforter. In lines 13 to 16 – *“en ek wonder oor die ritme / die onderliggende wiskunde / en of ons harte elektromagneties is / en of die heelal ‘n vlies is wat nog ‘n heelal wag hou”* (“and I wonder about the rhythm / the underlying maths / and if our hearts are electromagnetic / and if

the universe is a fleece that's guarding another universe") – the speaker is possibly conveying his musings about life, likely to figure out how to live it better to be happier and more successful. The use of the words "rhythm", "maths" and "electromagnetic", which all have scientific and measuring connotations, could imply that the speaker has a desire to decipher life – to understand it in a robust way. The universe is compared to a "fleece" (line 16) that conceals another universe, which may imply that the speaker feels this universe is superficial, and serves only to keep the true universe from us - this conveys the speaker's dissatisfaction with reality. "[F]leece" being a thick material dating back to ancient times may imply that it is not easy to reach this true universe, and that it has been around for all of humanity.

Lines 17 and 18 are a repetition of lines 11 and 12, however the "sea" is replaced with "fire"; this is another form of nature that the speaker finds comfort in. These lines are further evidence that a love of nature is something the speaker deems worth salvaging from the Afrikaner culture.

Lines 19 to 24 are a repetition of the opening 6 lines, and lines 25 to 29 are a repetition of lines 9 to 13 from the chorus. Lines 30 and 31 – "*ek wonder oor die verganklikheid van besittings / ek wonder oor die verganklikheid van idees*" ("I wonder about the transience of belongings / I wonder about the transience of ideas") – are more musings of the speaker with regards to life, these related to transience; the speaker is questioning the worth of things if they will not last, both physical ("belonging") and abstract ("ideas").

Lines 32 to 34 – "*god is groot / bier is goed / en die mense is mal*" ("god is great / beer is good / and these people are crazy") – (repeated in lines 35 to 37) all seem to deal with the Afrikaner culture: "god is great" (lines 32 and 35) is another common phrase; it is often used by Afrikaner churches; "beer is good" (lines 33 and 36) could imply that Afrikaners enjoy socializing with alcohol; and "and these people are crazy" (lines 34 and 37) is the speaker's opinion that Afrikaners in general do not have a rational mindset – as we have seen in previous songs.

Line 37 that follows – "*afrikaner moet sy nonsens los*" ("afrikaner must leave his nonsense") – is hopeful in the sense that the speaker implies that he believes the culture is redeemable, and is further evidence of the speaker's wish to alter the culture to

something he approves of. The line after it – “*n boer maak ‘n plan*” (“a boer makes a plan”) (line 38) – uses the well-known Afrikaner saying as a means of encouraging and convincing them – it seems as if he wants to help his people, not simply leave them as past songs implied.

The final three lines – “*die lewe is ‘n reeks foute / en ons almal is verkeerd / fokkit*” (“life is a series of mistakes / and we are all wrong / fuck it”) – return to the theme of trying to figure out life, but might also vindicate the Afrikaners and their past by implying that no one culture is without faults.

In “Droom Hoog” we see echoes of the struggles from earlier songs – the speaker muses about life and happiness – but we also see a much less angry and condemning individual, with more hopeful views. His musings seem more hopeful and curious than the doomed tone of earlier releases.

Two years after this song’s release, the band released the EP *Kajuitkoors* (2020) (their most recent release at the time of writing this) which keeps up this trend of presumed societal acceptance. Like all songs on the album, “Ons is die virus” makes heavy references to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Ons is die virus**

- 1 ons het goed begin
- 2 ek wil net by voorbaat
- 3 dit duidelik maak
- 4 dat ek het nie ’n punt het nie
- 5 lief vir my mense
- 6 probeer om nie te haat nie
- 7 nog nooit gewens my pa’t minder geld gemaak nie
- 8 vir eeue en eeue
- 9 het ons in die donker rondgekak
- 10 elektrisiteit herontdek

- 11 en nou sit hulle die ligte af
- 12 staar in my foon in
- 13 word verlief op onself
- 14 ons almal soek die antwoord,
- 15 maar het jy jouself gevra
- 16 op watter ouderdom het Adam en Eva gepaar?
- 17 het ons begin met kinders wat kinders grootmaak?
- 18 het ons van 'n ander planeet af gekom?
- 19 is ons eintlik vertraag?
- 20 want dit voel so
- 21 o, my jirre, dit voel so!
- 22 ons almal gaan soms 'n bietjie agteruit
- 23 soms gebeur alles op dieselfde tyd
- 24 soms poes die lewe jou oor die kop
- 25 en soms los hy jou heeltemal uit
- 26 soms voel ek veiliger met die weermag op straat
- 27 soms is daar nirvana op die bank in die lui middagson
- 28 in die braaikamer
- 29 ek is lief vir my lot
- 30 soms poes die lewe jou oor die kop
- 31 ons is die siekte
- 32 ons is die virus
- 33 ons is die skape
- 34 ons is die krisis
- 35 ons is die heelal se gedagtes

36 ons is vlietend

37 ons is die siekte

38 ons is die virus

translation:

**We are the virus**

1 we started well

2 in advance I just want

3 to make it clear

4 that I don't have a point

5 love my people

6 try to not hate

7 never yet wished that my dad made less money

8 for ages and ages

9 we screwed around in the dark

10 rediscovered electricity

11 and now they switch the lights off

12 stare into my phone

13 fall in love with ourselves

14 we're all looking for the answer,

15 but have you asked yourself

16 at what age did Adam and Eve mate?

17 did we start with children raising children?

18 did we come from another planet?

19 are we actually retarded?

20 because it feels like it  
21 my god it feels like it!  
22 we all sometimes go a bit backwards  
23 sometimes everything happens at once  
24 sometimes life smacks you over the head  
25 and sometimes he leaves you completely alone  
26 sometimes it feels safer with the army on the street  
27 sometimes there's nirvana on the bench in the lazy midday sun  
28 in the braai room  
29 I love my lot  
30 sometimes life smacks you over the head  
31 we are the sickness  
32 we are the virus  
33 we are the sheep  
34 we are the crisis  
35 we are the universe's thoughts  
36 we are the fleeting  
37 we are the sickness  
38 we are the virus

This song features a stream of consciousness style: vaguely related ideas, questions and statements flow with very little structure. With the opening line – “*ons het goed begin*” (“we started well”) – it is unclear what the speaker is referring to – perhaps South Africa’s first steps in reaction to the pandemic it alludes to – South Africa had some of the strictest lockdown rules in the world (Wasserman & Moynihan, 2021).

Lines 2 to 4 that follow – “*ek wil net by voorbaat / dit duidelik maak / dat ek het nie ’n punt het nie*” (“in advance I just want / to make it clear / that I don’t have a point”) – are clearer: the speaker implies that he is merely expressing his mind and doesn’t have a message to convey – this is in line with the stream of consciousness style. As we have seen, earlier songs do seem to have a point, and this change in style reinforces the idea that the speaker has undergone a change in these later songs.

Lines 5 to 7 – “*lief vir my mense / probeer om nie te haat nie / nog nooit gewens my pa’t minder geld gemaak nie*” (“love my people / try to not hate / never yet wished that my dad made less money”) – also imply that the speaker is trying to better himself and going through changes – attempting to not hate and experiencing things “never yet” experienced. The speaker’s wish that his “dad” makes “less money” (line 7) could mean that he wished that he had a poorer, less privileged upbringing so that he learnt what he has sooner. The words “never yet” imply that this is a totally new desire – perhaps as a result of his changing outlook on life.

Lines 8 to 11 – “*vir eeue en eeue / het ons in die donker rondgekak / elektrisiteit herontdek / en nou sit hulle die ligte af*” (“for ages and ages / we screwed around in the dark / rediscovered electricity / and now they switch the lights off”) – likely refer to the loadshedding experienced in South Africa; the time “screwed around in the dark” (line 9) could refer to apartheid, and its abolishment could thus be when “electricity” (line 10) was restored and so, metaphorically speaking, the light came back.

Lines 12 and 13 – “*staar in my foon in / word verlief op onself*” (“stare into my phone / fall in love with ourselves”) – may refer to the fact that many people in the modern era are addicted to their cell phones and social media, and this is a form of a pursuit of happiness. Lines 14 to 17 – “*ons almal soek die antwoord, / maar het jy jouself gevra / op watter ouderdom het Adam en Eva gepaar? / het ons begin met kinders wat kinders grootmaak?*” (“we’re all looking for the answer, / but have you asked yourself / at what age did Adam and Eve mate? / did we start with children raising children?”) – carry on this idea of perusing meaning in life: the speaker implies that parenting has been done inappropriately from the start, and so we are all doomed to experience bad upbringing and be bad parents too. This links with the speaker’s commonly expressed dislike of his



parental generation, however conceptualised this way the speaker implies that they are not to blame, but rather that this cycle of bad parenting is.

Lines 18 to 21 – *“het ons van ’n ander planeet af gekom? / is ons eintlik vertraag? / want dit voel so / o, my jirre, dit voel so!”* (“did we come from another planet? / are we actually retarded? / because it feels like it / my god it feels like it!”) – are further musings as to why people are seemingly incapable of being happy; the speaker suggests that we don’t belong on earth, and so we cannot be at peace here. It is likely that the speaker does not actually believe that humans don’t originate from earth, but uses this rhetorical question to highlight how impossible life can seem sometimes.

Lines 22 to 30 all pertain to the struggles life presents us with and how we cope; lines 22 to 25 – *“ons almal gaan soms ’n bietjie agteruit / soms gebeur alles op dieselfde tyd / soms poes die lewe jou oor die kop / en soms los hy jou heeltemal uit”* (“we all sometimes go a bit backwards / sometimes everything happens at once / sometimes life smacks your over the head / and sometimes he leaves you completely alone”) – list various struggles – backsliding, becoming overwhelmed, traumatic incidents and loneliness. Lines 26 to 28 – *“soms voel ek veiliger met die weermag op straat / soms is daar nirvana op die bank in die lui middagson / in die braaikamer”* (“sometimes it feels safer with the army on the street / sometimes there’s nirvana on the bench in the lazy midday sun / in the braai room”) – list ways we cope with these challenges: official protection services, music, nature and socialising. With line 29 – *“ek is lief vir my lot”* (“I love my lot”) – the speaker implies that he has come to some level of peace with life’s challenges. The many uses of the word “sometimes” in these lines emphasise the unpredictable nature of life.

The song ends with 8 lines starting with the phrase *“ons is”* (“we are”), followed by several different things; the “we” the speaker refers to is likely humanity in general; the speaker claiming that people are the “sickness” (*“siekte”*), “virus” (*“virus”*) and “crisis” (*“krisis”*) implies that the pandemic is not as bad as people themselves, who caused it in the first place and are responsible for pollution, resource depletion and many other problems. The speaker calling people “sheep” (*“skape”*) likely implies that he believes people don’t think for themselves, and “universe’s thoughts” (*“heelal se gedagtes”*) and

“fleeting” (“*vlietend*”) refer to the unclear meaning of life and our transience as humans respectively.

Like “Droom Hoog”, “Ons is die virus” is reminiscent of the band’s early work, however the tone is notably lighter, with certain sentiments, such as “*lief vir my mense*” (“love my people”) (line 5) that were completely absent in earlier songs.

In both these songs the speaker expresses confusion about life, but not about who he is, nor do we see anger directed towards any society, like the Afrikaners whom he attacked in the earlier half of the band’s careers. This is strong evidence to support the notion that the speaker has attained the so-called virtue of fidelity, which implies that he has also overcome his repudiation.

## Conclusion

From the analysis of the selected songs above, it may be argued that the speaker in early Fokofpolisiekar lyrics has developed the Eriksonian malignancy of repudiation: he exhibits rejection of his birth culture and self-destructive behaviour, he discloses feelings of not belonging, and he suffers from mental turmoil.

Furthermore, the above analysis also presents a strong case that the speaker eventually overcomes this repudiation and finally achieves its conceptual opposite, the virtue of fidelity: the speaker clearly has a healthier state of mind; he has formed intimate, meaningful relationships; and he shows acceptance and love for society.

In the following, concluding chapter I will tentatively apply the findings gained from this study to the post-apartheid Afrikaners who are the band’s primary audience.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

This study's central argument is that the speaker in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics has experienced an identity crisis, which has led to the development of repudiation as Erikson defines it; this study aimed to prove this claim by analysing their lyrics. From the evidence gained from this analysis, it is clear that the speaker has indeed developed the malignancy of repudiation as a young adult: he openly rejects the core values of his birth culture; he displays self-destructive behaviour, such as excessive indulgence in alcohol; he attempts to mend his lack of identity through the cult-like group that is the band; he does not feel at home in his country of birth; and the speaker discloses mental turmoil – including anger, depression and confusion – which is of such severity that he experiences suicidal thoughts.

Through the observation of the band's history and the interviews they gave, it is also clear that the speaker's views can be directly linked to the band's socio-political background as individuals who saw the end of apartheid during their teenage years, and who felt that their culture had lied to and mistreated them.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to explore Eriksonian repudiation in the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar, however other studies regarding the band do support these findings indirectly. Klopper notes in her conclusion that the search for identity is a major motif in the band's lyrics:

*Uit die gevallestudie van die punkrockgroep Fokofpolisiekar is dit duidelik dat die kwessie van verlossing en identiteit 'n brandende kwessie is wat ondersoek word in die lirieke van hierdie groep en dat dit teruggevoer kan word na die posisie van die Afrikanerjeug na afloop van die magsverlies van die Afrikaner (2009: 192).*

[From this case study of the punk rock group Fokofpolisiekar it is clear that the issue of liberation and identity is a burning issue that gets explored in their lyrics, and that it can be brought back to the position of the Afrikaner youth after the loss of power of the Afrikaner.]

Nell, who also studied the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar in her M.A. in Afrikaans, remarks that the speaker shows a desire to liberate himself from previous identities:

*Indien die identiteitsvormingsproses beskou word . . . as gepaardgaande met die soeke na verlossing van vorige identiteite, die bewuswording van huidige realiteite en die strewende na iets waarna gemik kan word, is dit duidelik dat hierdie proses tot uiting kom in die lirieke van Fokofpolisiekar (2014: 103).*

[If the identity forming process is regarded . . . as moving in conjunction with the search for liberation from previous identities, becoming aware of present realities and the striving for something that can be aimed for, it is clear that these processes come out in the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar.]

There is, furthermore, strong evidence that the speaker manages to overcome his repudiation to an extent as he becomes older; releases from *Selfmedikasie* onwards feature songs where the speaker is notably less angry, more loving and exhibits less emotional turmoil. These lyrics also reveal that the speaker has formed intimate relationships and is much more accepting of his society, despite its flaws. This latter trait is almost the definition of Erikson's virtue of fidelity which indicates the successful completion of the adolescence stage; as Erikson states: "Fidelity, when fully matured, is the strength of disciplined devotion" (1962: 23).

The hiatus after which this change took place began soon after the Fok-God incident; we see in the album *Swanesang* (which was recorded very soon after the incident, but before the hiatus), that this incident had a major impact on the band members. As I have argued, these events were a shock to them and made them aware of their repudiation-related mindset and lifestyle, and were the trigger that allowed them to address it.

As previously mentioned, throughout the band's discography – both as an individual who has repudiation and one who has overcome it – the speaker expresses his dislike of many traditional Afrikaner traits, including conformity, conservatism and Calvinistic Christianity. Through this rejection of most of the core values of their birth-culture, yet not adopting any other specified cultural identity, the speaker implies that he wishes to

reform the Afrikaner culture into something he approves of. Klopper agrees with this sentiment:

*Deur middel van Afrikaanse punk wou Fokofpolisiekar losbreek van 'n voorgeskrewe identiteit ten einde 'n nuwe identiteit in en deur middel van musiek (as kunsvorm) te vind (2009: 111).*

[Through the medium of Afrikaans punk Fokofpolisiekar wanted to break loose from a prescribed identity towards finding a new identity in and through music (as artform).]

In a similar vein, Nell states:

*Hulle sien hulself as deel van Suid-Afrika en hulle wil tot 'n nuwe soort identiteit bydra en maak daarop aanspraak dat hulle en hul generasiegenote iets werd is (2014: 7).*

[They see themselves as part of South Africa and they want to contribute to a new type of identity and proclaim that they and their peers are worth something.]

The question then arises: what values does the speaker in Fokofpolisiekar lyrics have in mind for this new Afrikaner culture? In his Master of Arts dissertation in Sustainable Communities, M. Timms (2017) explored how “the works of Fokofpolisiekar deconstruct a homogeneous and nationalist Afrikaner identity and reconstruct a post-Apartheid, New South African, Afrikaner identity and narrative” (Timms 2017: 10). He found that “the works of Fokofpolisiekar greatly deconstructed a homogeneous and nationalist Afrikaner identity”, but don’t offer much in the way of reconstructing a new identity, stating: “[Fokofpolisiekar] to a much lesser extent reconstructed a post-Apartheid Afrikaner identity and narrative” (Timms 2017: ii).

While I agree with Timms’ view that the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar deconstruct the nationalist Afrikaner identity to a much greater degree than reconstruct a new one, I would argue that in my analysis I found a few aspects from the Afrikaner culture that they still valued. The most prominent of these is probably a love of nature: from their

first album, with “Hemel op die platteland”, right up to the recent release “Droom Hoog”, the speaker shows his love and admiration for nature. Specific examples include the ocean, the South African countryside (i.e. biomes such as fynbos, savanna and desert and grassland), stars and fire.

The Golden Rule – treat others as you would like others to treat you (Spooner 1914) – is another value that the speaker explicitly states as something he believes in after the band’s hiatus. This maxim is found in most major religions, including Christianity.

Another key trait that the speaker implies that he would keep from traditional Afrikaner culture is the language itself. As well-known South African poet Antjie Krog says about Fokofpolisiekar: “*Hulle Afrikaans is suiwer*” (“Their Afrikaans is pure”) (quoted in Nell 2015); their respect for the language and insistence on using it and having never switched to English – a language with far more commercial potential – likely indicate their admiration for the language, and their wish for it to live on.

As mentioned, the Voëlvry movement also had a desire to pave the way for an Afrikaner identity different from the stereotypical one, but the style of the music differs greatly: as seen in this study, Fokofpolisiekar’s style is angry and filled with turmoil, whereas the Voëlvry movement’s is comical and satirical; Pienaar observes:

The musicians’ dress style, mocking pseudonyms, lyrics and even their use of traditional Afrikaner musical instruments . . . emphasised the cynically humorous attitude that the Voëlvryers adopted in their derision of sacred Afrikaner symbols (2012: 9).

The obvious difference between the two is that the Voëlvry artists were active before apartheid’s end, and Fokofpolisiekar started almost a decade later; Voëlvry could therefore be seen as the protest to bring about political change, and Fokofpolisiekar as the anger-filled outrage towards the past with that change having come to pass.

Due to the band’s popularity and cult-like status, the findings of this study can be seen as an indication of the attitudes of many post-apartheid Afrikaners. The band’s desire

to reform the Afrikaner culture is, no doubt, shared by many of their fans; as Klopper puts it:

*Die groep se aanhangers identifiseer met die lirieke en vind solidariteit in die samesyn met ander aanhangers wat saam met hulle deur die identifikasieproses gaan (2009: 111).*

[The group's fans identify with the lyrics and find solidarity in the togetherness with other fans who together with them go through the identification process.]

As mentioned in chapter 1 of this mini-dissertation, Loubser found that while many post-apartheid Afrikaners still regard the Christian faith as important to their identity, there is a strong trend of moving toward more charismatic churches in favour of the Dutch Reformed Church:

[Christianity] is still seen as an important part of contemporary Afrikaner identities, as values, faith and church-going came up time and again in my interviews. A common phenomenon among young Afrikaners is moving away from the Dutch Reformed Church to more charismatic churches (2015: 42).

This contrasts with the findings of this study: the speaker makes it clear that Christianity is not a value he wishes to perpetuate for himself, both as an individual who suffers from repudiation and one who has presumably overcome it. This could imply that there is another, less widespread, trend of discarding Christianity, and religion in general, among post-apartheid Afrikaners. Both findings imply, however, that there is a general trend in many post-apartheid Afrikaners of becoming less conservative and less traditional.

The fact that the speaker seems to have overcome his repudiation is a hopeful finding for the generation of Afrikaners born around apartheid's end – that the possible emotional turmoil that they have had to cope with due to the socio-political circumstances of their upbringing can indeed be overcome.

There is a marked trend of Afrikaners emigrating from South Africa: 10 to 15% of the Afrikaner population – 300,000 to 450,000 people – emigrated between 1994 and 2011, according to official statistics (Giliomee 2011: 709). This exodus is cause for concern for many who fear that it will lead to the downfall of the Afrikaner culture; Bornman observes:

*'n Bewustheid van die bedreiging wat emigrasie vir die land as geheel inhou, het in Maart 2003 gelei tot die loodsing van 'n Kom-huis-toe-veldtog waarby organisasies soos Solidariteit en die Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (FAK) betrokke is (2005: 387).*

[An awareness of the threat that emigration holds for the land as a whole, lead in March 2003 to the launch of a Come-home-campaign where organisations such as Solidariteit and FAK (*Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings*) are involved.]

Fokofpolisiekar and their continued success, however, as well as other Afrikaans artists like them, are beacons of hope that the culture could live on, and perhaps even thrive, albeit with alterations.



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