

## **Edgeland Encounters in the South African City**

### ***Stone Plant: a Novel***

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Submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of East Anglia

School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing

August 2018

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## Abstract

‘Edgelands’, or urban wasteland spaces, are often represented as sparsely peopled ecosystems existing on the periphery of European and North American cities, in the wake of declining industry. This thesis examines the cultural meanings and literary, artistic and popular representations of such spaces in the context of the South African city, with a focus on Cape Town. I examine the cultural role played by three iconic urban spaces: the perimeter of the Table Mountain National Park, site of centuries-old anxiety over wilderness and criminality; the apartheid-era ‘unfinished bridge’ on the foreshore, which confronts the city with infrastructural dysfunction; and the generic road verge, where the barrier between motorist and pedestrian is breached. To demonstrate the role these spaces play in the popular imagination, I draw on representations in art, literature, journalism, advertising and government communication. South African edgeland differs from the British model in its colonial and apartheid origins, and in its consequent contemporary occupation by marginalised people. The ambiguous, compelling figure of the edgeland denizen emerges as a key figure in representations of these spaces, eclipsing the conventionally depicted edgeland qualities of isolation and wilderness. Thus peopled, South African edgelands are shown as facilitating encounters between historically divided communities. While such encounters are traditionally represented as perilous, they are also symbolic opportunities for empathetic or transformative connection. The thesis is accompanied by a novel that explores these themes, *Stone Plant*.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I'm greatly indebted to my supervisors Jean McNeil and Thomas Greaves for their insight, kindness and invaluable help over the course of writing this thesis.

Thank you as ever to Peter Colenso and Olivia Rose-Innes for all your support. And to Dr Eustacia Riley for the inspiration.

## Introduction

Edgelands, neglected urban wasteland where the built human environment intersects with its unplanned, ‘natural’ surroundings, are a feature of the modern cityscape. These ambiguous peri-urban landscapes have historically been considered unattractive, dangerous, wasteful and disorderly. However, there has recently been a critical reassessment of such spaces, with a new recognition of their value as unique ecologies. They represent the interplay between human activity and the non-human environment, they refute conceptions of human culture as separate from ‘pure’ nature,<sup>1</sup> and their existence challenges triumphal narratives of planned city development.

Given this rich mix of meanings, the edgelands are an increasingly popular resource and inspiration in a variety of disciplines, including urban planning, wildlife conservation, tourism, music and architecture. In particular, they provide rich material for the visual arts and literature. Often, the edgeland space is represented as characterised by its eerie abandonment; these spaces are emptied of the usual human traffic, save for a few solitary eccentrics, and are all the more atmospheric for it.

This portrait, however, is not recognisable in the context of southern African colonial cities, which have received relatively little critical attention in edgeland studies, and which have other political and economic histories that have influenced their structure and growth.<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, too, these spaces have proved inspirational to certain artists and writers; their representations carry meanings that are affected by the local social and historical context.

In Cape Town, the South African city that is the focus of this thesis, edgeland spaces are moulded by the proximity of the Table Mountain wilderness, by the legacy of apartheid town planning, and by a certain rawness imparted by

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion in Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> See for example accounts of urban growth scenarios in developing countries: Marcello Balbo, ‘Urban Planning and the Fragmented City of Developing Countries’, *Third World Planning Review*, 15, no. 1 (1993), pp 23-35; José Barredo, Luca Demicheli, Carlo Lavallo et al., ‘Modelling Future Urban Scenarios in Developing Countries’, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 32 (2004), pp. 65-84.

historical and ongoing societal violence and inequality. Post-apartheid, these spaces retain this special ambience: neither straightforwardly ugly ‘waste’ space, nor the nostalgic, even idyllic spaces envisioned by urban-wasteland preservationists and conservationists.<sup>3</sup> They are transgressive landscapes in a specific, local way, as well as in a more universal ecological sense.<sup>4</sup> While often regarded as unsettling places of dread and peril, I argue that they can allow for moments of transcendence, transformation and discovery – and that these experiences are mediated by the human occupants of these ambiguous spaces. Such potentials are reflected in the ways the edgelands are depicted in art and literature.

Importantly, many South African edgelands are, unlike their equivalent spaces in British or European cities, quite actively and constantly populated by marginalised people. In these zones, encounters between this population and the more economically secure inhabitants of a city do, from time to time, take place. The edgeland becomes a stage where unexpected meetings can occur: fluid crossings-over between worlds that may be impossible in the more formal city. Edgeland spaces are charged with the likelihood of such encounters – their anxiety, but also their potential for connection. Such meetings are particularly fraught in a country historically burdened with social and racial division.

These tensions emerge in public perceptions of the South African edgeland, in bureaucratic communication, and in their representation in art and literature. The ambiguous, compelling figure of the edgeland denizen – rough sleeper, ‘droster’, or foot traveller – emerges as key. The solitude and unique wildlife ecology of waste spaces is often eclipsed, in the South African aesthetic, by a preoccupation with this defining human figure.

In this thesis, I examine these qualities of South African edgelands by

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Marion Shoard’s assessment of the suitability of edgeland space for children’s games seems dangerously optimistic in the context of the South African city: ‘The subversiveness of interfacial land perhaps explains why children often value it more than other groups, seeming to find the edgelands a wonderful place to play. Why? This landscape offers an obviously varied environment, which is often wild, and which has plenty of places to hide and things to play with.’ Marion Shoard, ‘Edgelands’, in Jennifer Jenkins (ed.), *Remaking the Landscape*, (London: Profile Books, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of transgressive ecologies, see Joern Langhorst, ‘Re-presenting Transgressive Ecologies: Postindustrial Sites as Contested Terrains’, *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 19, no. 10 (2014), pp. 1110-1133.

exploring several key locations in Cape Town and beyond. I trace the sequential development of the South African edgeland imaginary, from the first colonial settlement on the edge of the mountain, through apartheid-era attempts to constrain the shape of the city, through to the contemporary politics of the highway verge. In so doing, the thesis traces the historical trek of colonial settlers, the first South African urbanisers, from Cape Town north towards the gold-fields of Johannesburg: a mobile and evolving zone of contact between the urban and the non-urban.

In Chapter One I give an overview of the concept of the edgeland as established in the works of largely British writers and ecologists, exploring the differences evident in the South African city. Chapter Two ('Proto-Edgeland: the Table Mountain Park') explores the oldest and most central edgeland in the city, the mountain, discussing how a colonial-era 'transgressive' zone has, over time, become concentrated along the narrow borderline of the Table Mountain Reserve, provoking anxiety about ownership, control and 'unauthorised aliens'. Chapter Three ('The Bridge') moves into the apartheid-era infrastructure of the inner city, exploring the historical circumstances of the formation of an iconic edgeland space and examining how it and its dwellers have provoked public responses, official and creative. Finally, Chapter Four ('The Verge') leads out of town, examining the importance of roads and road-edges as transitional spaces where the barrier between motorist and pedestrian may be breached; and how the figure of the road-walker has emerged as a trope in South African cultural representation. Chapter Four also briefly touches on the landscape of Johannesburg, where the road ends, with particular reference to the emerging edgeland space of the reworked mine-dumps. In each case, I show that the marginal wasteland discussed, by virtue of the complex human interactions that it uniquely allows, comes to represent an opportunity for transgressive and transformative connection in a historically divided society – and how these ambiguities are reflected in popular, artistic and literary representations.

My novel, *Stone Plant*, is set in the iconic Cape Town edgeland space of the 'unfinished bridge', the focus of Chapter Three. This evocative space, and

the presence of a shifting population of people living beneath it, making their camp in the midst of a city, partially inspired my initial interest in urban wastelands and their inhabitants. I chose to place my novel here, and to imagine the lives and perspectives of edgeland-living and edgeland-visiting characters (not all of them human – one of the chief forces in the book is a noxious but persistent weed, an exemplary edgeland-dweller.) This setting and focus has allowed me to explore the themes of exclusion, transgression and boundary-breaching that are examined in the thesis. In my novel, as in other depictions of Southern African edgeland worlds, the edgeland is represented as a space not only of potential peril and uncertainty, but also of possibility, connection, escape from the rigidities of the formal city, and renewal.



## Chapter 1: Edgelands in the Postindustrial City

In this chapter, I briefly define the concept of the edgeland as it has been developed in reference to large cities of the industrialised world. I then consider how the South African edgelands differ, in ways determined by the specific colonial and apartheid history of the South African city. In particular, I discuss the human occupation of these spaces, and discuss how the presence of street-dwellers in an otherwise socially segregated environment makes South African edgelands especially charged locations of transgressive human encounters, full of both anxiety and possibility.

Most critical writing on ‘edgeland’<sup>5</sup> spaces has referred to the large postindustrial cities of the northern hemisphere. These zones tend to be the products of post-industrial decline; indeed, these spaces are often referred to as ‘postindustrial landscapes’.<sup>6</sup> These are wastelands ‘left behind’ by the retreat of industry, places on the edges of cities that once had purpose but have now fallen out of use. London’s edgelands, for example, are characterised by Robert Macfarlane as:

... jittery, jumbled ground: utilities infrastructure and haulage depots, crackling substations and allotments, scrub forests and sluggish canals, slackened regulatory frameworks and guerrilla ecologies.<sup>7</sup>

These marginal geographies usually form on the perimeter of cities, but may also take the form of discontinuous interstitial spaces. Frequently, such spaces are the direct products of industry: what is left, often in a contaminated and polluted state, after resources have been extracted from the land by once-

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<sup>5</sup> Other terms that have been proposed for similar landscapes include Alan Berger’s ‘drosscape’, proposed in *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006); and ‘junkscape’, a term used by ‘anti-suburbanite’ writer James Howard Kunstler, cited in Nina-Marie Lyster, ‘Trashed Space’, in John Knechtel (ed.), *TRASH* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Although this term has been criticised by Berger as static, narrow, isolating, and bound to the past. *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), p.233.

profitable industries:

Economically finished, socially forgotten and ecologically decaying, they are wasted remnants of what was, or what could have been, in a culture other than one defined by endless consumption and planned obsolescence.<sup>8</sup>

Alan Berger, who coined the term ‘drosscapes’ to describe equivalent spaces in American cities, discusses them in the context of urban sprawl; he attributes their creation to rapid deindustrialisation, urbanisation, and the accompanying decentralisation of industry, leaving gaps in the urban fabric that deteriorate into waste landscapes.<sup>9</sup> In Berger’s analysis, this creation of waste is a necessary, organic and even ‘healthy’ part of the processes of an evolving, horizontally expanding city: ‘Like a biological organism, the urbanised landscape is an open system, whose planned complexity always entails unplanned dross.’<sup>10</sup> Less benevolently, this process of ‘creative destruction’<sup>11</sup> is an integral part of the consumerist ethos of ever-accelerating growth, an aspect of planned obsolescence.

Historically, such unpromising landscapes have been reviled: considered ugly in the popular imagination, unrecognised as legitimate ecologies, and excluded from appreciations of picturesque ‘nature’ (such as embodied in traditional, lyrical nature writing). Urban planning schemes have, until relatively recently, neglected these zones or considered them problematic, actively seeking to eradicate them from the fabric of the city.<sup>12</sup> Part of the resistance to finding value in these spaces is that they are ambiguous, and do not easily fit into existing categories of use; they are disturbing spaces that elude classification and reject stability. As Berger writes: ‘The in-between landscapes of the horizontal city are liminal because they remain at the margins ... awaiting a societal desire to

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<sup>8</sup> Lyster mentions the ‘massive roof spaces of big-box retail centres’ in ‘Trashed Space’, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Berger, *Drosscape*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Berger here quotes Joseph Schumpeter’s phrase, from *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1942), pp. 82-82.

<sup>12</sup> The first formal recognition of these spaces in Britain as distinct landscapes came in the sixties, when a land utilisation survey revealed extensive fringe land – ‘the rurban fringe’ (sic) – that, worryingly to surveyors, could not be described as either farm or town, the result of urban sprawl spilling over and blurring these boundaries. Alice Coleman, as discussed in Shoard, ‘Edgelands’, p.12.

inscribe them with value and status.<sup>13</sup>

However, in recent years this desire seems to have arrived in force, with a growing cultural and scholarly interest in these wasteland and edgeland spaces. This has to a large degree flowed from influential texts by writers such as Berger, Marion Shoard and Richard Mabey. Nature writer Mabey first advanced the cause of what he termed ‘the unofficial countryside’ in his 1973 book of the same name.<sup>14</sup> It was Shoard who coined the term ‘edgelands’ in a seminal essay of the same name, in which she celebrates these spaces as rich biomes and cultural resources.<sup>15</sup> Iain Sinclair, with his influential work on the psychogeography of cities – particularly London, as in *London Orbital*<sup>16</sup> – has also been a prominent promoter of the psychic value of urban wasteland spaces.

For a non-academic readership in the UK, the book *Edgelands* has been particularly influential. This is a collection of meditative and celebratory essays on various waste spaces in the north of England by the poets which also draws on the work of the abovementioned writers.<sup>17</sup> This book, widely reviewed, has given rise to various artistic, practical and academic investigations of these landscapes, in fields as diverse as architecture, waste management<sup>18</sup> and tourism (ie. ‘nature walks’)<sup>19</sup>, as well influencing practitioners in photography<sup>20</sup>, film<sup>21</sup>, literature and conceptual art.<sup>22</sup>

Part of this new appreciation for edgelands is due to the growing recognition of them as alternative wilderness spaces, ‘emergent’ ecologies that

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<sup>13</sup> Berger, *Drosscape*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Mabey, *The Unofficial Countryside* (London: HarperCollins, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> Shoard, ‘Edgelands’.

<sup>16</sup> Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital*, (London: Granta Books, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Bath Spa University’s MA in Literature, Landscape and Environment <[www.bathspa.ac.uk/courses/pg-literature-landscape-and-environment](http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/courses/pg-literature-landscape-and-environment)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of the cultural and intellectual impact of the edgelands concept, see Lancaster University [Case Study], ‘*Edgelands: Transforming Contemporary Understandings of Landscape*’ <<https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies2/refservice.svc/GetCaseStudyPDF/43559>> [Accessed 10 May 2018].

<sup>20</sup> See for example Catalan artist Lara Almarcegui’s photographs of marginal spaces, as discussed in Matthew Gandy, ‘Marginalia: Aesthetics, Ecology, and Urban Wastelands’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103, no.6 (2013), pp. 1301-1316.

<sup>21</sup> See for example the collaboration between filmmaker Kieran Evans and musician Karl Hyde, charting the edgelands of Essex. *The Outer Edges* [film], dir. by Kieran Evans (UK: Smith Hyde Productions, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> See for example the ‘guided tours’ of wasteland given by German artist Boris Sieverts: ‘Journeys through the Urban Periphery’, 2003, as described in Anna Jorgensen and Marian Tylecote, ‘Ambivalent Landscapes – Wilderness in the Urban Interstices’, *Landscape Research*, 32 (2007), pp. 456.

intrude upon human-made zones but that evade human control, and which support unique and rich collections of wildlife. Writer and filmmaker Simon Sellars writes:

The forgotten nature of the edgelands, and its chaotic, fragmentary character, gives rise to new modes of being that would not have been possible otherwise, a complex, co-dependent ecology and a refuge for many species of plant life, and even startling hybrid flora. These thrive in the mixed-use soil strata deposited by multiple industries, which would not otherwise occur in nature.<sup>23</sup>

More than this, however, the appeal of these neglected spaces lies also in their subversive ability to lay bare urban processes of growth and decay, displaying as they do the workings of defunct industry, as well as the successes and failures of urban planning. Shoard, for example, urges us to celebrate and preserve these landscapes ‘for what they can tell us about the way our society is. Town and country may show us the surface of life with which we feel comfortable, but the interface shows us its broiling depths.’ They are the ‘museum of our recent past and cauldron of our economic present.’<sup>24</sup>

It is these qualities – the ability to subvert the conventional categories of urban and rural, useful and useless, and to make visible marginal elements of the city – that make the edgelands an attractive topic to urban ecologists concerned with social and environmental justice. Langhorst here explains how such landscapes may be considered ‘transgressive’:

Emergent ecologies can be considered the most authentic elements within many concepts of urban nature, as they are the physical expressions of non-human processes that are not controlled by human maintenance regimes. They may be interpreted as nature’s ... acts of resistance, occupying marginal and marginalised spaces that are less or not at all controlled by hegemonial powers of development and capital.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Simon Sellars, *Postcards from the Edgelands (for Marion Shoard)*, 2010 <<https://www.simonsellars.com/postcards-from-the-edgelands>> [Accessed 19 January, 2018].

<sup>24</sup> Shoard, ‘Edgelands’, p.16.

<sup>25</sup> Langhorst, ‘Transgressive Ecologies’, p.1113.

They are unsettling, anarchic places, and in their very existence, displaying evidence of deterioration, waste and chaos, they challenge the orthodoxy and authority of the planned city. They are also places that offer possibilities for new and more progressive urban development to emerge:

Post-industrial sites are simultaneously iconic reminders of the ongoing deindustrialisation, and locations to re- imagine, reinvent and recover landscapes as agents for cultural, social, economic and ecological change ... Such sites have the potential to be at the centre of conversations about urbanity and urban transformation.<sup>26</sup>

The existence of these transitional spaces between town and city also challenges traditional concepts of a separation between the human and natural – a duality that is ecologically destructive, serving to distance human beings from their environment. An acknowledgement of these spaces, and a celebration of their aesthetics, is a rebuke to the environmentally damaging, impossible and historically conservative notion of uncontaminated, ‘pure’ nature. Instead, wasteland spaces are the location of ‘contestation between multiple human and non-human processes’, an idea that runs counter to ‘nature’ as an ideal state that must be preserved unaltered. Such ideal states, Langhorst reminds us, ‘are suspect of “naturalising” existing political and economic systems, using ecological values’.<sup>27</sup>

The inherent subversiveness of edgeland spaces is part of why they are frequently the subject of governmental endeavours to tame, eradicate, homogenise or otherwise control them:

When the emergent, the anarchic, rears its head, the symbiosis is ritually shunned by government planning and development, which imposes ‘urban growth boundaries’ to shunt the edgelands back and forth, forever mindful of the chaos embodied by the interzone that threatens to overwhelm order, reason and structure.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 1112.

<sup>27</sup> Langhorst, ‘Transgressive Ecologies’, p. 1126.

<sup>28</sup> Sellars, ‘Postcards’.

For these reasons, many commentators see the preservation of the edgelands as a vital part of resisting these authoritarian urban agendas. Importantly, it is necessary to preserve their anarchic essence. As Shoard warns:

Much of the special character of interfacial areas arises from the fact that they are not planned and not managed. If the essential feature of the edgelands is that they are untamed, and that they express our own age in being so, then to plan them is to some extent to trample on their essential character.<sup>29</sup>

This is the essence of much criticism of initiatives to turn wastelands into sanitised, ‘environmentally restored’ faux-wildernesses or parkland, which at their worst are doomed attempts to recreate an imagined pre-industrial arcadia. The danger in this ‘greenwashing’ approach is that it can produce homogenous, decontextualised landscapes that erase human presence, ‘with no regard for history, context, or culture, let alone emergent and new ecologies.’<sup>30</sup>

Such schemes, Langhorst cautions, serve to reinforce culture/nature dualities, setting ‘symbols of the failure of the industrial age’ in opposition to ‘essential, sustainable and environmentally just renewal.’ Rejecting this, Langhorst rather conceives of waste spaces as ‘locations for the ongoing negotiation of human and non-human processes, as passive ground and active agent in the constant and continuous remaking of place ... the simultaneous ruins of culture and nature.’<sup>31</sup>

These complex and contradictory energies have proved inspiring to artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers. As Macfarlane writes: ‘The edgelands have sprawled all over late-twentieth-century English painting, photography, film ... and children’s literature.’<sup>32</sup>

Despite rejecting the picturesque tradition of British nature writing, such celebrations of the edgeland often take on its elegiac tone. For example, Mabey finds inspiration in ‘nature’s fight back ... her dogged and inventive survival in

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<sup>29</sup> Shoard, ‘Edgelands’, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> Lyster, ‘Trashed Space’, pp. 71-72.

<sup>31</sup> Langhorst, ‘Transgressive Ecologies’, pp. 1110.

<sup>32</sup> Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, p. 232. Here Macfarlane gives several English examples.

the face of all we deal out.’<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Farley and Roberts (praised by Shoard as ‘the first bards of England’s edgelands’<sup>34</sup>) frequently strike a nostalgic and lyrical note. As Macfarlane writes: ‘In the end, the thought-crimes of which Farley and Symmons Roberts accuse traditional landscape romantics ... get re-performed almost perfectly here [in *Edgelands*], just in a new setting.’<sup>35</sup>

A further irony is that despite the emphasis on the integration of human and non-human in such spaces, much writing on, and artistic representation of, the edgeland emphasises its lack of human habitation. An absence of other people often appears to be an important aesthetic value of these landscapes for many observers, who find poetic romance in their emptiness and solitude. Matthew Gandy writes:

The word wasteland is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as an ‘empty or barren area of land’ ... Yet this essentially practical rendition disguises a poetic undercurrent to the term ... that reveals a certain allure toward spaces of emptiness within the European cultural imagination.<sup>36</sup>

They are blank spaces whose value lies in that they may be filled by the creative imagination: ‘void, absence, yet also promise, the space of the possible, of expectation’.<sup>37</sup>

This desire to maintain a sense of human isolation is evident in Farley and Roberts’ *Edgelands*. As Macfarlane points out, despite the authors’ stated intention to ‘talk to edgelands people’,

... their edgeland turns out to be a region almost as evacuated of its inhabitants as Sebald’s Suffolk or Yves Marchand’s Detroit. ‘Hundreds of conversations’ are referred to in the acknowledgments, but a meagre half-dozen are (briefly)

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Mabey, *Unofficial Countryside*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>34</sup> Marion Shoard [review], ‘Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts’, *The Observer*, <<https://theguardian.com/books/2011/mar/06/edgelands-england-farley-roberts-review>>, 2011 [Accessed 12 January 2015].

<sup>35</sup> Robert Macfarlane [review], ‘Edgelands by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts’, *The Guardian*, 2011 <<https://theguardian.com/books/2011/feb/19/edgelands-farley-symmons-roberts-review>> [Accessed 12 January 2015].

<sup>36</sup> Gandy, ‘Marginalia’, p. 1302.

<sup>37</sup> Ignasi Solà-Morales, ‘Terrain Vague’, in Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Anyplace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 119.

rehearsed in the book. A few individuals stumble past in the distance, like extras from *The Road*. When the inhabitants of this 'loved and lived-in' landscape do appear centre-stage, they are left faceless, nameless and allegorical.<sup>38</sup>

The lack of human presence in many edgeland depictions may not always, or even often, reflect the reality (given reports of growing populations of homeless people in urban 'jungles'<sup>39</sup>); and indeed, the edgelands attract their own enthusiastic population of visitors:

For decades the edgelands have been crawling with chroniclers: psychogeographers, biopsychogeographers, auto-biopsychogeographers, deep topographers, and other theoretically constituted lovers of the detrital, gleaning their ruminations on ruination.<sup>40</sup>

And indeed, however barren an edgeland landscape may appear, it is always shaped by complex human histories and cultural engagements. As Gandy says of what he terms 'unintentional landscapes':

... these are never landscapes without human presence or meaning: just as the wilderness ethic has tended to erase cultural or historical dimensions to 'wild nature' so we find that some of the more romanticist or rarefied responses to 'urban wilderness', or the abandoned spaces of modernity, tend to overlook the full complexity of their human interactions, both in the past and the present.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear this is not a sustainable approach in the context of many cities of the global South, where urban edgeland spaces are differently constituted, and where human habitation and use of such spaces is common. Population and space pressure mean that many apparent wastelands are often zones of intense human habitation, as well as conflict over use and ownership. Gandy notes that in India, for example, 'the unintentional, the spontaneous and the makeshift are

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<sup>38</sup> Macfarlane, 'Edgelands'.

<sup>39</sup> For example in Seattle and San Jose, discussed in Alexia Fernández Campbell, Reena Flores and National Journal, 'How Silicon Valley Created America's Largest Homeless Camp', *The Atlantic*, 2014 <<https://theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/how-silicon-valley-created-americas-largest-homeless-camp/431739/>> [Accessed 12 July 2017].

<sup>40</sup> Macfarlane, 'Edgelands'

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Gandy, 'Unintentional Landscapes', *Landscape Research*, 41, no. 4 (2016), p. 438.



often the rule rather than the exception, and political conflict over rights and definitions has tangible and frequently violent consequences.’<sup>42</sup>

Certainly in Cape Town these urban spaces are robustly, even aggressively peopled: an encounter here implies interaction, welcome or not, with another person, perhaps someone from a very different stratum of life.

There is a structural and historical context for this, of course. Edgeland spaces in Cape Town are the product of different and unique processes. They are not the remnants of failed, one-mighty industry, or the left-behind products of rapid urban sprawl. Rather, they result from the highly controlled and rigid ordering of space that was integral to apartheid-era urban planning and social engineering. They exist because they fell outside, or in-between, the rigidly bounded zones of the apartheid city, and lay by and large invisible to and unregarded by city planners and private developers.<sup>43</sup>

They often lie along historically fraught faultlines, or on the borders between more regulated places. For example, between areas that were demarcated black or white residential areas; alongside structures (such as highways and canals) that served as buffers between these zones; between public and private land; or where potential development has been stalled for political or financial reasons. (District Six being, as always, a special case.<sup>44</sup>) In Cape Town, the situation is complicated by the existence of ‘wild nature’, in the form of the Table Mountain Reserve and the undeveloped coastline, that directly abuts the city without intervening rural areas, creating unique edgeland zones that are only partly controlled by official conservation bodies.

As the material fabric of the city is ruptured in these spaces, so too do other ruptures occur: the borders between urban and wild may dissolve; even the boundaries between the past and the present may become blurred. Partly because they are not buried beneath more recent infrastructure, they can also allow for the physical emergence of suppressed or unacknowledged aspects of the city’s ecosystem – even literal emergence, in the form of bones or artefacts from deeper

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p 438.

<sup>43</sup> See for example AJ Christopher, ‘Urban Segregation in Post-apartheid South Africa’, *Urban Studies* 38, no. 3 (March 2001), p. 449-466.

<sup>44</sup> Marco Bezzoli, Martin Kruger and Rafael Marks, *Texture and Memory: The Urbanism of District Six* (Cape Town: Cape Technikon, 2002).

strata, revealing a hidden history. Often, they function as paths and access routes connecting separated parts of the city (eg. verges, underground tunnels, canal edges).<sup>45</sup> They may become almost uncanny spots existing in a kind of parallel reality to the regulated city – what writer Ken Barris has described as ‘bursting seams’ between past and present, nature and city: places of ambiguity and blurring.<sup>46</sup>

Because of this blurring, and the historical lack of regulation, they are spaces which are unusually accessible to all, a rarity in a city whose formal zones have been so rigidly policed. It is partly this accessibility that has encouraged homeless populations to take root – in a city with a perennial housing crisis, virtually no inner-city housing for the poor, poor social services and deep inequality. Such urban toe-holds are competed for in these marginal economies.<sup>47</sup>

The presence of these street-dwellers in the heart of the city (rather than out in the remote ‘townships’ where other underprivileged communities have been exiled) means that the edgelands are also rare locations of human interactions across social lines, in a way that may not be permitted elsewhere: between black and white, rich and poor, criminal and law-abiding citizen. Such transgressive interactions are fraught with anxiety and actual danger. Edgelands can be unsettling spaces, overturning social divisions in communities that have historically been characterised by mutual suspicion; these spaces are traditionally viewed, in official communication and in popular understanding, as ‘bad places’, no-go zones where danger lurks. They are foci for ‘postapartheid anxiety’<sup>48</sup>, as well as sites of real physical peril for poorer residents who must

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<sup>45</sup> Konstantin Sofianos, ‘Magical Nightmare Jo’burg’, *Safundi* 14, no. 1 (2013), pp 111-112.

<sup>46</sup> Ken Barris, ‘Every Place is Three Places’, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 26, no. 1 (2014), p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> David Southwood, a photographer whose ‘Stowaways’ project I discuss in Chapter 4, writes about his photographic interest in occupied wasteland spaces, and in particular the reclaimed land of the foreshore: ‘It’s becoming clear to me that the space which people occupy has started to become a starting-point for series [...] Reclaimed land is always complicated and contested. If you reclaim land it’s because there is a shortage and where there is a shortage there is generally fierce competition and where there is fierce competition people make interesting economic decisions.’ Quoted in Jessica Hunkin, ‘Featured: David Southwood | Peripheral Economies and the Urban Landscape’, *Between 10and5*, 2014, <<https://10and5.com/2014/08/28/featured-david-southwood-peripheral-economies-and-the-urban-landscape>> [accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>48</sup> Shane Graham, ‘The Entropy of Built Things: Postapartheid Anxiety and the Production of Space in Henrietta Rose-Innes’ *Nineveh* and Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City*’, *Safundi* 16, no. 1 (2014), pp. 64-77.

pass through them on foot.

However, these spaces can also be liberating spaces of possibility and excitement. They can act as dynamic, generative sites: places where new connections are made, beyond the constraints of the formal, structured city. This ambivalence is evident in the representations, both anxiety-provoking and seductive, of edgeland spaces in contemporary South African texts, including works of art and literature. Street people (at times no doubt exploitatively) remain a subject of enduring interest to South African writers and artists, as illustrated by the examples in later chapters.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> My novel *Stone Plant*, which forms part of this thesis, is an example of creative work that uses the permeability and ambiguity of an edgeland setting to explore conflict, communication and crossover between disparate urban dwellers, and across eras.

## Chapter 2: Proto-edgeland: the Table Mountain Park

There are any number of things odd about Cape Town ... Nothing is so unlikely to me, though, as this wilderness in the centre of things, this national park and world heritage site, where you are never properly out of earshot of the humming city ...<sup>50</sup>

In this chapter, I examine how the ribbon-like zone around the Table Mountain Park is the last remnant of the city's original 'transgressive edgeland', the mountain itself. I trace the history of the city's relationship to the mountain, from colonial times through to the development of the Park and modern disputes about access and control. I discuss how the mountain's initial role, as barrier between 17th-century colonists and the hinterland, set the pattern for the city's uneasy relationship to uncontrolled spaces and their transient inhabitants, along with many of the fears (of crime, fire, incursion by 'undesirable aliens') that persist today. In closing, I offer a reading of writer K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* as an alternative, 'insider's' perspective of the transcendent possibilities of the mountain edgeland space in literature.

In Cape Town, the most apparent edgeland is the zone of contact between the residential areas and Table Mountain, a buffer between the city and its island of 'wilderness'. An irregular strip of land runs around the perimeter of the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), porous and not easily defined as belonging to either the city or the mountain. Here, on the lower slopes or in the forest margins not far from the road, it is possible to encounter a range of unexpected and often transgressive phenomena: illicit marijuana plantations, informal dwellings, ad-hoc artworks, crime scenes, gardens, ritual shrines,<sup>51</sup> as well as middle-class dog-walkers and armed wardens on patrol. It is a space in which humans impact on the mountain ecosystem, and vice versa; it is the unofficial route via which both animals and people slip across official borders between city and wilderness.

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Anderson, 'On Common Ground' in Stephen Watson (ed.), *A City Imagined* (Cape Town: Penguin SA, 2006), p. 69. Anderson is a Cape Town-based poet and literary scholar.

<sup>51</sup> I have written about my own experiences of these in 'Five Sites', in Watson, *ibid.*, pp.55-64.

In the imagination of the ‘official’ city, it exists as both a barrier against perils (natural, criminal), and as a valued point of contact with wild spaces, and as such is the subject of much public and official debate as to use, access and control.

This peri-urban zone is perhaps more significant in Cape Town than in most cities because here, wilderness and city interpenetrate each other in an unusually visible and spectacular way. The iconic mountain – its outline so closely identified with the city, featuring in numerous local-business logos – rises from the very city centre. The late Capetonian poet and literary scholar Stephen Watson wrote about this close involvement between the built and natural worlds:

Those who are privileged to live in this city inhabit a landscape the bones of which are everywhere exposed, naked to the eye, in the more than five hundred million years of granite, sandstone, slate and mudstone which is Table Mountain ... Cape Town inverts the usual relation between the built environment and the environs that the natural world has built ... Even in the midst of its downtown streets, the stone world has not yet become completely other. Nor ... has the green world become other here.<sup>52</sup>

From the earliest colonial encounters with the Cape, the mountain looming over the city has provoked unsettling sentiments: both dread and fascination. In the colonial setting, the mountain lay on the faultline between ‘civilisation’ and the African hinterland. Alarming, it harboured a population of ‘drosters’ – runaway slaves, escaped convicts and deserters from passing ships<sup>53</sup> – whose presence on the mountain was a source of anxiety and mystery to the early settler populace.

The mountain remains a source of wonder for many citizens of Cape Town. Dread, however, is no longer attached to the central massif of the mountain, which makes up the heart of the TMNP. While it is still possible to die by mishap on the upper slopes, its ‘wildness’ is no longer feared, but is rather desirable, providing a scenic setting for middle-class leisure pursuits such as

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<sup>52</sup> Watson, *A City Imagined*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>53</sup> Nigel Penn, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth Century Cape Characters* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), p. 165.

hiking, rock-climbing and paragliding. Its wilderness status has been commodified, and compromised by extensive intrusions – dams, roads, Mountain Club huts and fire lookouts, not to mention the cable car. It has been thoroughly mapped and explored, its dangerous animals have been almost entirely eradicated, and its territory is controlled, surveilled and patrolled by employees of the Table Mountain National Park. In any case, the majority of visitors are channelled towards the restaurant, botanical gardens, visitor's centres and few less challenging, scenic paths.<sup>54</sup>

In this era of a managed and tamed mountain environment, my contention is that the capacity for transgression and ambiguity that used to be associated with the mountain proper is now primarily concentrated in the unofficial edgeland zones of the mountain, those scruffy unmaintained borderlands sprouting with alien vegetation, that belong not quite to the city and not quite to the Parks Board, which still provide opportunities for unpredictable encounters, transitions and crossing-over, with all the risk and possibility that these entail. Poet and literary scholar Peter Anderson writes:

The forests ... mark the frontier between the city and the mountain ... In this they do not quite belong to Cape Town, but are its threshold. That threshold lies between the present and the past, when once Cape Town was not. It lies between what we think of as civilisation and wilderness, categories that the forests themselves confound. It lies between the pre-colonial and the colonial place, and between the colonial place and what has come, or is coming, afterwards. It lies between what is corporate and public in the experience of Cape Town, and what is solitary and private.<sup>55</sup>

This threshold, of course, is not clearly defined by a fence or a sharp line; it shifts with changes in demography, climate and real estate values. Part of the uncanniness of the mountain edgeland is that one can stumble into it unexpectedly; a quiet stroll on an authorised path can transform in a moment into another kind of encounter altogether – a mugging, say, or a glimpse of a

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<sup>54</sup> Sam Fuller, 'Continuity and Change in the Cultural Landscape of Table Mountain', *UCT* <<https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/9939>> (unpublished MSc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1999) [accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, 'On Common Ground', p. 90.

group of traditional healers gathering herbs in a scene that might come from another century.

The history of cultural responses to the Cape landscape has received extensive scholarly attention – indeed, the colonial encounter with the Cape, and more broadly the African, landscape has formed what Hedley Twidle calls ‘a persistent, perhaps even obsessive area of literary enquiry in this part of the world.’<sup>56</sup> It is a field heavily indebted to the insights of writer J. M. Coetzee – in particular, Coetzee’s assertion that indigenous English and Afrikaans literature reveals ‘a failure of the historical imagination’ to engage with an indigenously inhabited landscape; resulting in a literature circumscribed by two ‘dream topographies’: one, the heroic narrative of settler conquest of the savage wilderness; the other, the dream of an unpeopled land, ‘a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs whose bones lie bedded in its rocks, and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man has passed from its face.’<sup>57</sup>

Table Mountain is a particularly weighted element of this ‘dream topography’. It has been called Africa’s ‘first landscape’<sup>58</sup>, in the sense of it being the archetypal projection of the colonial imagination onto the topography of the sub-continent – an embodiment, even, of a threatening, vengeful ‘Spirit of Africa’, Adamastor (the Titan in Camoens’s epic poem, *The Lusiads*).<sup>59</sup>

Table Mountain has, since the earliest voyages of exploration, represented in the colonial mind a physical and symbolic border, barrier or transition: between Europe and Africa, between the ‘civilised’ Dutch settlement and the ‘savage’ hinterland, between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The sight

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<sup>56</sup> Hedley Twidle, ‘Prison and Garden: Cape Town, Natural History and the Literary Imagination’ <<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1057/>> (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2010), pp. xvi [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>57</sup> John Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Jeremy Foster, ‘From Table Mountain to Hoerikwaggo: Creolizing Africa’s “First Landscape”’, in John Beardsley (ed.), *Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture 37* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), pp. 397.

<sup>59</sup> See Malvern van Wyk Smith’s anthology *Shades of Adamastor* for an account of the ‘Protean permutations of the Adamastor motif in our literature, from an image of hostile confrontation to be overcome by the European conquistador, to an implicit and growing emblem of resistance to such conquest.’ (Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1988), p.19.

of the mountain's famous silhouette was a joyously recognisable landmark for ships rounding the Cape on the arduous voyage to the East, and its slopes were the site of the first Dutch governor Jan van Riebeeck's famous wild-almond hedge that was planted in 1660 as a barrier to keep out Khoisan cattle-thieves.<sup>60</sup>

But it was an ambiguous symbol. As edgelands do, it blurred distinctions, undermining the neat dualities of beauty and ugliness, savagery and civilisation. Physically striking but mysterious and difficult to explore, its slopes were a source of both wonder and fear for early European visitors and inhabitants. It offered sublime vistas, but to see them meant braving terrifying heights; the vegetation was reassuringly green in parts, but elsewhere harshly alien to the Dutch eye. In short, it was both paradise and purgatory: an oscillation which is a familiar trope in early European cultural descriptions of the Cape landscape.<sup>61</sup>

Early accounts of climbing Table Mountain by European explorers, such as Anders Sparrman and Francois Le Vaillant, betray this mix of emotions: the grandeur of the ascent of Table Mountain is tempered by the terrors of dizzy heights. The naturalist and explorer Burchell reported that 'a spectator cannot look down the awful depth directly beneath without feeling some dread, or giddiness.'<sup>62</sup>

This ambiguous relationship with the mountain was reinforced by the practical hardships and benefits of establishing a town in close proximity to wilderness. The mountain was a source of abundant fresh water, firewood, grazing and game; but also the den of wild animals such as baboons, hyenas and lions, all of which regularly preyed on the settlement. These animals were most often encountered not high on the mountain, but on its edges: 'What predators there were on the mountain, subsisted by raiding along the margins of the settlement not on the summit itself and few survived for long at this deadly

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<sup>60</sup> Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, 'Van Riebeeck's Hedge', *SANBI* <[sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch/virtualtour/kirstenbosch-nbg-van-riebeecks-hedge](http://sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch/virtualtour/kirstenbosch-nbg-van-riebeecks-hedge)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>61</sup> See for example Fuller, *Continuity and Change*, pp. 32-50 for a discussion of the paradise/purgatory trope.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Warner (ed.), *Lady Herschel: Letters from the Cape, 1834-1838* (Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1991), p. 138; and William Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, vol.1* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1822), p.35.



interface.’<sup>63</sup> The people most at risk from animal attacks were slaves and servants whose work led them into this marginal zone: gathering firewood, or washing laundry in the streams at the base of the mountain.<sup>64</sup> (Later, the perimeter of the mountain reserve would fall more or less along the line of this risky zone.)

More worrying still, the mountain sheltered ‘drosters’. There are many colonial accounts of notorious bands of brigands and runaway slaves hiding out in caves on the mountains, slipping down into the city at night to thief livestock, and occasionally committing acts of violence against law-abiding burghers.<sup>65</sup> Colonial accounts of ascending the mountain reveal a preoccupation with these shadowy figures: Anders Sparrman was concerned about ‘a troop of slaves, that had sometime before run away from their masters, and who were suspected at the time to have their haunts about Table-mountain.’<sup>66</sup> Later, Lady Ann Barnard, wife of the British colonial secretary at the Cape of Good Hope, also climbed the mountain and wrote a breezy and patriotic account of her ascent; but she, too, was distracted by troubling human traces, such as the ‘cave cut in the rock which is occasionally inhabited by run away Negroes’.<sup>67</sup> Part of the unease these sightings stirred is perhaps the fact that these miscreants and runaways were, like their environment, ambiguous: neither free nor slave, neither ‘native’ nor colonist, and therefore unpredictable.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of the threatening aspects of the mountain had been tamed as the power of the British Empire asserted itself on the landscape. The peaks were fully mapped and explored and the indigenous populace subdued. In 1884, Maclears Beacon was built on the highest point.

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<sup>63</sup> Lance van Sittert, ‘The Bourgeois Eye Aloft: Table Mountain in the Anglo Urban Middle class Imagination, c.1891-1952’, *Kronos* 29 (2003), pp. 163.

<sup>64</sup> For further accounts of animal attacks on the early settlement, see Lawrence Green, *Tavern of the Seas* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1947).

<sup>65</sup> See for example Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments: Slavery and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1983), for various accounts of encounters between settlers and mountain-based ‘drosters’. There is also a long history of quieter habitation on the mountain by more peaceful dwellers, including the famous case of Joshua Penny, a deserter from the Royal Navy who made his home on the mountain and later wrote a celebrated account of his time there. See PE Westra, *The Life and Adventures of Joshua Penny* (Port Elizabeth: South African Library, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, Towards the Antarctic Polar Circle, Round the World and to the Country of the Hottentots and the Caffres, from the Year 1772–1776*, V. S. Forbes (ed.) (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1975), p. 37.

<sup>67</sup> Lady Anne Barnard, *South Africa a Century Ago; Letters Written from the Cape of Good Hope (1791-1801)* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1910).

Troublesome flora and fauna were eradicated or tamed by various means – including domesticating and Europeanising the vegetation with the introduction of oaks, pines and soft grasses. European songbirds, deer and squirrels were also released onto the slopes – most famously, by Cecil John Rhodes on his mountainside estate, Groote Schuur.<sup>68</sup> The mountain became a safe, recreational landscape for Cape Town’s intellectual and administrative elite.<sup>69</sup>

The Mountain Club was formed in 1891 and grew rapidly as middle-class nature lovers took to the slopes. The club’s planned activities served to establish the gentler, lush southern face of the mountain as a site of leisure and privilege, as opposed to the harsher northern face that abutted the margins of the rapidly growing city and its working-class suburbs – again revealing a historical unease with ‘edgeland’ spaces, and continuing the process of shrinking and limiting this space, delimiting it from the mountain proper.<sup>70</sup> The construction of the cable car in 1929 effectively created a new zone of contact between the mountain biosphere and the new complex of outbuildings, paths and lookouts on the top table, now easily accessible to city dwellers. In 1926 the National Parks Act was promulgated, and in 1938, Table Mountain was declared a reserve.<sup>71</sup> After 1948, the new Afrikaner nationalist government, aided by the expansion of private motor-vehicle ownership and the construction of new roads, encouraged patriotic domestic tourism, including the exploitation of the mountain as a sight-seeing destination.<sup>72</sup>

After the ANC came to power with the regime change in 1994, new conservation philosophies and political priorities came to the fore. On May 29 1998, more than 14 000 hectares of the Table Mountain chain, then under the control of 23 government bodies and 200 private landowners, was consolidated. This land – amounting to over 70% of the Cape Peninsula – was promulgated as the Cape Peninsula Natural Protected Environment, under the direction of the

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<sup>68</sup> Ann Harries’ 1999 novel *Manly Pursuits* fictionalises the project to introduce English songbirds, thus ‘improving the amenities’ of the mountain. (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2000).

<sup>69</sup> Van Sittert, ‘The Bourgeois Eye’, p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Thereafter, the park was gradually expanded to incorporate the Cape of Good Hope Reserve, the Table Mountain Reserve and, in 1974, Silvermine. See Fuller, *Continuity and Change*.

<sup>72</sup> For context, see discussion in Eustacia Riley, ‘From Matieland to Mother City: Landscape, Identity and Place in Feature Films set in the Cape Province, 1947-1989’ (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town, 2013), pp. 81-102.

South African National Park Board.<sup>73</sup> This was, Jeremy Foster asserts, ‘part of a larger process of expressing South Africa’s new-found democratic identity to the world’.<sup>74</sup> Part of this process was to rebrand the mountain as an indigenous landscape, ‘Hoerikwaggo’ – the old Khoisan word for the mountain, meaning ‘Sea Mountain’.

What resulted from the haphazard stitching-together of many smaller properties into one enormous park is the (mostly) open-access Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), with a long, irregular, poorly defined and porous ‘edgeland’ border that runs like a seam through plantations, alongside impoverished informal settlements, and elsewhere alongside luxurious housing estates.

Across this border, in recent years, conflicts over issues of ownership and use of the mountain have raged. These have included disputes about housing development, a cable car upgrade that many felt was unsightly, and the rights of corporations to advertise on the slopes. But perhaps most contentious remain issues of access, especially for historically less privileged groups. In Cape Town, a class of homeless person is historically strongly associated with the Table Mountain edgeland; the colloquial, derogatory term for them is ‘bergies’ – derived from the Afrikaans word *berg*, ‘mountain’. It originally referred only to vagrants living on the lower slopes, but has expanded to include other adult homeless streetpeople. (The term ‘stroller’ more typically refers to, and is preferred by, street children, such as the character Azure in the novel *Thirteen Cents*, by Sello K. Duiker, discussed later in this chapter.)<sup>75</sup> ‘Bergies’ have been treated as degraded remnants of the indigenous Khoisan people, and are frequently treated with abuse and/or humorous condescension.<sup>76</sup> They are in some ways the psychic and perhaps actual descendants of the drosters of the early Cape settlement.

But there are many other informal users of the mountain, too. As Foster

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<sup>73</sup> Detailed timeline of this process is provided in Fuller, *Continuity and Change*, p. 106.

<sup>74</sup> Foster, ‘From Table Mountain to Hoerikwaggo’, p. 397.

<sup>75</sup> See also Lesley Beake, *The Strollers* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> See for example Green’s further essays about ‘quaint’ Cape Town street life, and numerous other writers, including as recently as 2007: ‘They’re famous for their love of the bottle, their unusual humour, and their fondness for extremely vulgar language.’ Madeleine Barnard, *Cape Town Stories*, (Cape Town: Struik, 2007), p 157.

notes, since the political transition, ‘the Mountain’s highly varied terrains – many the product of its history – have been used as places of identity by local residents of different classes and races, in the guise of workers, scientists, administrators, recreationists and amateur botanists.’<sup>77</sup> There has also been increased recognition of the mountain as a venue for religious and spiritual practices, emerging as a sacred site for New-age practitioners and Christian groups (including syncretic African Zionist Christians); a place for Rastafarians<sup>78</sup> and sangomas (traditional healers) to gather medicinal herbs; and the location of the graves of Muslim saints (kramats).<sup>79</sup> Community outreach programmes such as vegetable gardens and seed banks, youth groups, and the Working for Water (alien vegetation clearing) and Working on Fire programmes explicitly aim to create an environment where anyone can feel welcome on the ‘people’s mountain.’<sup>80</sup>

Against these broad-based, democratic and culturally diverse functions of the mountain, in which it operates as a community resource that requires a porous boundary to remain accessible, as Foster discusses, is set the increasingly slick Table Mountain ‘brand’ that is profitably marketed to international tourists. The South African National Parks (SANParks)’ own mandate, set out on its website, demonstrates how ‘the TMNP has attempted to navigate tensions between these two cultural conditions’.<sup>81</sup>

The nature of SANParks’ business poses a fundamental challenge for the organisation to develop and integrate approaches that ensure the achievement of its ‘public good’ mandate (conservation management, constituency building through a people-centred approach to conservation, cultural heritage management as well as socio-economic development programmes) with its ‘private good’ mandate of growing the nature-based tourism business at a surplus. To do this, SANParks has to adopt both the public good principles and measurement standards, and the business and strategic principles of successful

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<sup>77</sup> Foster, ‘From Table Mountain to Hoerikwaggo’, p. 397.

<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Ashby, ‘Rastafarian Wild Harvesters on Table Mountain’, *Cape Trekking*, <capetrekking.co.za/rastafarian-harvesters> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>79</sup> Fuller, *Continuity and Change*, pp. 91-94. See also the website of the Cape Mazaar Society, which ‘maintains the numerous shrines located in the Western Cape and to propagate the teachings of these Saints’. <capemazaarsociety.com/about.php> [Accessed 31 July 2018].

<sup>80</sup> Fuller, *Continuity and Change*, p.108.

<sup>81</sup> Foster, ‘From Table Mountain to Hoerikwaggo’, p. 397.

private enterprises. [...] Furthermore, SANParks' nature-based tourism pillar has to balance its surplus objectives with the stated objective of government to make the National Parks accessible (at affordable prices) to communities that were previously excluded to the biodiversity, cultural-heritage and other experiences that South Africa's national parks can offer.<sup>82</sup>

The TMNP, while committed to 'open access', places emphasis on controlling and limiting such access, by means of gateways and fences that channel visitors through certain entry points. Other controlling innovations include increased signage, designated parking areas, and the introduction of wardens.<sup>83</sup> An ideal aim, it has been stated, is for 90% of visitors to be concentrated into only 2% of the conserved area.<sup>84</sup> In effect, this results in a policing of the edgeland border of the park, and reveals an ongoing official unease with the existence of an undefended, ambivalent space of crossing-over, a frontier space that is neither park nor private land, and that cannot be regulated. These contradictions are brought into acute focus by certain real and intensifying threats to the mountain environment, in particular crime and wildfire. These elements are related and stem to some degree from incursions into the park from the edgeland buffer.

Currently, intense anxiety is provoked by the spread of crime on the lower slopes of the mountain.<sup>85</sup> The accelerating incidence of armed robberies and rapes have reached crisis proportions, with regular news reports of such assaults. These generally occur on the lower slopes of the mountain, in transitional spaces between the mountain proper and the roads, where assailants can easily and quickly exit the mountain and melt into the suburbs.

Wildfires, too, inspire public dread, and this anxiety has a long history, reaching back into colonial occupation.<sup>86</sup> Novelist Mike Nicol calls fire 'the

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<sup>82</sup> South African National Parks, 'SANP Coordinated Policy Framework Governing Park Management Plans', *SANParks*, 2006 <sanparks.org> [Accessed 9 February 2018].

<sup>83</sup> Fuller, *Continuity and Change*, p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> Peninsula National Park information paper, cited in *ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>85</sup> A recent high-profile example: Ilze-Marie Le Roux and Marie Mortlock, 'Three Men Formally Charged for Franziska Blöchliger's Murder', *Eyewitness News*, 2016, <<https://ewn.co.za/2016/03/09/Franziska-Blöchliger-Three-men-charged>> [Accessed 1 February 2017].

<sup>86</sup> Also, at times, awe and fearful wonder – the fires can be spectacular. See for example artist Matthew Hindley's series of paintings, 'Wall of Fire' (2015) and 'Ruin Lust' (2016), which spectacularly evoke the fires of 2015 and their aftermath. <[www.everard-read-capetown.co.za/artist/MATT\\_HINDLEY/works/870](http://www.everard-read-capetown.co.za/artist/MATT_HINDLEY/works/870)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

most significant element in Cape Town's secret life [...] a persistent crackle at the edge of our lives.'<sup>87</sup> Fire awareness has long been a major focus of Table Mountain conservation efforts, regardless of changing conservation ideologies: 'The one point of agreement for these diverse approaches to the mountain environment [is] a vehement antipathy to fire.'<sup>88</sup> Wildfires on the mountain are worsening, with major summer fires now hitting the slopes on an annual basis.

Some of this increase is due to increasing aridity occurring with climate change. Part of the blame, however, for these mountain fires is laid on the presence of invasive species, such as rooikrans, wattle, hakea and bluegum: these alien plants are vulnerable to fire and help to spread it. They are also typical denizens of neglected urban edgeland zones, creeping into the protected mountain biome from the margins. After the extensive fires of 2000, the intensity of the public outrage at the presence of alien plants suggested to some commentators that this was a displacement of suppressed social fears, with a xenophobic tint; that 'the anxiety over foreign flora gestured toward a submerged landscape of civic terror and moral alarm' related to the transgression of boundaries, and to the control of the movement of undesirable aliens of all kinds.<sup>89</sup>

There is a long association in the middle-class public imagination between human 'undesirables' on the mountain and the threat of fire. This racialised anxiety is present throughout Cape history:

In the town's early years under the Dutch East India Company, and later the British, accidental fires could cause vast damage, especially in times of high wind, as did the Great Fire of 1798 [...] Although an inquiry found that the cause was accidental most whites believed it had been set by runaway slaves. Even at that time the belief was founded on a long tradition.

From the settlement's beginning, many fires had been deliberately started. The Khoi used it as form of retribution against the invaders, slaves resorted to arson as one of the few expressions of rebellion open to them. In fact the intention of the

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<sup>87</sup> Mike Nicol, *Sea-Mountain, Fire City: Living in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2001), p.10.

<sup>88</sup> Simon Pooley, *Burning Table Mountain: An Environmental History of Fire on the Cape Peninsula* (London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2014), p. 136.

<sup>89</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 'Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, no. 3 (2001), p. 630.

first slave revolt in 1688 was to burn the town.<sup>90</sup>

In early colonial accounts, mention is often made of the fires of drosters on the mountain, the topography of the mountain and its proximity making the threat ominously visible at night to people in the settlement. Sparrman noted, of the invisible runaway slaves that so disturbed him on his hike, ‘A fire that I found there newly extinguished, was probably some of their reliques.’<sup>91</sup>

In the thirties, following the devastating Christmas fire of 1935, the Deputy Mayor of Cape Town remarked that ‘the Council would be reluctant to interfere with free access to the mountain, but if these outbreaks recur we shall be compelled to take drastic measures ... all vagrants [should be] excluded.’<sup>92</sup> In every era, the accused culprits have matched the fears, racial prejudices, and social conflicts of the time: tramps, immigrants, or simply ‘coloureds’.<sup>93</sup>

Once it was a commonly held truth among whites that the fires were started by coloureds because, in those days, the fire services paid people who came to help them beat out the flames. In January 2000 it was a commonly held truth among whites that the fires were started by arsonists. It was never said, it didn’t have to be, but by arsonists those who held this truth meant coloureds.<sup>94</sup>

In truth, the increase in fires is related to the city’s insufficient planning and housing initiatives. The CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) has noted an increase in wildfires over the period 1970-2007, apparently correlated to an increase in urban population and the ‘expanding wildland-urban interface’, noting especially the flood of immigrants into Cape Town in the 1980s after apartheid influx controls were relaxed.<sup>95</sup> The increasing population pressure has resulted in denser informal settlements in the zones

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<sup>90</sup> Nicol, *Sea-Mountain*, p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Le Vaillant, cited in Vivian Bickford-Smith, Nigel Worden and Elizabeth van Heyningen, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Human Rights Watch: 1999), p. 80.

<sup>92</sup> Related in Pooley, *Burning Table Mountain*, p.136. The mayor’s statement came after complaint from Lady Florence Philips, wife of Sir Lionel Philips, a Randlord involved in the establishment of the Botanical Society and Kirstenbosch Gardens.

<sup>93</sup> The term ‘coloured’ used in this context refers to the apartheid government’s racial classification of ‘mixed-race’ persons. It is still commonly used in contemporary South Africa, although not without debate – some claim it as an identity (particularly in the Cape, where this community is historically established), while others regard it as an offensive remnant of apartheid ideology.

<sup>94</sup> Nicol, *Sea-Mountain*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>95</sup> Pooley, *Burning Table Mountain*, p.i. Pooley does add the proviso, however, that population figures are highly uncertain over this period.

bordering the national park, and larger numbers of people setting up informal encampments, with campfires, on the lower slopes of the mountain. Fires do often start here, and are often caused by human neglect. See for example Dr David Klatzow's forensic report on the damaging fires of 2015, which started just above Boyes' Drive in Muizenberg:

I observed a shelter of sorts with signs of human habitation. There was a partially burned blanket, together with clear signs of fire-making and smoking material and two lighters. There is little doubt that the main fire which burned across to Hout Bay had its origin in or near this rock shelter and that its cause was human agency ... The use of this part of the mountain for various informal activities is well known to the local inhabitants. Further observations regarding the presence of religious groups on the mountains at night was also provided by residents.<sup>96</sup>

As with the early drosters, the presence of potentially dangerous 'others' provokes great anxiety in modern-day mountain leisure users, and threatens to disrupt the rights of access of such traditional denizens of the mountain edgelands. See, for example, the warnings of 'suspicious' vagrants that are posted (along with reports of muggings and rapes by hardened criminals) by Twitter account Table Mountain Watch, the 'Eyes and Ears' of Table Mountain: 'Keeping each other informed, aware, safe.'<sup>97</sup>

Resisting pressure to completely close off the perimeter of the mountain, the TMNP has responded by instituting a regime of guard patrols. Security is clearly a major priority and concern, addressed as the very first item on the 'Safe Hiking in Table Mountain National Park' page of their website:

Due to attacks and muggings in and around the Table Mountain National Park we wish to provide the public, tourists and regular visitors to the mountain with as much information as possible, in order to keep you safe.

... The Park's safety and security strategy is providing appropriate information to prevent incidents from happening, and

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<sup>96</sup> David Klatzow, quoted in 'Two of the fires "were arson"', *News24*, <<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local/Peoples-Post/Two-of-the-fires-were-arson-20150511-3>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>97</sup> See twitter account @TableMtnWatch.



also full intervention by 52 dedicated, trained staff who patrol the Park equipped with dogs, vehicles and radios, and who cooperate closely with the South African Police Service.

Visitor Information Centres have been established in the parking areas on Tafelberg Road and at Lion's Head, and a security hut placed at the bottom of Platteklip Gorge. Volunteer groups have been co-opted to help, and the honorary ranger's organisation is also being restructured to assist.<sup>98</sup>

These initiatives, while perhaps unavoidable, introduce the possibility of vigilantism, militaristic security solutions and the enclosure of public land, trends evident in other spheres of South African social existence. Always, one possible prospect is the eventual closing down of the porous mountain edgelands by destruction, policing or forceful transformation into something less ambiguous: either 'nature' on one side of a fence, or 'city' on the other. As Twidle remarks,

In the postcolony, it would seem, this utopian vision [of conservation] too easily becomes involved in a politics of displacement and enclosure; its risks dovetailing with those colonial travelogues and wilderness narratives which sought to disavow actual human populations.<sup>99</sup>

Modern-day equivalents of such exclusionary travelogues certainly exist – see any number of hiking guides aimed at the middle-class recreational user of the mountain. The 'safely' long-vanished indigenous (San) populations of the mountain are also occasionally romantically evoked by white writers of fiction and non-fiction.<sup>100</sup> But contemporary accounts from the other side of the South African social, racial and historical divide are far harder to come by. Of course, marginal people have frequently and continue to be excluded, economically, socially and educationally, from publishing and other forums of public

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<sup>98</sup> South African National Parks, 'Safe Hiking in Table Mountain National Park', *SANParks*, <[https://www.sanparks.org/parks/table\\_mountain/tourism/safe\\_hiking.php](https://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/tourism/safe_hiking.php)> [Accessed 9 February 2018].

<sup>99</sup> Twidle, 'Prison and Garden', p. 222.

<sup>100</sup> See for example Diane Awerbuck, 'Last week in the storms she had looked up and seen a couple on the ledge outside [Peers Cave]. They looked like the last people in the world or – take the clothes and hiking boots away – like the people who had always lived there, time-travellers keeping an eye on the traffic, wondering where the eland had gone. There were two of them, and no one else, and they belonged.' *Home Remedies* (Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 2012), kindle location 901-906.

expression and debate. Another obvious reason for the gap is the fact that people of colour were excluded for decades from the mountain vicinity, by enforced removal from nearby suburbs and other apartheid legislation; what remains of their stories are a few scattered records of loss and exclusion and estrangement, for example poignant photographs and personal testimonies of members of those excluded from the official white Mountain Club.<sup>101</sup>

Even less present are records of the lives of modern-day illicit occupants of the edgelands, other than the cryptic traces of their encampments and shelters<sup>102</sup>. A solitary example of such a voice caused a minor controversy when it was published in a local news website in 2016. The article ‘Table Mountain’s easy targets: On the trail with a Hout Bay mugger’ was aimed at, and served to reinforce and even inflame the fears and prejudices of, the privileged leisure user: ‘You can do whatever you want. You can get away quickly. It’s easy,’ boasts the violent criminal subject of the interview.<sup>103</sup>

Only one piece of writing that I have come across, the novel *Thirteen Cents* (2000)<sup>104</sup> by the late K. Sello Duiker, offers a sympathetic, subjective exploration of the experience of a mountain edgeland dweller. *Thirteen Cents* is a luminous but harrowing account of a homeless child prostitute (or ‘stroller’) on the streets of Cape Town and is based in part on Duiker’s own experiences of urban alienation.<sup>105</sup> Urban wasteland spaces feature prominently in this book – as would be expected, as this is where transient children find spaces to exist. Thirteen-year-old Azure sleeps on the beach and wanders the streets. In Azure’s world, paradoxically, such spaces are not places of peril but offer relative safety.

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<sup>101</sup> Acclaimed climber Ed February was the first ‘coloured’ person to join the official Mountain Club of South Africa, in 1994. The club officially apologized for exclusionary policies under apartheid in December 2005. Deji Bryce Olukotun, ‘Mountain Climbing and Apartheid’, *Return of the Deji* <[returnofthedeji.com/revamp/mountain-climbing-and-apartheid](http://returnofthedeji.com/revamp/mountain-climbing-and-apartheid)> [Accessed 31 July 2018]. See also Rustum Kozain’s elegiac poem ‘Kingdom of Rain’, which refers poignantly to the forcible exclusion of local communities from the wilderness landscape under apartheid. *New Contrast*, 30, (2002), pp.116-118.

<sup>102</sup> See Rose-Innes, ‘Five Sites’.

<sup>103</sup> Kimon De Greef, ‘Table Mountain’s Easy Targets: On the Trail with a Hout Bay Mugger’, *Groundup*, 2016 <<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/table-mountains-easy-targets-trail-hout-bay-mugger>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>104</sup> Duiker’s debut novel, awarded the 2001 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best First Book, Africa Region.

<sup>105</sup> Liz McGregor, ‘Kabelo Duiker, Young South African Novelist Scarred by a Childhood of Apartheid’, *The Guardian*, 2005 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/feb/07/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

But significantly, he also frequents the mountain, and this is a place of spirituality and sanctuary for him. Azure, driven beyond his limits of endurance by the traumas of life on the street, embarks on a pilgrimage up the mountain. He finds a previously inhabited cave, where he seeks shelter, experiencing a series of revelatory encounters with what appears to be the ghost of the long-dead Sara Baartman (the tragic ‘Hottentot Venus’, displayed in Europe in the early 19th Century as an anatomical curiosity<sup>106</sup>):

At the cave I meet a woman who looks like she lived a very long time ago. She is short and her bum is big but she has the lightest smile I’ve ever seen. She wears only a leather thong and her long breasts are like fruit, like fat pears. [...] I go inside and sit next to her. I can’t stop looking at her face. She has a beautiful face and a yellow skin that seems to glow. In the cave she looks at home. It is neat. There are carved bones, herbs that make you want to smoke them, clay animals and lots of other small beautiful things. [...] ‘What’s your name?’ I ask her. She begins to sob. ‘Saartjie,’ she says and stops crying.<sup>107</sup>

Azure’s experience on the mountain is the polar opposite of colonial dread. It is warm, familiar, affectionate; he belongs here, as does Saartjie. (In marked contrast, the white hiker he encounters earlier in the same cave is out of place, an intrusion.) Notably, fire is not to be feared: its smoke is powerful and facilitates communion. In its light, Azure sees ancient San paintings on the cave wall, and feels himself possessed by an atavistic urge to dance as in a traditional trance performance:

I dance around the fire and clap till I start to bleed through the nose. I hold my head up and keep dancing. The hairs on my back stand upright. Like a snake, that sensation crawls up my spine and erupts in my head. I start prancing about, huge leaps around the fire. My body feels light. I only hear the sound of bats and the rain and thunder.<sup>108</sup>

This is the only unambiguously positive depiction of fire on Table

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<sup>106</sup> Clifton C. Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>107</sup> K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2000), p. 143-44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Mountain that I have encountered. In this piece of writing, we have a rare glimpse of the subjective experience of the edgeland dweller. We see how, for a young black writer, historically and socially alienated from the 'official' landscape, ambiguous and porous edgeland space may stand for transcendent, even euphoric blurring and crossing-over; for radical reinterpretations of boundaries, and of who has claim to the land. (Much like a 'stroller' or 'bergie' defiantly making camp on a picturesque beachfront property.) The lines crossed are physical, societal, and also temporal: establishing connections between the present day and the deep past, and re-asserting ancient rights to the landscape.

Thus we see that the city's original 'transgressive edgeland', the edge of the mountain, set in train many contemporary patterns of thought regarding South African edgeland space: an unease with the ambiguity of these zones, anxiety about the unpredictability and potential hazards of their denizens, and a sense of these spaces acting as barriers between irreconcilable forces: settler and indigene, nature and urbanity, law-abiding citizen and criminal. But in the breaching of these barriers lies both peril and fascination – as we see in the edgeland visions of K. Sello Duiker, a writer of the 'new South Africa', whose work pointed the way towards new understandings of South African urban co-existence.

### Chapter 3: The Bridge

And edgelands, by and large, are not made to be seen, except perhaps as a blur from a car window.<sup>109</sup>

In this chapter, I discuss the infamous ‘Unfinished Bridge’ as a very visible example of Cape Town edgeland space. I trace the history of the planning and aborted construction of the bridge, laying bare specific South African political circumstances that came to create pockets of urban wasteland – and the more recent political decisions that led to its occupation by vagrants and stowaways. By reference to a variety of creative responses to this location and its inhabitants – from essayist Mike Nicol, novelist K. Sello Duiker, photographer David Southwood and journalist and author Sean Christie – I show how the presence of edgeland can reveal, in different ways to different careful observers, the hidden lives of others living unofficially within the official city, and how these edgeland spaces represent (or can be made to represent) the opportunity to transcend social and cultural barriers.

While the mountain looms over the centre of the city, downtown is dominated by Cape Town’s other most prominent edgeland space: it extends into the sky above one of the busiest interchanges in the city, where downtown meets the port and the highway leaves the CBD. The notorious Unfinished Bridge, or the Foreshore Freeway Bridge, consists of two sections of a highway, complete with road surfacing and white lines, that were never connected in the middle: they are separated by approximately 260 metres of empty space, and are a curious monument to hubris and poor planning. Begun in the early 1970s, the freeway was an expression of the contemporary desire of the then Nationalist Party (who came to power in 1948) for a modern, cosmopolitan face for the city, and to ease anticipated traffic overload. It was planned as part of the Eastern Boulevard<sup>110</sup>, part of a ring system of highways built to ease circulation of traffic

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<sup>109</sup> Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Renamed the Nelson Mandela Boulevard, as the Western Boulevard was renamed the Helen Suzman Boulevard, in 2011. Babalo Ndenze, ‘Mayor to Unveil Helen Suzman Boulevard’,

in and out of the city centre. This was mostly completed, and is now the Nelson Mandela Boulevard that now connects the city with the more affluent southern suburbs, passing through Woodstock and the site of District 6, the location of one of the most infamous forced removals of the apartheid era.<sup>111</sup> However, due to budget constraints, the bridge itself has stood in its unfinished state since 1977. Its unused surface, and also the shady spaces beneath its supports, are classic pieces of fragmented, accidental urban wasteland: left to moulder, as on either side busy traffic lanes connect the CBD to the popular Waterfront, Convention Centre, and trendy Sea Point, and on the other to the affluent southern suburbs, the N1 Highway, and the rest of the country.



Figure 1. *The Unfinished Bridge*, Lucie Demoyencourt, 2016

Capetonians have a love-hate relationship with this eccentric piece of abandoned infrastructure. It is a site that provokes many conflicting reactions. On the one hand, the bridge has become ironically iconic, even nostalgic.<sup>112</sup>

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*Independent Online*, 2011 <<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/mayor-to-unveil-helen-suzman-boulevard-1172854>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>111</sup> It also feeds into the N1 highway north, the topic of Chapter 3.

<sup>112</sup> One such story is that the engineers had made a calculation error, resulting in the two ends not meeting. Another was that a disgruntled shop owner refused to sell his property in the path of the flyover.

Popular Cape Town artist Lucie Demoyencourt, for example, includes a view of the bridge in a series of scenic and nostalgically familiar views of the Cape Town City Bowl, available as prints. (Figure 1.)<sup>113</sup> It's a lucrative location for advertising shoots and movie locations: the empty stretch of highway, still serviceable but conveniently free from traffic, pops up in international shoots and movie sets, representing cosmopolitan urbanism with its backdrop of generic city high-rises.<sup>114</sup>

However, the bridge is also a relic of the 70s, associated with the oppressive atmosphere and authoritarian architecture of high apartheid. As such, it represents a particular South African narrative of bureaucratic blundering, ineptness and absurdity.

It has also been for many years a shelter, providing in its strange shadow a place where a community of homeless people have made their beds, metres from where the traffic rushes. This makes it a 'home' to some, but also a locus of fear and anxiety: for passers-by threatened by the sometimes unruly behaviour of the rough sleepers; and for the homeless people themselves, for whom it is a dangerous place that leaves them vulnerable to crime, drugs, and not least traffic accidents. The bridge has been the site of several rumoured falling deaths over the years – both gangland murder and suicide. Indeed, the Samaritans have painted a large sign ('We Care!') very visibly high up on an adjacent building, presumably for the benefit of anyone hesitating on the brink of the lopped-off highway. At the same time, the impoverished homeless population can look out over the several lanes of traffic at some of the most valuable real-estate in the city – luxurious new office-block and residential developments that threaten to erase the remaining edgeland spaces and their histories.

The bridge also occupies a historically loaded location, and is a part of the city that seems particularly haunted by the past. It is very close to one of the oldest parts of the city, housing some of its most painful history: the

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<sup>113</sup> Lucie Demoyencourt, *The Unfinished Bridge* [artwork], *Lucie Demoyencourt Fine Art & Design*, 2016 <[luciedemoyencourt.com/#/50-x-city-bowl](http://luciedemoyencourt.com/#/50-x-city-bowl)> [Accessed 31 July 2018].

<sup>114</sup> Lisa Kane, 'Building the Foreshore Freeways: The Politics of a Freeway "Artefact"', *Proceedings of the 30th Southern African Transport Conference* (2011), p. 131.

(controversially disinterred) burial grounds of Prestwich Street, site of the pauper graves of the poorest and most exploited people in the colony, including a large population of slaves.<sup>115</sup> Much of this history has been suppressed, deliberately or unconsciously, and is only now resurfacing into popular memory. This area of town – the foreshore and Green Point – is currently particularly the site of commercial ‘heritage’ initiatives: not just memorial to the Prestwich Street dead, but also the revival of contentious ‘Cape Carnival’ celebrations; a recently instituted annual march to celebrate the liberation of the slaves; an urban park that consciously seeks to revive lost knowledge of indigenous plants; and a number of ‘urban exploration’ outfits that offer tours of hidden historical city infrastructure (especially buried watercourses).<sup>116</sup>

Lastly, the bridge lies on another crucial fault line of Cape Town’s topography: the area of land that was reclaimed from the sea in the 1940s, in one of the Nationalist urban renewal schemes of the forties and fifties. It sits in an ambiguous zone between the very old, public city, where the graves lie, and the ‘new’ harbour, which is a fenced-off, secured area. It is thus both a very old, and simultaneously very new part of the city – the ground beneath one’s feet has been there for less than a century. The Unfinished Bridge straddles the oldest ‘border’ of them all: the ancient line of the coast, now erased.

The construction of the highway bridge was the culmination of several decades of rapid transformation of this area of town, beginning with the radical reshaping of the shoreline, first mooted in the late thirties.<sup>117</sup> Previously, the space had been occupied by the old harbour and pier. In 1940, much to the nostalgic sorrow many Capetonians – who, according to historian Vivian Bickford-Smith, would come to remember the pier as emblematic of a ‘pre-apartheid Cape Town in which remembered social relations were more friendly

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<sup>115</sup> Shared Cultural Heritage, ‘Prestwich Memorial Project: Greenpoint Historical Burial Ground’, *Shared Cultural Heritage* <sharedheritage.dutchculture.nl/en/prestwich-memorial-project-greenpoint-historical-burial-ground> [Accessed 30 July 2018]

<sup>116</sup> See for example Tshego Letsoalo, ‘Cape Town’s Underground Tunnels: A place of sweet water’, *Cape Town Magazine* <capetownmagazine.com/cape-towns-underground-tunnels> [Accessed 30 July 2018]

<sup>117</sup> A reshaping that was to continue in the eighties with the establishment of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company, which transformed 83 hectares of the old harbour area, including the old pierhead, into the very popular luxury V&A Waterfront development. Bickford-Smith, Worden and Van Heyningen, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, p. 231.



and intimate, the pace of life was slower, and the town still in touch with the sea'<sup>118</sup> – the pier was demolished. In its place would be implemented an ambitious, ideologically motivated scheme to reclaim new land (the foreshore) by dredging. This would allow for more motor traffic in the city, and a modernised harbour, the Duncan Dock, was opened in 1943 to accommodate larger ships.<sup>119</sup>

The scheme was glowingly proposed by the government of the day as a beacon of modernity, and for a while the project was named 'Metropolis of Tomorrow'. As it was described in the Foreshore Joint Technical Committee report, 1940:

A vast area of original land has suddenly become available immediately contiguous to the seat of the city's greatest difficulties ... Here is clearly the chance to capture the lost ground (both physical and metaphorical) of the last century, and to re-create Cape Town for the needs of modern life whilst at the same time preserving and respecting its tradition of an earlier day.<sup>120</sup>

However, due to wrangling and disputes between different bodies such as the railways and municipality<sup>121</sup>, the reclamation project would not be completed until the 1960s, well into the apartheid regime. The resulting construction was 'an unhappy compromise', resulting in a blighted, dehumanised urban landscape that is recognisably the antecedent of the edgeland wasteland visible in the Foreshore area today:

Bored boulevards broke the foreshore up into wind-blown stretches of asphalt and concrete, filled with car parks and roaring traffic, inaccessible to pedestrians. Wind tunnels created by skyscrapers were fierce enough to blow over buses ... Great concrete flyovers isolated the city centre and drove through the heart of the inner-city residential areas. The age of social engineering produced a sunless city centre, virtually lifeless after office hours.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, pp. 67, 149.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>121</sup> These disputes are detailed in Kane, 'Building the Foreshore Freeways', pp.133- 134.

<sup>122</sup> Bickford-Smith, Worden and Van Heyningen, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, p. 154.

Ironically, a scheme that was meant to open the city up, to emblematised the city's role as 'Gateway to Africa', ended up being constricting and isolating, leaving the CBD physically, visually and socially segregated from the harbour.

This kind of segregation, control and authoritarian style was a reflection of the ideology of the ruling party. The foreshore scheme was intended as a propagandistic display of their power and economic confidence. As novelist Mike Nicol writes:

When the streets of the foreshore – Hans Strydom, Hertzog Boulevard, Coen Steytler, DF Malan, Oswald Pirow [all Nationalist Party worthies] – were named, the Nationalist Party had recently come to power and they were clearly making an attempt to lay claims to an historical authority both in terms of the recent and the distant past.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, the freeway scheme was implicated in one of the most brutal of all apartheid-era social engineering schemes: the destruction of the multiracial working-class suburb of District Six, with the intention of replacing it with an all-white residential area. The construction of the highway, opposed by the City for practical and budgetary reasons, but insisted upon by the National and Provincial government, 'has the dubious distinction of being the cause of the first large scale demolitions in District 6, starting in 1960'.<sup>124</sup>

The construction of the flyover bridge was a late stage of this overall scheme, becoming a greater visual and physical obstacle between city and sea. Ultimately, it was abandoned in 1977 due to budgetary issues and changing traffic requirements. In the modern view, the construction of the bridge did not take into account modern urban planning concerns. For some, the bridge's unconnected sections are 'acknowledged monuments to outdated planning practices and bungled city projects'<sup>125</sup>. Furthermore, the bridge and its surrounds remain a troubling and problematic reminder of the priorities of the previous regime.

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<sup>123</sup> Nicol, *Sea-Mountain*, p.70.

<sup>124</sup> Kane, 'Building the Foreshore Freeways', pp. 137-138.

<sup>125</sup> Matt Bevilacqua, 'Sounding Off on the Future of the Foreshore Freeways, Cape Town's Unfinished Highway', *Next City*, 2013 <<https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/sounding-off-on-the-future-of-the-foreshore-freeways-cape-towns-unfinished>> [Accessed 15 August 2018].

The seemingly neutral urban road infrastructure we now live with have embedded in them their social and political histories [...] these histories are not neutral, and they are not simple. In the case of the Foreshore Freeways they reflect the power politics of decades of negotiations, and so the conclusion is: the Foreshore Freeways have politics.<sup>126</sup>

The Unfinished Bridge encapsulates the ambiguous, uneasy but compelling nature of the urban edgeland. It illustrates the capacity of edgeland spaces to open up gaps in the fabric of the city, allow for curious juxtapositions and meetings across social, cultural and economic lines; to link geographical zones of a city in unexpected ways; and even to act as imaginative portals into past eras – however uncomfortable. In its current role, the bridge continues to demonstrate the uneasy politics of a deeply divided and unequal city: its chief function, until very recently, as with most of the edgeland spaces in Cape Town, has been to shelter the homeless. For years this encampment, bizarrely and perilously wedged between high-speed streams of traffic, was a familiar if troubling sight to Cape Town motorists. It is these compellingly strange urban-wasteland juxtapositions – of makeshift dwellings, brute architecture imbued with troubled history, and the mechanised frenzy of 21st-century traffic – that have particularly grasped the imagination of Capetonian creative writers and artists.

In my own 2006 essay about informal urban dwellings, ‘Five Sites’, I note this community living ‘under the snapped-off flyover on the Foreshore’, and recall how the ‘smoke from cooking fires came drifting up between the cars on the off-ramp during rush hour’.<sup>127</sup> Mike Nicol summons up the particular quality of layered time present in the fabric of this particular part of the city, viewing it through the (closed) eyes of an archetypal homeless ‘bergie’ figure:

Apart from bergies, there are no pedestrians. No local would think to walk here for pleasure [...] It is as it once was: an approach to the city that is now a transit zone of bridges, underpasses and railways lines [...] On this mild winter day

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<sup>126</sup> Kane, ‘Building the Foreshore Freeways’, p. 138.

<sup>127</sup> Rose-Innes, ‘Five Sites’, pp. 58-59.

before a storm, a man lies asleep on the grass of New Market Street, warmed by the sun. From where he is stretched out he would not be able to see the walls of the Castle through the stanchions of the flyover, yet the city's oldest building is no more than three or four hundred metres away. At this junction, under the Oswald Pirow bridge and the Eastern Boulevard flyover, [is] an empty zone, damp and cold [...] Under the flyover are signs of habitation: flattened cardboard boxes, tins, bottles, the remains of a fire.<sup>128</sup>

The eeriness and slightly ominous atmosphere is evoked also by Nicol's careful mapping of the present-day topography onto the more explicitly savage one of the 17th-century city. As well as the Castle (with its dungeons and places of torture and execution), he notes that the old gallows were also in the vicinity. These are the time slippages – the historical echoes – that may occur in edgeland spaces, revealing layers of time in the decay of their neglected, abandoned and unrenewed infrastructure. Even the traces of human settlement – the 'remains of a fire' – imaginatively recall a much older history, a time of hunter-gatherer encampments and, later, the anxious accounts of colonial settlers and explorers discovering the traces of the camps of outlaws and runaway slaves<sup>129</sup>.

Once again, it is interesting to contrast Nicol's curious and slightly fearful white outsider's gaze with that of writer Sello K. Duiker, from the other side of the racial privilege divide: In *Thirteen Cents*, discussed in Chapter 2, the street-child Azure lives for a while under the unfinished bridge, which offers relative sanctuary. It is 'home' in an otherwise hostile city:

I've been walking around town like a lost dog all day. Everyone seems to know where they are going except me. I ask someone for the time and decide to go home.  
Blue, that's my new name. The Bridge, that's my new home. Out here the world passes you by if you don't listen. It crushes you.  
Go home, I tell myself. You are getting stronger.

Later, he explains in this conversation with a middle-class hiker he meets on the mountain:

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<sup>128</sup> Mike Nicol, 'The City I Live in', in Stephen Watson (ed.), *A City Imagined* (Cape Town: Penguin SA, 2006), pg 66-76.

<sup>129</sup> See Chapter 1 for an account of the associations between fire, vagrants, edgelands spaces and colonial unease.

‘I live under a bridge.’

‘Which one?’

‘The one near Green Point.’

‘Oh, you mean the one that was under construction but never completed.’

‘If it is, I never noticed.’<sup>130</sup>

‘So what’s it like, living under a bridge?’

‘You see the stars at night. If you stand close to the fence.’

‘So what, you live with homeless people?’

‘We have a home. Its just not your normal kind of home with a kitchen and all that stuff but it’s still a home.’<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, this place under the bridge does not escape the ambiguity and eerie qualities that imbue edgeland spaces. The settlement is home to Liesel, Azure’s friend and comforter, but also to the domineering, frightening Gerald, who is Azure’s protector and tormenter both; a man who has an almost demonic whiff of the supernatural about him, with powers to read Azure’s past and to control him. Thus the home beneath the bridge is also a place where the real and the unreal overlap. (This is true also of the rough rock dwelling on the mountain, where at the climax of the book Azure steps over into the deep past and communes with the spirit of the long-dead Saartje Baartman.) This magical, slightly threatening quality is also revealed in the conversation with the hiker.

‘I’ve heard weird stories from there.’

‘Like what?’

‘Well, there’s this guy who lives there, right, and he’s supposed to control the entire rat population of cape town. It’s kind of an urban legend.’

‘That’s nothing. I know a guy who lives there and he can make anyone, take you right, he can turn you into a pigeon or a rat.’

‘It’s probably the same guy I’m talking about.’

‘I doubt it. He never leaves that place.’<sup>132</sup>

In the novel, the homeless encampment is ultimately destroyed by the authorities, as it later was in reality, leaving nothing but ‘splinters of wood and

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<sup>130</sup> Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, pp. 137.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

rubbish. Rats are all that's probably left of that place.'<sup>133</sup> It is significant that in Azure's final, vengeful, apocalyptic vision of the city (from the top of the mountain) whose inequalities and social divisions have so hurt him, he sees Cape Town destroyed by fire, but first engulfed by a tidal wave – demolishing the ancient border, between sea and land.

Visual artists, too, have been drawn to the uneasy contradictions of the bridge community. David Southwood is an acclaimed photographer with a track record of documenting eccentric inhabitants of in-between spaces (temporary flea markets, highways). He has produced a series of photographs entitled *MEMORY CARD SEA POWER*,<sup>134</sup> documenting the transient community of Tanzanian stowaways who live under the Nelson Mandela Boulevard – a similar location near the unfinished bridge, in the same complex of highway overpasses and road intersections right next to the port. Having travelled often long and torturous routes through Africa to reach Cape Town, this is where they live while waiting to sneak onto one of the boats in the harbour, en route to distant ports in the Europe, the Middle East or China. (Some also sleep 'amongst the restios on the Herzog Boulevard traffic island'. Others stay in 'The Kitchen': an informal settlement in the railway tunnels running to the docks under the N1, just off Tide Street, 'so-named because the sea had lapped against the shore there before the land reclamations'.)<sup>135</sup>

Southwood relates how he had first become intrigued by the foreshore underpasses and the people living there:

The figures living below the highways and ambushed between the palms in the triangles of no-mans' land which chamfers the hard civil engineering had accumulated in the corners of my eye and I'd decided meet them.

I clambered up an approach to a rim of the sump slung between the highways and unexpectedly reared up above the place which I had been observing from my speeding car at street level [...]

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 187.

<sup>134</sup> David Southwood, 2014: 'MEMORY CARD SEA POWER' [photographic series]. <davesouthwood.com> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>135</sup> Sean Christie and David Southwood, 'Under Nelson Mandela Boulevard – A Story About Cape Town's Tanzanian Stowaways – Summer 2012', *Africa is a Country*, 2013 <<https://africasacountry.com/2013/09/under-nelson-mandela-boulevard-a-story-about-cape-towns-tanzanian-stowaways>> [Accessed 1 August 2018].

It takes a while for the eyes to adjust from the deep shadows cast by tons of concrete to intense white daylight. To my surprise there are at least 25 men dotted about: wedged into apices, gambling intently at the foot of blackened plinths, collapsed under battling trees, waiting it out.

Later, he returns when the men are not there, and is struck by the usual dislocations of the middle-class observer witnessing the strange juxtapositions of the edgelands zones:

A strange atmosphere lingers under the bridge. Technically I am in someone's home, but the domestic interior is ultra-public due to the roaring periphery of commuters, trucks and Kawasaki which streams incessantly and hems this stage in.

Like Nicol, he notes in particular the traces the men have left, recalling once again a stone-age campsite or mysterious archaeological artefacts<sup>136</sup> from long ago (or even from another planet):

Boot prints, bottle tops, a sabre-tooth shard of metal featuring a handle made from wound-up plastic, the remains of an official travel document, the lower mandible of a cow, a half-submerged white packet flagging the spot. So this is what it feels like to be a Mars probe.<sup>137</sup>

In 2011, after two years of observation, Southwood invited journalist Sean Christie to collaborate on a photo-essay about the Tanzanian stowaways<sup>138</sup>, who call themselves the 'beach boys'. Christie describes encountering his first 'beach boys' in what they called 'The Freezer' ('because it's so fucking cold'), an archetypal edgeland space:

... bounded by the dizzying drop down to the start of highway on the left, the sloping wall we'd just scrambled up and the cars flying by on the bridge to the right, rushing down to join the highway. Ahead lay a 100 metre slice of lopsided, downward sloping land

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<sup>136</sup> A central motif in my own 2006 essay about informal settlements in Cape Town, 'Five Sites'.

<sup>137</sup> Hunkin, 'Featured: David Southwood'

<sup>138</sup> More recently, Christie has transformed this into a full-length book, *Under Nelson Mandela Boulevard* (Johannesburg: Jonathon Ball, 2016).

which was grassed and broken up<sup>139</sup> by three wild olives.<sup>140</sup>

His encounter with this underworld transforms Christie's perception of the formal city:

Whenever I was sluicing down Nelson Mandela Boulevard in my Renault [...] I couldn't help but think of the beach boys below, huddled around their fires cooking rice in blackened pots [...] In fact the whole seaward view was permanently changed for me. Where before the light playing off the Atlantic had turned the flyovers, cranes and ships into an oil painting, now I saw only cracks and chinks: bent palisade struts, tunnels, portals, hatches – not just flaws in a postcard perfect view but rents in the great system of human control. And I saw the human nobodies crawling through them, or curled up in utter darkness.<sup>141</sup>

Thus here we see again the power of an edgeland space, through its curious combinations and juxtapositions – of intimacy, access, public/private nature, welcome and threat – to break down and transcend long-established boundaries. To allow transformative encounters between people from utterly different backgrounds – in this case, with vulnerable voyagers from across the world – and, in so doing, call into the question the 'official' structures of the built environment. The creative response to this complicated and volatile atmosphere from Southwood and Christie, as with Duiker, is again a mixture: trepidation, but also elation and curiosity; and a sense of heightened strangeness, allowing one to imagine that such spaces offer brief views of other worlds, and even other times.

The formal city inevitably reacts where it can against the anarchic spirit of the

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<sup>139</sup> A tough indigenous species with traditional medicinal uses. In contrast to descriptions of the Table Mountain edgeland, where the natural world is an obvious and at time overwhelming presence, there is an absence of nature descriptions in these portraits of the bridge edgelands space – as largely reclaimed ground, these are not remnants of original 'veld'. Any vegetation would be council-planted lawn or, presumably like these olives, deposited in bird droppings.

<sup>140</sup> Christie and Southwood, 'Under Nelson Mandela Boulevard – A Story About Cape Town's Tanzanian Stowaways – Fall 2011', *Africa is a Country*, 2013  
<<https://africasacountry.com/2013/09/under-nelson-mandela-boulevard-a-story-about-cape-towns-tanzanian-stowaways>> [Accessed 1 August 2018].

<sup>141</sup> Christie and Southwood, 'Under Nelson Mandela Boulevard – A Story About Cape Town's Tanzanian Stowaways – Winter 2012', *Africa is a Country*, 2013  
<<https://africasacountry.com/2013/09/under-nelson-mandela-boulevard-a-story-about-cape-towns-tanzanian-stowaways>> [Accessed 1 August 2018].



edgelands. The community under the bridge was for a long time a thorn in the side of the City Council, provoking complaints from the public about the inhabitants' 'conduct' (drunkenness and begging; drug-dealing and other forms of criminality) and concerns about how their fires might affect the structural integrity of the bridge. It is also an obviously dangerous place for people – often with young children – to be living, prone to accidents.<sup>142</sup>

In response, in 2013 the city dealt with this problem in a typically brusque manner.<sup>143</sup> In interviews with previous dwellers of the space under the bridge, alternative news outlet *GroundUp* reported:

City workers began tearing down the informal community sheltered under the cut-off freeway in January or February of 2013. In its place, construction crews built a parking lot to house buses for the City's new Integrated Rapid Transit (IRT) project. Outside the perimeter of the bus lot, workers constructed a perplexing installation – a sprawling grid of tightly spaced rocks, planted vertically in the cement. The rocks, each around 30cm high, serve no obvious aesthetic or functional purpose.

'I saw them [the rocks], and I knew they were there to make people not sleep there,' Gregory said.

[...]

'People used to stay here, people of all kinds,' Tyrone said, picking his way carefully over the sharp rocks. 'There was a shanty here, drugs, prostitutes, everything. Then they [CID workers] came through and they moved everybody out.'<sup>144</sup>

This 'preventative rock field' provoked outcry from certain quarters: urban development analyst Rory Williams wrote in the *Cape Times* that:

People complain about how the freeway creates a wasteland, yet when a group of people figure out a way to occupy that space, we

<sup>142</sup> Jan Cronje, 'It's dangerous, they should move', *Cape Times*, 2013 <<https://iol.co.za/capetimes/its-dangerous-they-should-move-1556761>> [Accessed 2 March 2018].

<sup>143</sup> Harassment by the City police (CCID) is not uncommon. The 2006 Streets, Public Places and Public Nuisance By-law allows police to detain persons for 'anti-social behaviour, drinking, urinating, defecating and sleeping in public places, nuisance, fires, aggressive begging, and informal parking attendants', effectively making homelessness illegal. Amelia Earnest, 'City Installation Displaces Street People', *GroundUp*, 2013 <<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/city-installation-displaces-street-people>> [Accessed 25 July 2018]. Christie and Southwood also write: 'The holding cells at Caledon Police Station are often crammed to capacity when dignitaries visit. Using a city vagrancy by-law the city's Displaced Persons Unit rounds-up as many undocumented immigrants as they can lay their hands on, only releasing them when the event or visit has passed.' 'Under Nelson Mandela Boulevard – Summer 2012'.

<sup>144</sup> Earnest, 'City Installation'.

chase them away ... We should be learning how to use this space more effectively rather than arguing about knocking down the freeway.<sup>145</sup>

Over the years, various proposals have been made for the future of the Unfinished Bridge. The space underneath it was at one time a carwash.<sup>146</sup> In 2012, the municipality and the University of Cape Town ran an initiative to elicit creative proposals from hundreds of students (including turning the structure into a rollercoaster); but nothing came of it.<sup>147</sup> In a small poll taken in 2013, nearly half of respondents voted to demolish the bridge and reconnect the CBD to the seafront.<sup>148</sup> The eastern half of the bridge has been converted to public parking, and in 2015, the city council also started using the western top deck for parking.

Most recently, a bid has been approved by the City of Cape Town to complete the unfinished sections of the freeway, as well as to develop several thousand mixed residential units in the vicinity.<sup>149</sup> Whether this plan ever comes to fruition remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the people displaced from beneath the bridge in 2013 were offered ‘a shack and an outside bathroom far away in the middle of nowhere’. Many did not take this offer, preferring to move their camps to nearby patches of ground: the flowerbeds outside the traffic department; a traffic island. In some cases, people simply moved upstairs, bedding down on the uncovered road surface of the broken highway above their former homes.<sup>150</sup>

In this iconic Cape Town edgeland space, we see how decisions by apartheid- and post-apartheid era town planners were instrumental in producing urban wasteland in the city – while also creating the conditions for a human settlement to grow, survive and become visible to the formal city. While this engagement

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<sup>145</sup> Cronje, ‘It’s Dangerous’.

<sup>146</sup> Earnest, ‘City Installation’.

<sup>147</sup> Rahima Essop, ‘What’s to Become of CT’s Unfinished Highways?’, Eyewitness News, 2015 <<https://ewn.co.za/2015/01/15/Whats-to-become-of-CTs-unfinished-freeways>> [Accessed 14 July 2018].

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Brent Lindeque, ‘After 40 Years the Unfinished Bridges in Cape Town will be Completed. This is What They Will Look Like ...’ *Good Things Guy*, 2018 <[goodthingsguy.com/environment/foreshore-freeway-precinct](http://goodthingsguy.com/environment/foreshore-freeway-precinct)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>150</sup> Earnest, ‘City Installation’.

ultimately proved destructive to these vulnerable transients, it allowed, for a period of time, a unique portal through which disparate sections of the broader community might communicate. Through the reports and images of artists such as Southwood and Christie, the presence of this internal edgeland allowed the city to reimagine itself, beyond the borders that prior and present governments have tried to impose.

## Chapter 4: The Verge

A road such as the N2 also allows us to see the enormous paradox at the heart of the apartheid city, its cynicism and illogic. Insisting on racial separation, it relied on cross-racial labour. The result was, and still is, a city of movement and daily crossings: between spaces, languages, and ways of being ... Roads ... are spaces that all inhabitants of this country are forced to share. Perhaps the only space. Perhaps share is the wrong word: to overlap, to coincide upon.<sup>151</sup>

Road verges provide potential avenues for invasion of alien species, while at the same time offering connectivity of the landscape on a large scale.<sup>152</sup>

In this chapter I extend my exploration of Cape Town's edgeland space and follow it as it flows out of the city, alongside the road, reenacting the historical pioneer 'voortrekker' route into the hinterland. I survey the origins and historical/political meanings of South African highways, and discuss how the verge can function as an edgeland space – an ambiguous zone in which unexpected and uncontrolled encounters occur, both fearful and enlightening. I analyse how 'the side of the road' is presented as a space of unpredictable peril – for people on both sides of the divide. However, by reference to certain visual artists and writers, I show how the 'stoic highway walker' has come to occupy a cultural place as an emblem of endurance and even nobility, thus also allowing the edgeland space of the verge to act as a conduit for unexpected empathy, connection and discovery. Finally, I briefly turn to the logical endpoint of the road and the colonial enterprise: Johannesburg, the City of Gold, where the edgeland space takes a somewhat different form, influenced by the historical specificity of the city's mining origins.

There is a fairly extensive existing literature on the South African road – consisting of colonial accounts of exploration, lyrical mid-century travelogues

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<sup>151</sup> Twidle, 'The Road, a Literature Review', *Cityscapes*, 2014 <[cityscapesdigital.net/2014/07/19/road-literature-review](http://cityscapesdigital.net/2014/07/19/road-literature-review)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>152</sup> D. Snyman, 'The Influence of Adjacent Land-use on Road Verges in the Swartland Region, South Africa'. (Unpublished Honours thesis, DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology, Stellenbosch University, 2010).

of the open road<sup>153</sup>, or more contemporary visions of modern infrastructure as an ugly, technocratic form of social control<sup>154</sup>. Hedley Twidle, who is engaged in exploring the cultural significance of the N2 (coastal) highway in particular, writes that highways are:

... zones of dead time, sameness and forgetfulness—a physical and psychological space to be endured on the way to somewhere more interesting ... At worst, they are spaces of antisocial behaviour, injury and death.<sup>155</sup>

My contention is that the threatening space ('injury and death') is in fact not the road itself, which most motorists view as a speedy and convenient route from A to B<sup>156</sup>; rather, the perceived threat is concentrated just to one side of the highway: in the narrow verges or the road reserve<sup>157</sup>. To remain in the car, on the road and not to the side of the road, is to remain secure and insulated from the 'interior'.<sup>158</sup> To leave the car, to step off the edge of the road, across that border between built and unbuilt, is to expose yourself to potentially dangerous, even fatal, encounters with unknown denizens of the not-road. This is when the potential for violence, surprise or mishap occurs.

In the long history of South African migrations, the first informal 'roads' were the tracks followed by nomadic Khoi pastoralists in precolonial times – for example, the routes taken by the Korana and their herds as they trekked between the Cape and the Gariep (previously Orange) River in the north.<sup>159</sup> As these pastoralists were forced from their traditional grazing areas and their societies decimated, so too were their migratory routes overtaken and utilised by the herds

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<sup>153</sup> See for example, Justin Fox, *Marginal Safari* (Cape Town: Umuzi Books, 2010).

<sup>154</sup> See David Southwood, 'N1' [photographic series], 2011 <davesouthwood.com> [Accessed 30 July 2018]

<sup>155</sup> Twidle, 'The Road, a Literature Review'.

<sup>156</sup> At least for middle-class motorists; not for truck drivers or users of long-distance buses, for example.

<sup>157</sup> Defined as 'the area of land between property boundaries, state-owned and maintained (in the case of the N2) by the South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL). The road reserve may include: hard shoulder, lay byes, slip roads, culverts, nature strips, indigenous vegetation planting projects, picnic areas, weigh-bridges, emergency sandpits for trucks that have lost their brakes etc etc...' Twidle, 'The Road, a Literature Review'.

<sup>158</sup> Of course, there are also many unprivileged people who endure long hours of expensive and crowded transport get to work each day.

<sup>159</sup> 'The Khoikhoi', *South African History Online* <sahistory.org.za/article/khoikhoi> [Accessed 4 May 2016].

and oxwagons of the colonialists: first the Dutch trekboers, who, starting in the 17th century and continuing into the 18th, left the Cape to head east and north to escape from under the thumb of the Dutch East India Company; and then later the voortrekkers, who undertook the ‘Great Trek’ in the 19th century to escape the control of the British.<sup>160</sup>

These journeys became central symbols of Afrikaner nationalist mythology, their routes memorised by all-white high-school students before the fall of the regime. The romantic figure of the defiant, self-reliant, veld-toughened trekker is foundational to the Afrikaner nationalist self-image:

Trekking was in the blood of these land Vikings; it lay in the very core of their nature. For they were possessed by a restless spirit which is called the *trekkees* and it drove them on continuously in search of new territory. They would move if they were annoyed by wild animals or hostile natives or by tax collectors, but more often they trekked for no more reason than a quenchless hope that better pastures lay beyond the next horizon. ‘Myn vrouw, wy moet trek’, a Boer patriarch would say to his wife, and then their possessions were packed, the oxen put to the yoke again ... And every day the party would be five or ten miles farther away from Cape Town.<sup>161</sup>

The highways of the present day – notably the large National Routes N1, N2, N3 and N7 – are built along these pioneering trails. (Necessarily so – as all routes must pass through the same narrow mountain passes to traverse the country.)<sup>162</sup> These channelled migrations into the interior, of course, constituted the primal first contact between colonist and indigenous communities of the interior, with all the violence and subjugation that ensued. These intrusions set the tone for continuing encounters, and roads continued to be tools of oppression and social control – while also continuing to function, primarily for the white population, as symbols of freedom, new mobility, adventure and romantic contact with remote natural areas (such as the Kruger Park).

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<sup>160</sup> Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

<sup>161</sup> Oliver Ransford, *The Great Trek* (London: John Murray, 1968), p. 28.

<sup>162</sup> Twidle writes: ‘Passes might be imagined as the asphalt equivalent of what translators call lexical ‘rich points’: complex and vulnerable sites where much attention and labour has been concentrated.’ ‘The Road, a Literature Review’.

The most iconic of the national roads is the N1, ‘National Route One’, which runs from central Cape Town straight across the heartland of the country to Johannesburg, Pretoria and on to the border of Zimbabwe. This was intended to be the first section of the ‘Cape to Cairo’ road (sometimes called the Great North Road), itself an extension of the Cape to Cairo Railway, Cecil John Rhodes’ never-achieved dream of a transport route linking up the ‘Red Line’ of British colonies from the southern tip of the continent to the north.<sup>163</sup> (The N1’s beginning point – the elevated freeway that runs between the city centre and the harbour – is the site of the edgeland space discussed in the previous chapter.)

Road construction was a central tool of apartheid urban planning, forming buffers and barriers between segregated residential areas, controlling and restricting the movements of the black and the poor, and providing access into townships for the militarised forces of the state.<sup>164</sup> In the contemporary South African city, many believe that urban planning and road design (for example, new transit systems, barriered private roads) still serve to disadvantage the poor.<sup>165</sup>

Thus we see that South Africa’s modern, multi-lane built infrastructure coincides with and grew out of ancient so-called ‘desire paths’ – informal paths that begin over time, imperceptibly, gathering definition as people slowly recognise and legitimise the footfalls of their peers. Paths ... as old as the earliest transhumance, as the first drovers and movers of livestock, or even older.<sup>166</sup>

Along the edge of any highway in South Africa one can see a new desire path in formation, catering to all of those who cannot afford cars, but who must walk many kilometres a day along the inhospitable and dangerous road reserve, creating ‘footpaths of least resistance’ that ‘offer their own subtle resistance to

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<sup>163</sup> B. Roberts, *Cecil Rhodes: Flawed Colossus* (London: Thistle Publishing, 2015).

<sup>164</sup> Franco Frescura, ‘Deconstructing the Apartheid City’, *South African History Online*, 2000 <<https://www.sahistory.org.za/franco/urban-issues-apartheid-city.html>> [Accessed 21 October 2017].

<sup>165</sup> See for example Rashiq Fataar and Brett Petzer, ‘Cape Town’s Anti-Apartheid Urban Plan: Reclaiming a City from a History of Hate’, *Next City*, 2014 <<https://nextcity.org/features/view/cape-towns-anti-apartheid-urban-plan>> [Accessed 20 July 2018].

<sup>166</sup> Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 24. See also Robert Moor, ‘Tracing (and Erasing) New York’s Lines of Desire’, *The New Yorker*, 2017 <<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/tracing-and-erasing-new-yorks-lines-of-desire>> [Accessed 14 September 2017].

the dead hand of the planner.’<sup>167</sup>

Once again, in South African edgeland space we encounter time-slippage, an uneasy overlap between ancient and modern usage; the extreme contrasts of economic and racial inequality; and the weight of the oppressive colonial past. While it can be argued that roads are dangerous and exclusionary spaces anywhere in the world, in South Africa, the zone of contact between the road-makers / road-users and what their roads traversed or cut through has always felt like a charged space of engagement and sometimes conflict.<sup>168</sup>

However, the roads are not the outlaw space they once were. They have been formalised as highways, tarred over and defined with lanes and painted lines. Safe in his or her vehicle, the middle-class motorist speeds in an insulated bubble from town to town. And over and over again, South African motorists are warned not to risk breaching this bubble; not to pull over onto the road reserve or make contact with those on the other side: to stay in their cars, to keep their windows rolled up and doors locked, to not stop or stray beyond the approved route. If the bubble is breached, it is then that strange things occur: dangerous or even fatal confrontations.

The following is a representative sample of advice – much of it realistic, but also somewhat paranoid – offered to visitors to the country, who may not be aware of this edgeland etiquette. From the UK government travel advisory on South Africa:

Keep to main roads and avoid driving at night ... particularly on isolated secondary roads.[...] Drive cautiously ... avoid unfamiliar rural areas at night. Thieves have been known to employ various methods to make a vehicle stop ... Don't pick up strangers or stop to help apparently distressed motorists ...<sup>169</sup>

And from ‘Brand South Africa’ – a government-funded marketing agency under the Minister of Communications:

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<sup>167</sup> Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, p. 23.

<sup>168</sup> South Africa has a high road mortality rate compared to global averages, with 25.1 road deaths per 100,000 population. ‘South African Road Deaths vs the World’, *BusinessTech*, <[businesstech.co.za/news/general/124673/how-dangerous-south-africas-roads-are-vs-the-world](http://businesstech.co.za/news/general/124673/how-dangerous-south-africas-roads-are-vs-the-world)> [Accessed 3 July 2018].

<sup>169</sup> United Kingdom Government, ‘Foreign Travel Advice: South Africa’, *GOV.UK* <[gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa/safety-and-security](http://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa/safety-and-security)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].



Never stop to feed wild animals ... In general, be aware and keep your wits about you. It's a good idea to drive with your doors locked and windows up, especially in cities and at traffic lights. Don't ever stop to pick up hitchhikers ...<sup>170</sup>

And from a typical tourist-orientated website, World Nomads:

Don't alight from your vehicle except at designated spots and rest stops ... If wildlife does cross your path, stop the vehicle, turn off your engine and sit there quietly with no noise i.e no radio, music, talking, nothing ... You may feel you are safe in a vehicle, but there are still certain dangers that you may encounter ... Never get out of your vehicle to clear anything from the road ... It may go without saying, but never stop to pick up hitchhikers. No matter how lost or pitiful they may appear, chances are their intentions are not good ... If you see another motorist who has broken down on the side of the road, no matter how much of a Good Samaritan you may be, do not stop to help ... While stopped at a traffic light, remain alert at all times. Keep an eye on your mirrors for anyone approaching. People may attempt to sell you something ... Be especially aware of folks who come up and immediately begin washing your window. If you don't intend to give them money, you need to stop them immediately or the situation could turn ugly.<sup>171</sup>

This cautionary advice is directed at affluent visitors; the 'folks' who might threaten the motorist are, it is understood, poor, black and rural. As with most things in South Africa, there is a racial dimension to this undercurrent of threat, and a political history.

Indeed, the highways played a role in the struggle against apartheid (as well as in the suppression of that struggle). They were frequently barricaded, declared no-go zones during times of civil unrest, or as the routes of mass protest marches. Fire was often an element of these protests:

Three centuries [after the slave revolts of 1688], during the turmoil of the 1980s, fire was again a dominant feature. Cars were set alight, barricades of burning tyres were thrown across roads, shack settlements were torched by the pro-government witdoeks, suspected traitors were necklaced to a flaming death gruesomely

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<sup>170</sup> Brand South Africa, <brandsouthafrica.com> [Accessed 30 July 2018]. Brand South Africa is a government-funded agency under the Minister of Communications.

<sup>171</sup> Phil Sylvester, 'Safe Road Travels in South Africa: How to Keep Alert!', *World Nomads*, 2015 <worldnomads.com/travel-safety/southern-africa/south-africa/safe-road-travels-in-south-africa> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

reminiscent of the way convicted arsonists once had been ‘roasted’ to death by the Company.<sup>172</sup>

To this day the highways are frequently used as sites of political disruption and clashes between residents of informal settlements and police for service-delivery demonstrations or for strikers’ barricades. The power of a highway shut-down to paralyse a metropolitan area demonstrates how dependant the functioning of the urban areas are on maintaining formal routes of access:

With the advent of the 2013 ‘poo protests’, buckets of faeces were repeatedly hurled at motorists and sloshed across the tarmac. Portable toilets were overturned and set alight by citizens demanding better sanitation. Transport authorities began testing an ‘indestructible’ new fence to separate people from highway. The N2 was registering larger societal pressures, political ferment, maybe even climate change. It kept forcing its way into the headlines, demanding to be reckoned with.<sup>173</sup>

Many of the images of dangerous roadside encounters, offered as warnings, have an nightmarish quality. In South Africa, with its enormous dependence on road travel and relatively undeveloped public transport, the private car is a particularly powerful symbol of agency, power and freedom of movement. There is something especially unreal and disturbing about sudden, low-tech disaster befalling you, the middle-class commuter, as you proceed down the four-lane highway in the capsule of your roadworthy vehicle. Sometimes it falls literally from the sky, for example in the form of a chunk of concrete dropped onto car windscreens from the highway bridges on the N2 outside Cape Town (a fairly frequent form of sometimes fatal vandalism<sup>174</sup>); or in the form of, say, a lion reaching in through your foolishly rolled-down window on a game drive and pulling you into a wilderness nightmare.<sup>175</sup> The breaching

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<sup>172</sup> Nicol, *Fire City*, p. 10.

<sup>173</sup> Twidle, ‘The Road, a Literature Review’.

<sup>174</sup> See eg. Jenny Bipat, ‘Durban Woman Injured in N2 Rock Attack’, *The Citizen*, 2015 <<https://citizen.co.za/news/406500/durban-woman-injured-in-n2-rock-attack>> [Accessed 25 July 2018]; Mpho Raborife and Jenni Evans, ‘Parts of Joburg Sealed Off after Bricks Thrown at Cars’, *News24*, 2015 <<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Parts-of-Joburg-sealed-off-after-bricks-thrown-at-cars-20150415>> [Accessed 25 June 2018].

<sup>175</sup> Such attacks are a gruesomely fascinating news item – and, now, YouTube staple. They are almost relished as part of a well-established ‘dumb foreign tourist’ trope. See eg. David Smith, ‘Lion mauls American tourist to death in South African game park’, *The Guardian*, 2015

of the barrier between road and surroundings is often imagined as an almost hallucinatory sight, one involving things disturbingly out of place:

Sickening images of a frenzied mob trying to slaughter injured cattle from an overturned truck on the N1 highway near Grasmere has triggered a raging debate on social media: Was it poverty or pure lawlessness? The brutality of the incident has left the public wondering if the people living close to the road are so impoverished that they have no food, or if they were opportunists.<sup>176</sup>

The characteristic South African crime of the violent carjacking is a particularly shocking example of ‘things out of place’, of a harsh switching of social roles: the aggressor becomes the motorist, while the driver is left – alive, if fortunate – on the verge. Again, here there is a touch of the the strange historical disorientation that edgelands spaces can evoke. One common hijacking tactic is the blocking of roads with chunks of concrete, forcing a car to stop; this does not feel like a ‘modern’ crime, although its target may be a brand-new luxury vehicle. As one victim of this technique described it to me, it felt like she was being trapped by some ‘ancient’ technique, like an animal in a trap; or by highwaymen from centuries before – another old, fearful colonial echo.<sup>177</sup>

Discomfort in this in-between verge space is reflected again and again in the South African literature. In my own story, ‘Poison’, I describe this sense of unease and exposure:

Standing alone on the highway was unnerving. This was for cars. The road surface was not meant to be touched with hands or feet, to be examined too closely or in stillness. The four lanes were so wide. Even the white lines and the gaps between them were much longer than they appeared from the car: the length of her whole body, were she to lie down in the road. She had to stop herself looking over her shoulder, flinching from invisible cars coming up from behind.<sup>178</sup>

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<<https://theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/01/lion-mauls-us-tourist-death-south-african-game-park>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>176</sup> Shain Germaner, ‘Fury over N1 Cattle Slaughter’, *Independent Newspapers*, 2015 <<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/fury-over-n1-cattle-slaughter-1807740>> [Accessed 25 June 2018].

<sup>177</sup> Personal communication to author, 2010.

<sup>178</sup> Henrietta Rose-Innes, ‘Poison’, *Homing* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2011), pp. 165-66.

Part of this uncanniness is due the great contradictions present. The contrasts on either side of the road reserve are extreme: speed and slowness, wealth and poverty, mobility and immobility. The South African National Roads agency even mentions this paradox as a further reason for lack of pedestrian safety: ‘We are one of the few countries in the world where first class roads run across ‘third world’ settlements.’<sup>179</sup> Twidle also speaks about the highway as a site of enormous schisms:

The freeway, it seems, is a space where two divergent but interlocked impulses of South African literature coincide: one is a reaching for great physical space, the other a realisation of intense socioeconomic confinement. Transport as aesthetic freedom; transport as a daily imprisonment. To watch the N2 verge from here to Cape Town International Airport is to encounter a 21.9 km demonstration of the paradox that those who live next to major highways generally enjoy the least mobility.<sup>180</sup>

And indeed, in terms of real danger to life, it is also these people, those who reside in the land beyond the verge, who are at greatest risk. The peril of the verge, real and imagined, operates from both sides. It is almost certainly true that the pedestrians entering the road-verge zone from the ‘land’ side are placed in more danger by the interaction than those in cars. Almost half of South African road deaths are of pedestrians. The reason for this extremely high rate (relative to international figures) are several: roads are often not designed for walking, lacking pavements or safe crossings; because of a lack of efficient public transport, people travel on foot daily to work and school, for very long distances, or board and alight unsafely from minibus taxis<sup>181</sup>; often the only routes between residential areas, places of work and schools are along busy highways; and very

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<sup>179</sup> The South African National Roads Agency, ‘Pedestrian Road Safety Strategy’, *SANRAL*, 2006 <[https://www.nra.co.za/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=80](https://www.nra.co.za/live/content.php?Item_ID=80)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>180</sup> Twidle, ‘The Road: A Literature Review’.

<sup>181</sup> According to Statistics SA, ‘Most learners ... walked all the way to reach educational institutions. Those attending higher educational institutions tended to use taxis more than any other mode of travel. As far as workers were concerned ... of the 15,2 million workers ... 3,7 million used taxis. A further 3 million walked all the way.’ Statistics South Africa, ‘The National Household Travel Survey in South Africa (NHTS)’, Stats SA, 2013 <<http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=2493>> [Accessed 2 February, 2018].

high rates of alcohol abuse mean that pedestrian drunkenness is rife.<sup>182</sup> ('Don't Drink and Walk on the Road, You May Be Killed' the public health warning slogan on cartons of a popular brand of maize beer, 'Chibuku Shake Shake').<sup>183</sup> This risk is not something that the middle-class driver is unaware of.

Indeed, if anything, it feeds into the horror of an unexpected encounter with a verge-dweller, in the form of a collision. The spectre of the consequences of running over a pedestrian in a rural area is a paranoid white South African motif – thus reversing the sense of victimhood. In Alistair Morgan's prize-winning<sup>184</sup> short story 'Departure', for example, a violent roadside collision is the occasion for both guilt and fear when a young, bourgeois white couple (looking for chichi wedding venues) runs over an intoxicated rural villager. Initially, they do not wish to engage, fearful of exiting the car:

'What's he doing?' she said. 'He's probably drunk.'

'Shouldn't we stop? Maybe he's hurt.' 'It's not our problem.'<sup>185</sup>

Once they have stepped from the car to encounter the victim on the verge, he seems so alien he is barely human, unable to speak in recognisable language:

The man was trying to say something. [...] The man was holding out his hand, palm up, expectantly. He was mumbling. If he was speaking a language it was not one Anna understood.

Anna's tentative compassion dissolves when she starts to fear the man physically, suspecting another roadside scam:

The headlights lit up his face, emphasizing the swelling above his left eye. His eyes were unfocused. Then he put both arms around Anna's shoulders and fell against her. She could not hold up his weight and they both collapsed to the tarmac, he on top of her. She rolled from side to side until she was free from him. She

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<sup>182</sup> SANRAL, 'Pedestrian Road Safety'.

<sup>183</sup> Bourree Lam, 'The Perils of Drunk Walking, South African Edition', *Freakonomics*, 2012 <<http://freakonomics.com/2012/01/06/the-perils-of-drunk-walking-south-african-edition>> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>184</sup> In 2009, with this story, Morgan won the *Paris Review's* Plimpton Prize. Ben Williams, 'Alistair Morgan is First Non-American to Win the Plimpton Prize', *BooksLive*, 2009 <<http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/02/02/alistair-morgan-is-first-non-american-to-win-the-plimpton-prize/>> [Accessed 13 March 2015].

<sup>185</sup> Alistair Morgan, 'Departure', *Paris Review*, 2008 <<https://www.theparisreview.org/fiction/5859/departure-alistair-morgan>> [Accessed 05 November 2016].

pushed his legs off hers and stood up. A feeling of terror gripped her throat and sent her heart into a spasmodic set of beats. It had only occurred to her then that the man could have been bluffing his injuries.<sup>186</sup>

This ambiguous encounter with a denizen of the edgeland, combined with a fear of reprisals as the couple are stranded by police red tape in the strange village, is so destabilising to Anna that it colours the whole story, destroying her faith in the certainties of her life and relationship.

The specific dread of such an incident is also entwined in white guilt about privilege and separation from the 'real', downtrodden population of the 'real' heart of the country. This is evident in William Kentridge's art film 'History of the Main Complaint':

The film cuts repeatedly between the clacking and ringing world inside Soho's body-mind and the view through a car windscreen as he drives along a night road. As his body is tested, the brutally violated bodies of black Africans appear at the side of the road. Red crosses appear at points of impact, on the victim's skull, and then on Soho's. Finally a figure runs across the road and is hit by Soho's car. As the body is flung up against the windscreen, Soho, in his hospital bed, awakens from his coma ... However, this restoration is a return to a position which was shown [...] to be one of abusive white authority and it is therefore not clear that he has made any moral progress.<sup>187</sup>

Thus, the figure of the walker at the side of the highway looms quite large in the post-apartheid South African imaginary. However, this nomadic figure, endlessly waiting in, or trudging along, the road verges, is not always a figure of dread, guilt or fear. Indeed, the stoic highway walker, traversing dusty kilometres, has also been taken up as a positive figure of suffering pride, endurance and even nobility, emblematic of the country's history of migrant labour, and also of the vast numbers of women who support families as roadside traders, as well as the 'men at the side of the road' who wait to be picked up by passing vehicles for temporary labour. In many ways the verges belong to these

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Elizabeth Manchester, 'William Kentridge, History of the Main Complaint, 1996', Tate, 2000 <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kentridge-history-of-the-main-complaint-t07480>> [Accessed 17 April 2017].

people who use them so intensively, in ways that, say, a British highway can never fully belong to a pedestrian. ('The roadside walker feels constantly pushed to the margins, ever vigilant and wary,' remark Farley and Roberts about English verge walking. 'The landscape passes slowly, but it's difficult to relax and feel a part of it.'<sup>188</sup>)

In reference to Sello K. Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (discussed in Chapter 4), South African literary scholar Meg Samuelson points out that for a black person, the mere act of walking across the post-apartheid city, with its history of rigid segregation, as 'strollers' (street kids) do constantly, is an act of transgressing borders, both spatial and temporal:

Such movements through the city, and the multiple transgressive selves these movements produce, testify to the passing of the temporal boundary as the borders segregating the apartheid city are erased by the footsteps of our narrators. [...] The act of walking the city postcolonially draws us back to these earlier moments and reminds us of the ways in which the city has been populated, perused and perambulated in more rigid times. Thus, we can read back into [...] Duiker's narrators' footsteps the trail stepped out by an earlier generation of black city writers in South Africa.<sup>189</sup>

There are many examples of figures in South African art and literature embarking on long walks through cities, or between towns, as acts of bravery, endurance and defiance.<sup>190</sup> One of the most vivid of these is the eponymous protagonist in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, who begins his long journey by trundling his dying mother in a wheelbarrow through a degraded Cape Town drosscape before following the road alone on to Stellenbosch<sup>191</sup> and beyond:

He took the shortest route, past the devastated area around the old

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<sup>188</sup> Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>189</sup> Meg Samuelson, 'The City Beyond the Border: The Urban Worlds of Duiker, Mpe and Vera'. *African Identities*, 5, no.2 (2007), pp. 255.

<sup>190</sup> See also the twin orphans in Rachel Zadok's *Sister-Sister* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2013); and the accounts of long journeys by foot between the northern cape and Mowbray given in the accounts of Victorian San convicts in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. *The Digital Bleek and Lloyd*, 2007 <lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>191</sup> A small university town in the Western Cape; traditionally a bastion of intellectual Afrikanerdom.

fuel storage tanks where the demolition of burnt-out buildings had only just begun, past the dock quarter and the blackened shells of the warehouses that had in the past year been taken over by the city's street bands [...] By noon they were passing through the ghostly industrial quarter of Paarden Eiland.<sup>192</sup>

#### 4.1 The Jo'burg edgeland: migration and mine-dumps

If Michael K had continued walking along the N2, he would eventually have made his way to Johannesburg, the industrial centre of South Africa: the new city, the final staging-post of the north-eastern expansion of the colonial settlement, the conclusion of the settler migration north that began with the establishment of the Cape settlement at the foot of Table Mountain 300 years ago.

Cape Town and Johannesburg comprise the two poles of South African urbanity: Cape Town, on the one hand, is the sleepy old colonial city ('Slaapstad'); historically English, of scenic beauty and 'old money'; also considered a 'less African' city: whiter, more racially segregated and more connected to Europe; versus Johannesburg, the big, brash, glitzy, ugly economic powerhouse, a self-styled 'world-class African city'.<sup>193</sup> Johannesburg is a far younger city than Cape Town. Its spaces are newer, less organic, built to purpose; its memory shorter. As urban planning researchers Guy Trangoš and Kerry Bobbins write:

Only having emerged in 1886, the life of the city is brief, its growth explosive, and its vertical urban layering thin and intermittent when compared to older cities.<sup>194</sup>

It is a dynamic, vibrant space of opportunity, and one that also vividly displays South Africa's stark disparities. As much as Cape Town, it fractured along economic as well as racial lines into what Martin Murray sees as two

<sup>192</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 27-8.

<sup>193</sup> City of Johannesburg website, <joburg.org.za>, cited in Sofianos, 'Magical Nightmare Jo'burg', p. 112.

<sup>194</sup> Guy Trangoš and Kerry Bobbins, 'An Introduction', in Guy Trangoš and Kerry Bobbins (eds), *Mining landscapes of the GCR, GCRO Research Report #7* (Johannesburg: GCRO, 2018), p.22.



worlds, separated spatially and socially:

...one that caters to the interests and desires of the propertied rich, and another where those without regular work and without authorized shelter are forced to eke out a marginal existence in isolated pockets at the edges of prosperity.<sup>195</sup>

My focus in this thesis is on the specific historical circumstances of Cape Town's edgelands. Jo'burg has its own, characteristic wasteland spaces, which are distinct from Cape Town's, and which have been written about more comprehensively in the context of colonial mining history and inner-city flight.<sup>196</sup> However, it is necessary to examine this, the largest and most economically important city in Southern Africa, because the ways in which its edgelands differ from Cape Town's are instructive. Also, the metropolis is the logical destination of the 'walking man' trope, as the end-point of the journeys of many determined travellers from all over the country and subcontinent.

The novelist Ivan Vladislavić is the great chronicler of Johannesburg urban spaces, and also the pre-eminent practitioner of the city perambulation, exploring in much of his writing the corners of the city that can be reached on foot. Here it is the author who is the wandering figure, obsessively mapping the Johannesburg streets and the spaces in between, while the edgeland dweller lies still, awaiting discovery. In a passage in Vladislavić's novel *The Restless Supermarket*, the protagonist Aubrey Tearle encounters a lifeless body of a vagrant laid out in the urban wasteland. The encounter acts as an unsettling irruption into his orderly life, and a harbinger of life-changing disruptions to come, when he will be forced out of his complacency and into confrontation with the chaotic city:

... I could almost smell the pungent scent of the khakiebos crushed by its fall. It lay among the rusted pipes, blackened bricks

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<sup>195</sup> Martin J. Murray, *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), p. xii.

<sup>196</sup> Murray writes: 'These silently patrolled, de-cathected clusters of elite privilege ... are embedded within an atrophying urban landscape, racked by municipal dereliction and material want ... the urban centre, erstwhile showcase for the high modernist aspirations of apartheid city planners, has been given over to the entropy of low-cost housing, criminality, and vast diasporic migrancy.' *Ibid.*, p.6.

and outcrops of old foundations that mark every bit of empty land in this city, as if a reef of disorder lay just below the surface, or a civilisation had gone to ruin here before we ever arrived.<sup>197</sup>

In *Portrait with Keys*, the narrator ‘Vlad’ stumbles across the beds of the homeless concealed under the city street, in empty water mains pipes. In this humble and concealed space, he is struck by the orderly and careful arrangement of their few worldly goods. As Vladislavić scholar Gerald Gaylard writes:

This confrontation with the unfamiliar widens the door to empathy for our narrator; just as the poor store their belongings neatly in small compartments, so too are they stored neatly and out of sight [...] They are as welcome as their belongings in this place they inhabit. Nevertheless, they, like the narrator, do not stop searching for home, community and a way of belonging.<sup>198</sup>

This encounter with the edgeland zone is a record of an irruption of one world into another (reminiscent of the engagement between photographer Southwood, writer Christie and the Tanzanian stowaways discussed in Chapter 3). It is an uncanny, unsettling moment, evidence of a desperate battle for survival. It returns us to a much earlier encounter: the colonial adventurer on the slopes of Table Mountain, warily surveying the traces of a fire left by a droster. But while that early meeting of worlds was filled with fear and incomprehension, in a dangerous space on the border of the known, Vladislavić’s account is tender and full of human curiosity and admiration. It demonstrates the potential for edgeland space – where borders and definitions dissolve, and a water pipe can reveal itself as a home – to be used by writers as a staging ground for empathy, human connection across differences in circumstance, and new insight.

Perhaps, as suggested by Shane Graham, Johannesburg – as a city of immigrants – is simply more comfortable with encounters with the stranger, less anxiety-ridden and suspicious, than still-colonial Cape Town.<sup>199</sup>

Other representations of Johannesburg edgelands are bolder. One iconic

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<sup>197</sup> Ivan Vladislavić, *The Restless Supermarket*, p.6.

<sup>198</sup> Gerald Gaylard, ‘Migrant Ecology in the Postcolonial City in *Portrait with Keys*’, in Gerald Gaylard (ed.), *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011) p. 291.

<sup>199</sup> Graham, ‘Entropy’, pp.64-77.

image of the nomadic verge pedestrian is ‘Jo’burg Man’, a collaboration between photographer Dale Yudelman and artist Arlene Amaler-Raviv. (Figure 2.)<sup>200</sup> This image, in which a gigantic black labourer in typical overalls and hat, carrying a humble plastic bag, strides across a sepia 19th-century city scene, is part of a series in which the man is superimposed in monumental form on various cityscapes. This humble but heroic figure cuts across established roadways and steps clean across multi-lane highways, making his own path across the city. ‘Jo’burg Man’ was enormously successful, gaining penetration and popular recognition far greater than a fine-art image usually does: it was reproduced at billboard size for display on the side of a building in downtown Johannesburg, and prints appear in private and corporate art collections in South Africa and internationally. The figure is conceived overtly by the artists as a triumphal one: ‘He strides with pride across the cityscape of Johannesburg at the turn of the twentieth century ... An icon of contemporary man in a free South Africa.’<sup>201</sup>

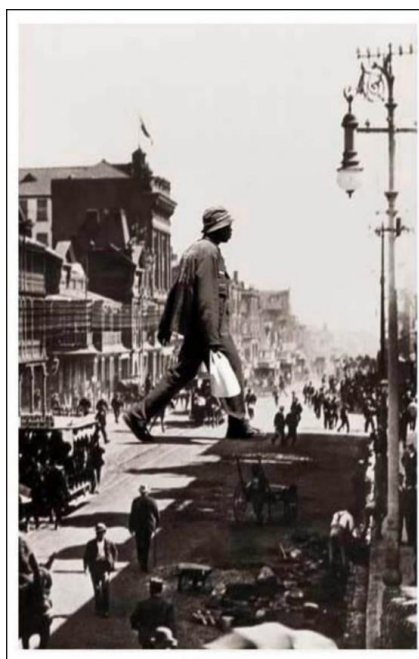


Figure 2: *Jo'burg Man*, Dale Yudelman and Arlene Amaler-Raviv, 2000

<sup>200</sup> Dale Yudelman and Arlene Amaler-Raviv, *Jo'burg Man* [artwork]. (Cape Town: The AVA Gallery, 2000).

<sup>201</sup> Julia White, 'Jo'burg Man: A Collaboration Between Dale Yudelman and Arlene Amaler-Raviv', *David Krut Projects*, 2011 <davidkrutprojects.com/8442/joburg-man-a-collaboration-between-dale-yudelman-and-arlene-amaler-raviv> [Accessed 30 July 2018]. Amaler-Raviv has also produced a related series featuring figures in Cape Town settings, with the suitably transitional title of 'Where the Mountain Meets the City', 2002 <https://www.amaler-raviv.com/gallery-view/where-the-mountain-2002> [Accessed 14 September 2018].

It is possible that Johannesburg edgeland spaces and their dwellers are differently and perhaps more assertively constructed and perceived, perhaps due to the city's mining history and more recent immigrant origins. Such an image is hard to imagine being displayed convincingly in Cape Town; it is Johannesburg that is the symbol of successful, confident African modernity.<sup>202</sup>

The most characteristic edgeland spaces of Johannesburg are intimately connected to the city's mining origins. Johannesburg, 'City of Gold', was built by and for the mines. Its surface topography is linked to an underground landscape of tunnels and shafts, above which the modern city floats. Scholars Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall see this as an integral part of the character of the city; that unlike Cape Town, with its apparent physical and historical solidity, Johannesburg is more tolerant of potential instability, as well as of influxes of new inhabitants, having long been a magnet for migrant miners and other workers:

Johannesburg is a city built on holes in the ground, and the interaction between surface and depth, and its tolerance for newness and the foreign, are crucial parts of the city's origins and its identity.<sup>203</sup>

This city would never have existed if not for these mineral-rich deposits – quite different to Cape Town's layered archaeological history that speaks of the organic development of a settlement in a place of natural sweet waters, grazing and coastal foraging. As Ivan Vladislavić writes in his novel *Portrait with Keys*,

In Johannesburg, the Venice of the South, the backdrop is always a man-made one. We have planted a forest the birds endorse. For hills, we have mine dumps covered with grass. We do not wait for time and the elements to weather us, we change the scenery ourselves, to suit our moods. Nature is for other people in other places.<sup>204</sup>

Kirby Manià points out that the other symbolic Johannesburg landscape is the

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<sup>202</sup> Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, 'Introduction: Afropolis' in Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 22-23.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ivan Vladislavić, *Portrait with Keys & What-What* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2006), p. 94.

city garden, which represents both privileged access to urban nature, and the 'history of urbanised black servility'<sup>205</sup> that has maintained it. However, discussing gardens in Vladislavic's work (eg. his 2010 novel *Double Negative*<sup>206</sup>), Manià writes that the *untended* garden:

... could be taken as a symbol of the threshold, a transculturated liminal zone between city and country, between colonial and precolonial epistemic and environmental structures. It is at once a reminder of nature eroding the concretised certainty of urbanity, but also ... of what has been repressed: the precolonial landscape.<sup>207</sup>

In this, Johannesburg's neglected gardens are potentially emancipatory edgeland spaces, which 'might just signal the opportunity to disrupt the persisting pattern'.<sup>208</sup>

However, the city's pre-eminent man-made backdrops are a more direct reminder of its industrial past: the mine dumps, their flat-topped silhouettes once as closely associated with the city as the flat-topped mountain is with Cape Town.

Few cities in the world are located in such close proximity to mining waste as Johannesburg ... While the large city has sprawled across the Highveld grasslands, it is the mounds of white and yellow dust, the lakes and dams of red water heavy with metals, and the deceptively bright blue – but toxic – water that have most destructively reshaped the landscape.<sup>209</sup>

After gold production peaked in 1970, active mining declined; its legacy was the glittering city, but also a darker, toxic residue.<sup>210</sup> Tailings disposal facilities, waste rock dumps, open-cast excavations and quarries, water storage facilities, tailings spillage sites, footprints left after the remining, slime dams – collectively and popularly referred to as 'the mine dumps'. In 2003, there were

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<sup>205</sup> Kirby Manià, "A Garden had been Left to Grow Wild There": Considering Nature in Ivan Vladislavic's Johannesburg', *Safundi*, 18, no.1 (2017), p. 81.

<sup>206</sup> Ivan Vladislavic, *Double Negative* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2010).

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Trangoš and Bobbins, 'An Introduction', p. 34.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

over 250 of these dumps, covering 44 000 hectares<sup>211</sup>, amounting to six billion tons of mine waste.<sup>212</sup>

There is no Johannesburg without mine dumps. Fly over the city, and you see them everywhere: next to Soccer City, near the city centre, snuggled next to China Mall, and out in the hinterland beside the city's few remaining farms ... Many have been dormant for years. Determined little green spots cling to the tops of some, others are barren, the tallest among them standing proudly against the skyline ...<sup>213</sup>

These iconic landscape features have been artistically depicted many times over the course of the city's history – a visual motif employed by such hallowed names as Pierneef (the iconic Afrikaner painter of mystical 'empty' landscapes, beloved of the Afrikaner establishment) and Moses Tladi (South Africa's first black landscape painter). In these images the dumps are statuesque, unpeopled, and viewed from a distance (much like picturesque colonial-era paintings of Table Mountain; they perhaps compensate for Johannesburg's lack of an imposing natural landscape feature). Contemporary painter Herman Niebuhr shares this aestheticised approach:

I come from here. It's my place. In a previous exhibition of work on the mine dumps, Jo'burg's central paradox was made most apparent [for me]. The gold colour of the dumps comes from the toxic chemical process employed to extract the gold, you know all that glitters ... The rich earthen browns of the city, coupled with the varied greys, are offset by magnificent skies. A colourist's dream, really.<sup>214</sup>

While they are not really empty (many poor people – by one estimate, two million – live in proximity to these dunes<sup>215</sup>), they are harsh and inhospitable

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<sup>211</sup> N.F. Mphephu, 'Rehabilitation of Tailings Dams on the Central Rand; Johannesburg', *Researchgate*, 2003 <[researchgate.net/publication/237405949\\_Rehabilitation\\_of\\_Tailings\\_Dams\\_on\\_the\\_Central\\_R\\_and\\_Johannesburg](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237405949_Rehabilitation_of_Tailings_Dams_on_the_Central_R_and_Johannesburg)> [Accessed 31 July 2018].

<sup>212</sup> Mara Kardas-Nelson, 'Jason Larkin: Up and Down in the Dumps', *Mail&Guardian*, 2013 <<https://mg.co.za/article/2013-07-05-jason-larkin-up-and-down-in-the-dumps>> [Accessed 10 June 2018].

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Charles Leonard, 'Jo'burg's True Colours', *Mail&Guardian*, 2012 <<https://mg.co.za/article/2012-03-30-joburgs-true-colours>> [Accessed 25 July 2018].

<sup>215</sup> Kardas-Nelson, 'Jason Larkin'.

places. The dumps are blamed for any number of environmental and health ills due to contaminated water, dust and air; radioactivity, sinkholes, acid water rising and land instability are persistent dangers. They have not, traditionally, been the kind of intriguingly accessible, ambiguous edgeland spaces into which a middle-class observer might be tempted to wander, as on the perimeters of Cape Town. While impressive as skyline features, they are, examined more closely, toxic and jarring reminders of the city's exploitative past.

Discussing the discomfiting presence of the dumps in the cityscape, Daniel Roux proposes that the rapid South African industrial revolution produced an unusual situation in the country's cities. Capital did not just flow out of the country, as with many other colonial enterprises, but was also used to consolidate a local 'cultural and economic infrastructure'. Thus,

... a capitalist imaginary was developing right alongside the actual extraction of wealth, which was a process that involved the interlocked devastation of Southern African life worlds and damage to the environment ... In South Africa, a capitalist society was forced into close proximity to its traumatic, destructive material point of origin. We are everywhere reminded of the social and environmental cost of the economy and the cultural forms that it sustains ... our worlds of privilege exist in an uncomfortable propinquity to the Real, which is always experienced as a pressure against the edge.<sup>216</sup>

It is this pressure that makes all edgelands potentially sites of unease; and this is perhaps particularly so in South Africa, given its conflicted history; and most visibly in Johannesburg. It is this quality of 'uncomfortable propinquity', too, that makes edgeland space a compelling subject for artists and writers wishing to illuminate the faultlines in this society.

However, the iconic mine dumps are experiencing a transformation that is rendering them less forbidding, more porous. The dormant dumps contain fine traces of gold which could previously not be extracted. However, with advances in mining technology and rising gold prices over the last two decades, it has

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<sup>216</sup> Daniel Roux, 'The Vanishing Mine Dumps: from Mine Boy to Marikana', *SLipNet*, 2013 <<http://slipnet.co.za/view/blog/the-vanishing-mine-dumps-from-mine-boy-to-marikana>> [Accessed 20 July 2018].

become economical to reprocess them to extract precious metals<sup>217</sup> – with the result that, since 2005, 40% of the country's tailings dams have been levelled.<sup>218</sup> This gradual disappearance has resulted in, perhaps, a shift in their popular perception. As with Cape Town's broken bridge, a semi-ironic nostalgia has seized long-term residents:

I had to fly to Joburg, the city where I grew up ... my eyes were drawn to the mine-dumps that always announce one's final descent: they surround this city, testimony to its history and its continuing, if diminished, dependence on the mineral wealth that gave birth to it. But where the landscape used to be defined by the dumps, they were now more like intermittent punctuation marks. They have all but disappeared from the city's skyline, a fact I find a bit uncanny, because they were so immutably part of my experience of the place. It's like visiting Paris and realising the Seine is gone.<sup>219</sup>

In addition, the reworking of the old mine dumps has attracted a new influx of people (often immigrant Zimbabweans) to these spaces: an unusual scavenger sub-economy has emerged. Skilled, unemployed mine-workers have turned to illegal, unregulated mining, and the collection of scrap metal from disused mine-works.<sup>220</sup>

Every day from dawn to very late in the evening, groups consisting only of men intensively and illicitly work the polluted soil of these pale landscapes in search of scrap metals – leftover fragments of old mine operations that are either surfaced through the mechanical reshuffling or manually dug up ... As the scrap metals surfacing in one site get depleted, the men move on to other areas, often resorting to manual excavation in order to maintain their livelihoods ...<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Potsiso Phasha, 'Photo essay: Scavenger Economies of the Mine Dumps', *Gauteng-City Region Observatory*, 2014 <<http://www.gcro.ac.za/outputs/photo-essays/detail/photo-essay-scavenger-economies-of-the-mine-dumps/>> [Accessed 10 July 2018].

<sup>218</sup> This is not uncontroversial: certain mine-dump areas have been zoned for government housing, creating conflict with environmentalists and communities in desperate need of housing; in certain areas, people have been evicted from polluted areas, allowing the mining companies to step in: see Kardas-Nelson, 'Jason Larkin'.

<sup>219</sup> Roux, 'Vanishing Mine Dumps'. See for example also Peter Ball, 'Where Have All the Mine Dumps Gone?', *The Heritage Portal*, 2017 <[theheritageportal.co.za/article/where-have-all-mine-dumps-gone](http://theheritageportal.co.za/article/where-have-all-mine-dumps-gone)> [Accessed 30 July 2018].

<sup>220</sup> Phasha, 'Scavenger Economies'

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*



Thus these barren dumps are in the process of being transformed into a kind of emergent edgeland space: one that, unlike the truly barren dumps before, offer purchase to human users and inhabitants, allowing for ‘an invisible but vibrant economy on ... seemingly dead spaces typically overlooked as mere waste ground.’<sup>222</sup>

I detect increasing interest, in the broader culture, in these relatively new edgeland-dwellers: see for example the intimate interviews with Zimbabwean illegal miners and scavengers in Potsiso Phasha’s photo essay ‘Scavenger economies of the mine dumps’, published in 2014; and photographer Jason Larkin’s sympathetic studies of dump-dwellers praying and hunting with dogs in his 2013 book, *After the Mines*. Perhaps, in time, these newly accessible spaces will inspire more of the barrier-breaching, creative representations that have been the subject of this thesis.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

Much cultural attention has been paid in recent years to ‘edgeland’ spaces – the unplanned, wasteland zones within and on the perimeter of the modern city. These ambiguous landscapes, traditionally derided, have in recent decades attracted attention from a generation of scholars, writers and artists, newly appreciative of their value as unique ecosystems, aesthetically inspiring and politically subversive spaces.

Much of this work has been focused on the post-industrial landscapes of affluent countries of the north, while less attention has been given to cities of the global south, with their particular urban histories and different ways of utilising urban space. For this reason, I chose to examine South African cities in particular, with an emphasis on Cape Town, to elucidate the particular cultural role that edgeland spaces, and their representations, play and have played in the life of the city. While scholarly work has been done on relevant aspects of Cape Town’s urban history, the city as a whole has not been examined through the lens of edgeland studies.

To this end, I looked closely at the development of two iconic Cape Town edgeland spaces: the Table Mountain Reserve perimeter, and the ‘Broken Bridge’ on the foreshore; as well as the road verges on the highway leading out of the town. (I look also briefly at the somewhat more assertive and accepting relationship that the city of Johannesburg has with its edgeland areas and dwellers.)

I found that edgeland spaces in Cape Town were shaped to the unique historical development of the city: not spaces left in the wake of industrial decline, but rather moulded by the proximity of the Table Mountain wilderness, by the legacy of apartheid town planning which strove to separate the population into racial enclaves, and by the continuing anxieties and restrictions of a society built on these racial and economic divisions.

A further feature of these spaces that distinguishes them from typical edgeland spaces in, for example, the UK or US, is that they are actively

populated, often permanently and quite densely, by poor and marginal communities: they are not ‘abandoned’ spaces. An important result of this is that these edgelands, being in close proximity to the formal city, allow for regular engagements and transactions between individuals from very different backgrounds, both positive and negative: encounters that are potent in a country where segregation and inequality was notoriously enforced for so long, and where those divisions persist today, geographically and in the psyche of the population. Such concerns feed into the traditional perception of edgeland spaces and dwellers as dangerous, and to be avoided.

However, I found that such encounters, in how they are perceived and represented, are charged not only with anxiety but also with possibility and mutual discovery. This ambiguity and potential is reflected in a variety of literary and other artistic representations of edgeland spaces, and in particular, of their inhabitants. The edgeland dweller emerges as a particularly prevalent and potent figure in (predominantly white, middle-class) South African art and literature, overshadowing interest in the wildlife and landscape aesthetics of edgeland spaces.

I feel it is important and timely that the value of these spaces is highlighted. They are currently under threat in Cape Town, in particular due to initiatives to define and limit the city edge (to reduce sprawl), and to densify and in-fill underutilised spaces within the city.<sup>223</sup> Another threat lies in the heritage industry’s drive to sanitise and reframe these parts of the city, in an effort to attract tourists and enshrine an official narrative of local history.<sup>224</sup> Part of this drive, inevitably, is the desire to ‘cleanse’ the city of populations of street people.

I have drawn examples from art and literature to demonstrate how such spaces are symbolically meaningful in the life of the city, and how they can also be effective in sparking insight and empathy in those who are willing to engage

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<sup>223</sup> Future Cape Town, ‘Summit Proceedings and Discussion Paper: Drawing the Line on Urban Sprawl’, 2013 <<http://futurecapetown.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/36178765.pdf>> [Accessed 22 August 2018].

<sup>224</sup> See, for an example of one such complex heritage site, Harriet Clift, Liesbet Schietecatte et al., *Prestwich Precinct Revitalisation, Erven 738, 734, 564, 202, 566 Green Point* (Cape Town: Citythinkspace, 2011).

creatively with them. These accounts are overwhelmingly from the point of view of middle-class and predominantly white writers, journalists and artists; many of these representations demonstrate a middle-class yearning for contact with briefly glimpsed ‘others’ on the side of the road. Sadly, the view from the edgeland is very much harder to obtain; its inhabitants’ marginal voices are often silenced, with nothing but campfire traces to mark their passing.

It is partly these concerns that have guided the creation of the creative part of the thesis: my novel *Stone Plant*. The capacity of edgeland spaces to allow for ambiguous, unpredictable and unconventional interactions makes them rich locations for fiction. The particular setting of my novel – the ‘Unfinished Bridge’ discussed in this thesis – has been the subject of a small but interesting range of artistic and literary representations; I wished to add to these, and feel there is space for new interpretations of these compelling urban zones in the South African context.

In the heightened universe of the book, the boundaries that are breached in this edgeland are not only between people, but also between historical eras, and even between different non-human organisms, living and dead. The space below the bridge contains, in its deep stratigraphy, the history of every event that brought about its singular existence, and certain characters – especially the rough sleeper and road-walker, Roland – have access to that that history. The ‘natural’ porousness of the edgeland is, in this novelistic world, expanded to allow for porousness across time, too.

I have attempted to find a voice, or voices, for the edgeland – something I feel would be an imaginative contribution to South African creative writing about such spaces, which tend to view them from an external point of view. Such voices are embodied in the bones and seeds and even in the inanimate substance of the bridge and the road, which together comprise a small and contained, but appropriately complex, edgeland ecology. The patch of land also has a certain amount of agency: it has the capacity to produce, as its vessel and vector, a toxic weed – the emblematic organism of the urban wasteland – and use it to manipulate its human inhabitants to ensure its survival and propagation.

The novel is also a small cry of protest against the homogenising impulse

of urban development, which would deny the rich singularity and complex ecology of unplanned and unregulated urban space, and replace every broken bridge with a parking garage.

# STONE PLANT

## A Novel

It is a dying world, like Mars, but glowing still.

J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine*

## 1.

The patch of wasteland by the unfinished bridge once had a name; an ancient one, now untranslatable in any tongue. No one can speak it nowadays, or tell you what it means.

It was not a hard place to find: right there, spitting distance from the highway, with not much in the way of cover. Thousands of people every day cast a casual eye across it as they sped past, cars hurrying in one direction or the other. The land sat quietly in the play of dazzle and fume, an irregular, scrubby patch, half an acre maybe, inked across one corner by the shadow of the broken bridge.

It was an ordinary place, with nothing more than the usual run of events for any spot on the globe: a number of deaths, a number of births. Feats of love and sacrifice and rage and enterprise. On the face of it, the land's inventory was modest. Some stones, some paltry plants, the carcass of an old car that had once plunged down into the gap between the raised lanes, but had never been removed by the council. The usual treasury of broken-glass diamonds, of wire and scrap and number plates and cast-off hubcaps.

The objects here were humble, not holding themselves above other objects. They had some secrets. Seven skeletons, four keys, twenty knives, some made of stone. There was a gun buried around here somewhere. The place was flat, with no outstanding features, no hills or rises.

But any piece of land is like an iceberg. Beneath the shallow surface topography, underfoot, under the soil, deep stalactites descended; upside-down mountains, unscaleable peaks, inverted valleys, profound clefts filled with shadow ore. Lodged here were the bodies of climbers, those who'd lost their grip long ago in the course of perilous descents, still slowly plummeting. Nobody ever attained these sunken summits; there was always further to fall.

In the layers furthest from the sun, the skeletons of old, strange animals swam, their giant forms suspended in rock. Flotsam from some murky inland sea, rendered down to silt. The earth down there was sour and starved of oxygen; more recent occupants turned their backs on it. A little higher, there were

inscrutable things: acres of char from gigantic fires that had left nothing else behind. If you put your face close, you would still smell the stink of singed feathers. A ring of bleached jackal skeletons, laid out as offerings to some forgotten god. Complicated. Clues to a million murders. Enough to keep generations of detectives busy with their magnifying glasses, their fingerprint dust.

The soil got lighter, in colour and in spiritual weight, the closer to the surface. There were whole eras reflected in strata of sunny sand, of washed-up shells and necklaces made of those shells, of ox vertebrae worn smooth by the hands of playing children.

Several graves deep, a woman lay curled, hands up by her chin, thoughtful, listening to the ruckus of the years. Her necklace of eggshell beads was intact, although their string was gone. She was very, very old. There was no thought left really, the empty cranium long relieved of that. But there was something: a watchful presence. The ground all around was churning and alert: worms turning the soil, the odd mole. These passers-by were familiar with the ancient skeleton, and the others scattered here and there through the depths of the soil, furnishing this deep world.

Above, in the sunless space under the bridge, a living man lay equally motionless, through the night hours and sometimes through the day. He came here to drink and to sleep, eyes twitching as he watched his dreams unspool. The bridge was fond of the man. There was a stash of his bottles in an intimate crook of the bridge's undersides, and a rancid blanket. The bridge took a modest pride in these things. It was reminded of the time a vulture had similarly built a nest there; it had been fond of that creature too.

There was a plaque on one end of the bridge. On it were words, but the bridge found these unreadable. The bridge had forgotten the men in suits who put it there, the ones with flowers in their lapels. Once, a lizard had walked onto the sun-roasted metal of the plaque, and scuttled off again: too hot. If the bridge could be said to have a sense of humour, then that lizard tickled it.

The bridge missed the animals the most. Their warmth, their wet mouths. There had been veld here once, bustling with so much more life. Now there was



a road, a fence, some buildings on the far side. The bridge could not take an interest in the houses. *Your people*, it said to the oldest human skeleton.

Old Lady Bones clenched the teeth of her yellowed skull; kept her peace. Sometimes the bridge wished it could lie down.

The road? The road was moving on. It had no time for chat.



*Jesus fucking Christ Gabriela what are you like. In the shit again.*

It had always been a cruelty to Gaby that she had to spend so much of her time sitting still. As a little girl she'd never been able to manage it: teachers always shouting at her to sit back down at her desk, not to run in the corridors or climb trees, her nanny pinching the back of her neck or sometimes pulling her skinny pigtails to keep her close in public places. As she matured, she learned to some degree to be still, or at least to turn the fidget inwards so it became a kind of controlled internal flutter, barely perceptible to anyone else, like the minute super-rapid vibrations of a hummingbird's wings that make it seem to hang motionless in thin air. Most of the time, she could hold her position. But right now, she was struggling.

Here, sitting at this table in the cramped little office at the back of the magistrate's court, across a scratched-up desk from a beaten-up Youth Diversion officer, she was jiggly as hell, leg popping, pink polish splintering off a fingernail damp from nibbling, despite the expensive manicure. Being looked at was not her thing either, not at all. Not by someone like this anyway, this old guy in his cheap white shirt smelling faintly of sweat, in these greasy cheap chairs, with all the sad cardboard folders in heaps on the floor and her own personal folder drawn up in front of him on the desk. There was a smaller pile heaped on the broken-backed chair next to him, apparently selected for processing from the towers of files on the worn parquet, and she wondered if he had a certain number to get through today, tick by tick. Probably. Did nobody in this place have a computer, even. It was medieval. She spotted a bible balanced on top of one

teetering pile, a well-thumbed one with a black cover shiny from use, like you see Church people carrying in the streets on Sundays.

Her impulse here was to keep up a constant low-level distracting motion, a blur of sound and movement so that he couldn't fix on her for long, couldn't get her in focus. So she shifted and tapped her foot and hummed under her breath. She'd only just sat down but she could see it was getting to him already, an impression confirmed when he slapped the pen down and glared testily at the corner of the desk, as if taking a moment to contain an involuntary outburst of his own.

Ancient guy – fifty? fifty-five? she wasn't good at guessing – with a sagging, battered-looking face coarse with lines, and a smattering of grey hair that looked like someone had ashed a cigarette across his damp scalp. He might have been in this room for thirty years, endlessly cycling through his brown cardboard box-files. He had sleepy crinkled eyes that he seemed to find difficult to manage; they kept sliding away from her face, from the paper in front of him, seeking something in the spaces over her shoulders – a window, perhaps, in an office that had never had one. He sighed, and effortfully fixed his gaze on her folder. Opened the cover as if it weighed a ton.

She sighed too.

Ignoring her, he hovered his chewed blue Bic over the first page. 'So,' he said. 'Miss Michaelis. Gabriela. How are we today?'

She took her fingernail out of her mouth. 'Fine.'

'You've been keeping all your appointments? Your commitments?'

She shrugged affirmatively. 'Think so, yes. All my hours. I brought all the forms and stuff.' She pushed her own little pile of grubby papers at him. Five envelopes, lick-sealed, from five separate authority figures. Naturally, she had steamed them, read them, resealed them. There was nothing of note there.

He took his time, methodically putting on reading glasses to squint at each statement, each note and check-mark and signature and purplish stamp, replacing each one in its envelope. Meanwhile, she was going mad in the tiniest way she could manage, stubbing the toe of her trainer against the table leg, bounce bounce bounce. Stop it. She's made a mark – a bruise on the new cream

suede, just from contact with this ancient dirty furniture.

At length, he swiped blue tick-marks briskly across five or six check-boxes on a photocopied form.

‘What I’ve got here when I add it all up ...’ His pen-nib tap-tap-tapped down the boxes as he counted under this breath. ‘Is ... ten hours at Lancaster House .... seven and a half hours at the SPCA ... four hours beach clean-up ...’ Each item on his list made Gaby squirm harder. Each one had been the occasion for some kind of fuckup, some kind of shameful catastrophe. The runaway cat. The soup spilled on the pensioner. The dead seal on the beach, which combined with light sunstroke had nearly made her faint. The usual. Gaby gazed stonily at the last irregular island of shell-pink polish left on her thumbnail. ‘And the school feeding stuff. Five hours there,’ she added when he’d stopped talking. Despite all the distractions – her embarrassment, her restless body – there was an adding machine her head that didn’t stop. ‘Right. So ... fifty-five hours.’

‘Fifty-six hours. And a half.’

He narrowed his eyes, counted again, made a correction to his total. ‘Right. Fifty-six and a half. Which means ... forty-three hours to go. And a half.’

‘Forty-one. If you add in today.’ She met his gaze levelly. ‘Plus travel. So say forty.’

He sighed, made a further adjustment. ‘Forty. You’ve completed the drug testing.’

‘Yes.’

‘And the fire awareness training.’

‘Yep.’

‘And the victim-impact workshop.’

‘Uh-huh.’

He sat back in the chair. She knew what he was thinking: what a brat. Or maybe even something like: rich little cunt. She didn’t blame him, really. Gaby had this effect on people, historically. Plus, he was going to be sitting in this horrible place for another ten years, not her. Soon she would be leaping from this chair, sprinting on out of here past the quiet of unfortunates in the corridor,

propelled into the open air. The thought did not bring her particular joy.

‘And then you’ll be done. Except, of course, for the statement of responsibility. No progress there, I take it? I understand that you have, uh, made some changes to your psychotherapy programme. Once again.’

She stared at her thumbnail. ‘That doctor wasn’t working out. We didn’t get along.’

‘You are aware that a successfully completed course of therapy is a requirement of your sentence. Or I mean, excuse me, your Divergence Programme.’

She nodded. The silence held stubbornly. Like the air between them was stiff and unwilling and choked past the throat only with difficulty.

He broke first: ‘But!’ He slapped his hand on the table, making her jump. ‘But of course I am not here to harass you on this point. I know that your guardian will see to it that you find the help you need. Of course the therapeutic relationship must be mutually satisfactory.’ Taking his time, he reached into a drawer and took out a further sheaf of papers, flipped them methodically, paused at one and perused it. ‘So do you want to hear about your next placement?’

‘I guess so.’

‘No, you’ll like this one. Get you out into the open air for a change. It’s a community garden scheme.’ He watched her, eyebrows raised encouragingly. ‘Your ah, your lawyer agreed to this. Mr Franks?’

‘My mother’s lawyer.’

‘Exactly. I’ve emailed him the details. It’s not bad, not bad at all, really. I think you might like it. If you stick with it, it will take care of all your remaining Youth Diversion service hours. Four hours a day, ten days. Or an hour a day for forty days.’ He smiled at her. ‘Like Jesus in the wilderness.’

‘What?’

‘Never mind.’

A garden. She swallowed. ‘Is it ... is it a pretty place?’

He seemed taken aback by the question. ‘Don’t ask me!’ he said. ‘I haven’t been outside this office in years.’

After she'd left the room, the YD officer took a further few minutes to add his notes and impressions. He was only forty-seven, and Gaby had maligned him. He was not, in fact, thinking *rich cunt*. He was a deeply religious man and did not permit such words, even into his own brain. Funny, nervous child, was what he thought. Not a child, even. She was what, nineteen? Older than her manner. Too old, really, to technically qualify for Youth Diversion; but then, that's what an expensive lawyer can buy. He sighed. Troubled, though, and the trouble she'd got herself into was not trivial. Pretty little thing, delicate, white-white skin like it had never seen the sun. Sweet almost, though, at the end there, with her question about the garden. He did admit to, not vindictiveness, but a degree of Solomonic justice-dealing in his decision to assign her to the garden project. The punishment pleasingly fitted the crime.

'I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in,' he murmured, closing her folder and securing it with a pink rubber band and then another one at right angles to that, satisfied that everything inside the tight pouch of documents was up to date and correct: all boxes checked, all hours served, the clock of justice ticking on.

In the corridor outside, bleached sunlight sifted down on the green-grey linoleum, the varnished benches, the curling paper notices thumb-tacked to the wooden door frames. Everything grubby, tacky from the touch of a million hands, porous with the perspiration of generations of the down-on-their-luck. The stench of waiting, of years and years of waiting in this place. An old man with his old-man fedora between his swollen hands. His skin had the taut shine that comes from rubbing hard against life for decades. A young woman with a baby in a blanket on her back, asleep on her feet, her face smoothed in dreams but her hands staying resolutely awake, tensed around a summons paper red with some angry demand, not letting go. Young lawyers walked briskly through the space, their robes flying behind them, distinguished sharply from the mass by the speed and purpose of their movement. Everyone else here was still, on slow time; motionless and wordless on the benches, waiting to be told. Waiting for arraignments, to pay fines, to pick up relatives from hearings. Every twenty

minutes or half an hour, at some invisible signal, one of them might stand and enter through an office door, and the rest of the row of seekers would shuffle up to fill the space.

They were poor people, in cheap clothes, worried, serious; they'd been up since dawn, they'd travelled far to get here, since four this morning, on trains, buses, minibus taxis, on foot. It was not a good moment in any of their lives. Nobody came to this building willingly; nobody came when the angels were smiling on them. This was a place where you brought your luck in your hands and waited and waited and waited for someone to tell you how bad it was this time, and how much you had to pay for it.

What a dump, thought Gaby. She stood irresolute in the corridor. Mr Franks was not where she'd left him. Had he gone to the loo? That was impossible to visualise – the lawyer unbuttoning his flies, let alone in a public toilet in a place like this. Mr Franks' three-piece suits were so immaculately tailored it was hard to imagine they had flies at all – she'd never noticed, nor had she had any desire to look. She crossed her arms and held herself close. She didn't want to sit down on the public benches, which seemed foul. No space for her there anyway, among the waiting.

She shouldn't be here. Ridiculous. She should have been able to keep herself out of this situation; but she never had been able to keep clear of trouble, not as long as she could remember. Maybe one day she'd grow wise enough to learn. But right now it felt like trouble was all over her like invisible dirt, she picked it up, it was on her fingers and her face, it rubbed off on everyone and everything she touched. She was filthier than anyone here. Where the fuck was Franks. Was she even in the right corridor? She walked stiffly to the end of the benches and looked around a corner, and yes, there was the familiar pacing figure in his dove-grey suit, lawyer's leather briefcase as fat as a luxe toolbox, thumbing his phone in his usual harassed manner. It steadied her. She waited for him to see her.

Mr Franks was skinny old stick but strong; he swung that briefcase like it was nothing, although she knew it held a good seven years' worth, a ton, of her crimes and misdemeanours. He was a dry, slight, accusatory man, but after

all this time she'd grown easy with him. And certainly she would rather be doing this with him than directly with her mother. God forbid. Mr Franks had sat with her through everything. He'd shepherded her through the worst things, since she was what, twelve? The pills, the broken windows, the truancy, the accidents, the pregnancy scares, all of it. At times she could see herself decades from now, in the company of this man – or not him, eventually, but his successor, or his successor's successor; the eternal family lawyer, discreetly inserting him- or herself between Gaby and the world, translating her chaos into precisely the same cadences, that opaque protective language of the papers in his briefcase. The language that she feared and relied upon.

In the padded cool of his car, there was silence for a while, as there often was with Mr Franks. 'How are you, Gabriela?' he said after a measured pause. He always called her by her first name because he'd known her so long, but always used the longer form. She'd never wondered what his first name might be.

She gave it a moment, but she could never hold a sulk for long. She was fond of the old asshole. She let her head droop against the glass, her body wilt. Ghost nose snubbed up against its reflection in the glass, black ghost eyes. She allowed herself, just for a moment, the sad pleasure of being a bad child, berated and taken home. She caught Mr Franks's dry glance in the rear-view mirror, and wondered what she looked like to him.

Like a petal, she decided defiantly. Delicate and pale, pressed against the glass. She pouted at herself in the reflection. Then: *fuckit*. She pushed herself back upright, snatched off the shades, kicked the back of the passenger seat. 'Chrissake. Can we have some music on, at least, please?'

He switched it on, pre-set to some kind of tinkly classical music. She groaned. 'Jesus, I'd rather listen to the *news*. Here.' She reached between the seats to fiddle with the knobs and find something different, a sparkier beat. On her trajectory, she gave the lawyer's grey cheek a passing peck.

'Gabriela,' he grunted. 'I'm driving.'

She slumped back in her seat, gazed out the window. They were on the highway; the shacks on either side looked even grimmer than usual, stranded in

their acres of dust. The drought had cased a pall of beige dust to hang over the city more or less permanently, and it was worse out here on the outskirts, where the tar ran out metres from the highway. There were people in there, but you could barely make them out through the murk. Some kids pushing through a gap in the fence. Fuck, bleak, she thought. Not a stroke of green. Not that there ever had been really, along this stretch. A bony cow standing in a culvert – grazing what? – lifted its head, then dropped it again. And then the road arced away towards the city, and the shacks dropped back, out of sight.

The lawyer seemed to be hesitating over something. Eventually he came out with it. ‘They’ve given me the details of the new ... work situation,’ he said. ‘It’s actually quite close by. I wondered if you’d like to see it now? We could drive past.’

‘Okay, sure.’

He took a different turnoff from the highway, not the usual one, heading in the opposite direction to home. The highway took them around the sweeping periphery of the city centre; they passed through the arabesques of one complex spaghetti junction and then another, glimpses of sea between the concrete slopes as they rose and fell. Through the car windows the day seemed stunned and dusty, everything distant, refracted through more layers than the car’s pane of shatterproof glass and its bubble of air-conditioned air.

‘Coming up soon, apparently,’ said Mr Franks as they mounted a aerial section of the road, suspended above a knot of off-and on ramps on tall concrete supports. ‘Keep an eye out. I believe it’s down to the left of the highway, under the bridge. Piece of land. Some sort of allotment down there.’

Her eye drifted towards a familiar landmark – the chopped-off end of the old unfinished highway bridge. The jagged end of it, crudely blocked off with concrete bollards, was almost level with the car here, a little higher: you could see the old rusty rebar poking out of its end like the wiring of a busted appliance. Everybody knew it; from ground level, its blunt shape visible from many parts of the city, coming into view unexpectedly down side-streets or looming behind buildings like an unanswered question. There were stories about the bridge: someone had told her the gangs used it for initiation. They’d force people to run



off the edge. But that could well be crap, another urban legend.

But where was this garden? She must have driven, or been driven, past that spot on the highway a million times, and she'd never seen anything down there. A secret plot, right in the middle of the interchange? Surely not? Certainly not a trees, or rose-bushes.

'There,' he said. 'Did you get a look?'

'What?'

'We just went past.'

'Oh,' she said. 'I wasn't really looking.'

'Do you want to go back?' He glanced at his slim gold wristwatch. 'It's actually ... a little tricky to turn around on this junction ...' Around them the off-ramps twisted and multiplied like sea-serpents. Franks squeaked into a left-hand lane ahead of a Mercedes. 'And I'm afraid I have another meeting coming up.'

'Sure, whatever,' she said, 'I mean I'll be going there soon anyway.'

But she hadn't really missed it, not exactly. Just as they came alongside the bridge, as a cool concrete shadow fell across the windscreen of the car, she'd felt an urge to duck; had closed her eyes for a long blink, had turned subtly away, until the moment had passed. She hardly thought about what she was doing, it was such an instinctual flinch. When she turned her face back, they'd passed out of its shadow and were heading back towards the sea, back to the easy bright blues and whites of the bay.



As Gabriela had flinched away from the plot of land, so too had it flinched away from her, lightly, a delicate mutual acknowledgement. The purr of Mr Franks' luxury car was not distinguishable from the general rush of traffic that steamed past the intersection at all hours. But the land below felt her passing nonetheless, very faintly, as a shiver of disturbance. Of trouble.

It's not that the place recoiled from change, from intrusions. The bridge, the road: these things were relatively new. They knew modern times, and

remembered the machines that built them. The bridge was a gentle structure, without anger or ego. It enjoyed the bravado of the graffitied slogans on its walls. It remembered the faces of the boys who'd made them, every tag.

But this was different. The spider under the bridge mis-knotted a tie and the silken thread drifted out of the shade. The bridge felt an itch it could not scratch, like you feel at the site of an old scarred-over burn. The landscape felt distress.

Under the bridge, the long-bodied sleeper turned, moaning.

He was dreaming in a fine room, fragrant with polished wood. In the corner a yellow-haired lady in yellow silks sat, tears streaming down her face. The room still echoed with the reverberations of her voice. She did not look at him. The air was textured with the hush and rasp of a language that crumbled and stuck in his throat. Rain on the roof, shushing on the thatch. *Mijn dame*, he said and his voice was lighter, it was a voice of youth. He turned ashamed and went back out into the yard and the rain. A piebald dog pissed against the plastered wall and he snapped his fingers at it. The dog came to heel with its hot yellow eyes. Inside, the serving women passed across the doorway. The young mistress's anger flickered from the house.

The car rolled on and the man rolled over in his earthy bed. He opened his eyes and let the heat of his dreams leak out and sink into the ground. The underside of the bridge arched above him like the roof of a shabby cathedral. Hush. No rain now, just the minute clicking of little beetles tilling the soil. He could still feel the dream moisture in the air. But perhaps it was now just sweat, curdled by centuries.

That dream was a new one, an odd one. Something hitched in his throat. There was pain in his ribs as if he had been struck. Dog's eyes. Something bad had passed by. He could not fall asleep again.



She almost felt like asking Mr Franks in – the place was big, with too many rooms for a girl alone. But for what, a drink? That was not how they did things, she and her mother's employee. And anyway he had other things to do; other fuckups to sort out, no doubt.

'Have you heard from your mother?' he asked as he saw her to the door.

'No,' she said shortly.

'You should call her ...'

'Yup, thanks. I'll do that.' She took her handbag from him – he'd insisted on carrying it – and with a tight wave, shut the door in his nosy old face.

The bay apartment was nice, of course; built up on stilts against the steep lower slopes of the mountain, with a high-angle view of the waves, the strip. It belonged to her mother, but it mostly stood empty. Gaby was staying here for now, until her hours were up. There was a terrace out front, and a swimming pool. Even for her mother, this was quite a bold move – to run a pool, in these drought-stricken times; and currently illegal. There were insects dying in the shallows. She caught a palmful in her hand, raised it to her nose and sniffed the chlorine.

She sat quietly on a Roman-style bench to one side of the pool, a blue-and-white cotton cushion under her thighs – her skinny white limbs had always bruised so easily. There were no flower-beds, just marble-effect paving and some cacti in pots. She wondered if she'd been sent here for a reason. There was nothing here in this flat that she could break or wound. Not without a struggle, anyway. No doubt they had someone coming in to clean the pool and replace whatever cacti might have expired. Maybe they weren't even real; they might be plastic, that would be practical. No gardener required.

She ran her finger over the spikes of the nearest. Ouch. Real.

She remembered that particular chemical, almost electric sting, from her mother's old garden, when she was little. Once, bitter and angry about some childish slight, she'd gone out into the garden and accidentally pricked herself on a thorn. She'd snapped all the needles off the plant and pushed them back in, stabbing their needles into the plant's own flesh. Her own pain paid back, she hoped, tenfold. When her mother's gardener spotted her doing it, she'd scowled

at him and run to hide in the bamboos. She'd known she was guilty, and that her crime was somehow perverse; but recognised that she and the gardener were both on uncertain ground there, in terms of authority.

That was when she was little. Before all the other shit came down.

Gaby let the water dribble out onto the hot stones, where it almost immediately fried away in the sun. Fuckit.

She picked up her phone in a dripping hand. There were no messages on it, nothing from her mother. After a moment's hesitation, she hit the number for her usual fall-back. She wanted warmth and flesh and taste, and Craig was all these things.

He picked up quickly. Keen.

'Hi, she said. 'Come here. Bring whisky.'

This was one of the things she liked about him: he responded well to instruction, with easy readiness. Craig was sandy and foursquare, a good-looking, big-featured guy around thirty, and he smelled of oats and cigarettes, a surprisingly provocative combination. They'd had an on-off now for a couple of years and it suited her fine.

But later, in bed, under the boozy buzz, she sensed something cool and still in the night. Over his shoulder, through the big picture windows, Gaby caught glimpses of the hard corners of things, fragmented, isolate, gleaming. Streetlamp, paving stone, broken glass. The sea lay somewhere below, but you couldn't see it in the dark.

A garden. How could they. How fucking could they send her to a *garden*.



Sometimes, on his back like this, Morne thought he could feel the world sway. It might be because he was up so high, in the penthouse of this tall building, and that really the winds here were making the whole structure drift to and fro. He'd heard this happened. A vertiginous feeling but not unpleasurable. He rode it for a few moments more. Sometimes he felt so light, himself, so weightless, that if

the roof came off the building he might just drift away, up into the stratosphere, beyond. Images of astronauts drifting in the void had always provoked in him an odd longing, almost to tears. If he was one of those tethered silver-suited men, he might well cut the cord. Push himself out and away, towards the cold and distant lights and not the near.

Enough of that. He sat up sharply. Clapped on the lights, which erased in an instant the gleaming seduction of the image.

It was four a.m. Kettle on, hot shower – turning the water to freezing cold for the last seconds – and dress. It was all a task. Task after task. But some pleasures. Morne took eggs from the fridge. Good eggs, still with fragments of down and chicken shit adhering to their toast-brown shells, from a farmer's market he patronised. Cracked them skilfully into a small glass mixing bowl, one two three, neat as a chef. Quick hands, clean hands, said the ghost of the woman who'd taught him to cook. Fresh herbs, small dense-fleshed tomatoes, chives. Simple. The produce was all fresher than fresh; it had not had to travel far to get to him. As he moved about the lit kitchen his reflection flickered in the windows. Sometimes he startled himself, catching sight of fragments of his own face, floating sixteen storeys high and wanting to get in.

He preferred not to eat in the evenings. He tried, despite the irregularity of his hours, to always go to sleep hungry. That way there was a reason to get up. And it kept him as he preferred, a lean man. Because he did like his food – the textures and flavours and colours, more than the weight of it in his belly. These were undeniable: aroma. Savour. These things got you out of your bed, got you moving.

He folded the omelette swiftly, laid it on a white plate with a thin gold line around its edge, and went out to the balcony to eat at the white cast-iron table that had been so difficult to get all the way up here, that was so heavy he could not shift it now an inch, as if it was still groaning for the ground, sixteen floors below. There was a light breeze. He took a neat forkful, with a little chunk of the fresh tomato; it was less sweet than he had imagined. Another mouthful, and then he pushed the plate away. Enough. Later, the seagulls would come for the scraps as they now did every morning. Only the gulls; the pigeons didn't

come up this high.

The cold teapot still sat on the sideboard. He picked it up and swirled its contents, sniffing. The stewed herbal liquid smelt sickly sweet. Once again, it hadn't put him to sleep last night. He poured a little more out into a teacup anyway, sipped as he stared out into the dark.

It was a medium-sized city, but not a twenty-four hour one; the streetlights were on but they lit the streets for nobody at four a.m. Soon it would be busy with cars. He liked it best like this, in the hour or so before the world woke. The only motion was the wind; he felt it licking coolly over his whole body; it lightly vibrated the poles of the highway lights and made the shadows shiver subtly. There were no trees here to carry the wind, at the knot of the highway interchange. Which made the small patch of green down there, visible at this angle in the shadowed nook between the highway and the old disused bridge, all the more precious. He liked to rest his eyes on the garden, watch it take on colour as the sun came up and the world lightened.

One could not say the city was thriving. When he looked out across the skyline he saw not a bustling metropolis but a city of wrong moves, of old mistakes. The broken bridge. The numerous dead alleyways. The burnt-out parks that no longer bloomed. The fountains gone dry. On the skyline were the modest and diminutive skyscrapers that reached for an older sky, a sky that used to be closer and richly hued but had now gone pale and weightless, receding beyond the reach of those concrete fingers. It was a city of retro derelicts, of crumbling deco pieces in the shadow of seventies boxes losing their trim. The old rotating restaurant, where the panoramic views once moved as one ate seafood – all the crayfish and abalone that could no longer be found in these coastal waters. Over there was a cryptic silhouette that was all that remained of the ferris wheel that used to circle its white lights over the waterfront; stilled now. A few years ago the deconstruction workers had swarmed over it, removing its lights and capsules; now only the skeleton remained. Sand blew around its feet. This city had been for pleasure, once.

Morne knew about it. He'd been a ringmaster of pleasure, a master of ceremonies and celebrations. But he'd had grown older, and the world around

him had grown older still, it seemed. The party-goers of his youth had retreated into the suburbs; many had actually left the country, years ago. The ones who were left were tired too. They wanted quieter fantasies now. Over on the other side of the broken bridge stood a nightclub that still pulsed blue and red some nights, but who knew what kind of children went there now? Not him. Even music was no longer balm. He liked the silence, now.

Beyond the city to the east, where before there had been shacks to the horizon, new sterile zones had opened up: blanks of dust and sand where even weeds could not take root, where even the poorest had picked up their meagre stacks of tin and cardboard and trekked away from the thirsty land. Sometimes you could see little dust devils picking up there; spectacular sunsets.

Exploring the abandoned roof garden above his apartment, where there once had been a swimming and sunbathing area, with linked pools and a lapa cocktail bar, he'd found a mummified gull skeleton in the corner of an old paddling pool. In its innards, a faded pink plastic wristband from a club he once DJ-ed at. He'd kept the gull's sweet bones, white and air-filled; had them mounted in the corner of his living room, the fluoro band tied around its leg. He'd read that gulls can live for decades, and now, whenever he saw a gull on his windowsill, he thought, did this one spy him, long ago? At any point in all young Morne's adventures on street corners, long ago. There was one gull that came, that he was half convinced was every time the same; a big old bird that checked him with a knowing eye, salt dripping off its beak.

Something dark scuttled across the space below. A dog. Morne leaned over the cold rail. He had excellent eyesight, and the air was very crisp and clear, like a lens – the dryness, of course. Odd, he thought. You didn't get stray dogs in this city; some of the homeless had pets, but they kept them close. And there was something about this one, too. It had the independent lope of a wild thing, watchful but confident of its territory. Its colour was patchy, indeterminate. He watched as it snuffled around the base of a bridge support, raised a leg to piss on the concrete. Morne raised his teacup in a salutation. The dog paused, turned its head and held it cocked for a moment, as if contemplating the naked man up there in the sky. Then lowered its leg and trotted on, disappearing into the

shadows under the bridge. Morne sighed, took another sip of the foul tea, and spat it out, over the edge.

Distantly, the screech of engines – somebody drag-racing on the empty highway. He opened his laptop and checked the news. Photos of the drought, mostly, dried-up dams, cracked soil, graphs of water levels, politicians making straight-faced promises. He tapped impatiently through to his email. He skipped past unimportant messages to the last one, sent just now by some other ambitious early riser. It was an offer to purchase from a developer. They specialised in multi-story carparks.

Then there was a message from Judie McAlpine, fussing again about her kid's twenty-first party. She'd sent him some photos. Red deserts, images from the Mars Rover mission. **INSPIRATION: THIS COLOUR FOR THE TABLECLOTHS?** Such stark images. Judie's birthday mood was faded blood. *I'm on it*, he emailed back.

It was curious. In the past two months, he'd had requests for no less than three space-themed parties. In fact, he'd started suggesting it himself. *Dinner in orbit*, he'd say, or *Disco on Jupiter!* And the client would agree enthusiastically, as if he or she had been waiting to hear these very words. He would arrange for them a sky of stars; he would do paste-like astronaut food in toothpaste tubes; he would provide silver-foil jumpsuits and haunting interstellar electronica.

It wouldn't be hard to find a venue for this one. To be honest, the Mars-scapes looked not much different from the abandoned sand-lands on the outskirts of town, just visible in the distance from his balcony. Just the odd curve of the horizon, and the metal arm crooked into the frame in some of them, gave the game away.

And there went the phone: Mrs Mc-fucking-Alpine. He let it ring three times while he held his breath and composed himself, his face, his mouth; then snapped back into motion, phone to ear, eyes open, breath out and in, *give*.

'Ground Control to Major Tom?' His voice was light, teasing, delighted.

They were the first words he'd said for twenty hours. It was five thirty.

It could not be said that he didn't work hard, that he was not good at what he did.





The dead girl mumbled through the earth in her mouth, she bared her rotten teeth; she'd been dead for such a short time, her breath still smelt. Her bones were young: not yet sixteen. Those bones would have carried her a lot longer, if the flesh had held, but the flesh did not hold. Her murderers had flung her down a storm-drain, and in a way this was appropriate, the old lady felt: for a human of the new age to take a new route down into the earth, not via the old way of burial. The two female skeletons were close to each other but divided by the lining of the storm drain. There was a certain amount of rivalry. *Clack* went the older skeleton, her teeth still whiter than white from all the good seeds and roots she had eaten in life.

More kindly, the old lady thought: what a pity, they would have been the same age, right for each other, the young man with the musket-ball in his chest lying over there in the bushes beyond the bridge, and the girl in the drain. The old lady was very old, it must be remembered; she had not kept up with the nuances of social caste and hierarchy, and the centuries elided in her mind. It was a boy, a girl; enough. The boy with the bullet, who was just starting to come around from his ordeal, gave a bleak little grimace: humour comes from pain.

Once, another time, another boy had held a concrete slab in his hands on the bridge and let it drop into the windshield of a car passing by below. The bridge had been confused by this, feeling the death below and the distress of the boy it carried on its back. The spider had observed the trajectory of the dropping brick, feeling it in its spinnerets. The car below had swung off the road with a shriek of tyres and voices and the bridge gathered it in, crumpling and burning. Such soft small bodies, such cries and pain. Their lives leaked out into the soil, the bridge could not hold them, it did not know how. The earth there was still stained.

But here: the soil retained a patch of fragrant moisture from the lovemaking of two humans of great innocence and beauty, who later went on to

bear many perfect children, white toothed and smooth skinned. A lucky family that. Even now their children's children's children walked the earth; just the other day one of the great-great-great-greats came past in a new car, whistling through his exceptionally fine teeth and thinking of the good things waiting for him at home. Little did he know it, but the souls deep in the earth, recognising his familial tune, lifted their heads to hear him pass, making the road tighten its skin a millimetre or two, which caused an articulated truck to shift its wheels fractionally to the side, thus avoiding the nail in the road that would otherwise have sent it screaming across lanes with a puncture, taking out the blue car and its musical occupant. These things do exist, after all: fortunate people. Fine adventures.

But right now, Old Lady Bones was *bored*. She could not move, of course, this was the great disadvantage of her condition. But, being dead a long time, you gain some allies. Worms for one. Long ago, she'd given the worms what she could of her meagre flesh. Now she needed them; now she rallied them to her side. They came. They coiled themselves fondly around the old lady's bones. The carpal and the metacarpals, the humerus the radius and all the rest. Once so pretty, once clothed in flesh. They found her jaws, eased them open with a creak, revealing what she had held cupped there safe all these years; the secret. The substance she'd been mumbling over all this time, held between her wasted jaws, came sifting out between her teeth and into the soil.

Seeds. They grumbled from their deep sleeps. They woke. Boisterous, hard, glossy brown and irrepressible. Tumbling out like tiny explosives. They did not travel far, but the small movement was enough to rattle them, to make them remember their purpose. A trickle of water insinuated itself through the soil and touched them, brightening them, pinching their cheeks, whispering: *remember*.

And they did remember: their last time out, in the air. They remembered: the woman, so young, light shining from her skin and light on her feet, singing a song she was making up as she went along. She sang from happiness, because she had defeated a rival in love; she was swinging a dried gourd in one hand, and in the gourd the seeds swung too, in time. The song sank into the seeds,

through their skins and into their quicks; wherever they grew, they would release an echo of the young girl's song, back into the air from which it came. But the air itself had changed; back then it smelled different, a richer mix of gases. The horizons were broader then, with fewer human figures breaking the skyline. People kept a lower profile. The world was more dense with other varieties of life. But still, the song would be recognised. It would become, in time, the oldest song in the world.

Old lady bones spat out the last plump seed. Actually she was a mean woman. Had always been one, had been mean when she was young and lively too. She probably shouldn't have lasted this long. But nothing is fair.

Despite their age, the seeds were still infants in the universe of plants. They were waiting, eager to burst forth. They tumbled; they orientated themselves. Up, down. Sunlight. Tasting the air for water. Not much. Nonetheless, they grew extraordinarily fast.

## 2.

The crop was shit this week. Sometimes it happens. A piece of land just fails, fades away, like an ageing human body. It grows thin and anaemic and all the fertiliser in the world can't help it. It was happening here. It was like the land could feel its time was over. It was the drought, of course. When he thought of it, Andrew's throat tightened.

'It's ok,' he said to himself. 'It's still an okay little piece of ground.'

You could still do something with a piece of ground like this. Especially if you were Andrew. *Green fingers* was the phrase, which he enjoyed. The quiet joke of it.

Andrew's fingers were, in fact, literally green. He'd had them tattooed that way. It had been incredibly painful to do but he loved the effect. It had started with a conventional ring of thorns on his bicep but had flowed from there, vine leaves writhing down the length of his arm and up and across his shoulders, tendrils creeping out under his shirt cuffs and onto the backs of his hands, thicker and lusher the more certain he became of his vocation. It was a kind of oath.

The tattoos were carefully chosen. All indigenous plants. It was his sister, Surita, who did the needle work, sitting in the family kitchen, her long black hair caught up under a baseball cap to keep things clean; she was the artistic one. She joked it was like planting a garden in his skin. The space available on his back was almost all used up now: just one small patch below the crest of his left shoulder. Surita said that when the last space on his skin was filled, it would be time to harvest. Also a joke, but it made him slightly anxious. When this body was done, some decisions would have to be made.

Andrew had worked in all sorts of gardens, landscaping, even done a horticulture course years ago, worked in an arboretum too, but he didn't have any botanical book-learning. His mother had taught him a lot. She would show him her hands full of the berries she found down by the river, or bulbs still earthy from the mountainside. Back when those things were still plentiful. How to cut them, how to cook them. As it had been in hers, the knowledge felt like it was held in his hands, in his fingertips, not on his tongue. When he had his hands in

the soil he liked to think he was talking to the plants that way, tickling the roots. And they talked back to him too somehow. Often, he could just feel what the plant wanted, as intuitively as if the information really did come straight through the skin: whether bit more blush of sun on its leaves, or a bit more clay in the soil snuggled around its roots.

He liked plants of all types: fancy decorative hybrids, archaic types, interesting medicinals. But trees were really his greatest love. There was something familiar about a tree, its stature; you could stand before it, measure yourself against it. There was company in trees. But also – and this was the wonderful thing – you could flip that familiarity over and make it exhilaratingly strange. The thing with trees is, they go down as well as up. People are used to thinking of them as beings of the upper air, they think of them in human terms, the roots as toes, branches as arms, twig fingers hairy with leaves, and so on. Heads above, toe-roots below, torso in the middle. But a tree is equally present below the ground, equally embodied in its roots as in its branches, perhaps more so. You can cut a tree down to the ground and still have a green shoot appearing; but you cannot cut it off below the ground, you cannot sever its roots and still let it live. The tree's life is lived deep down, among the grains and the worms, and its green branches are just antennae onto this world, probes and light-collectors extended up into the thin medium of the air. The heart of the tree beats below. There was still a wonder in this strangeness for him.

He liked to let his mind run over things like this, as he knelt in the shade, letting his green fingers browse and rummage through libraries of soil. He could ponder for hours, thoughts like leaf-fall.

Except of course there are few trees left in the city anywhere, except the ragged palms down the main boulevard that ran in front of City Hall. His only real memory of anything like a forest had been once when he was a small boy, being taken up into a secret part of the mountain where there was a trickle of a stream, and some ancient yellowwoods still bending their leaves over the moist gully. Small, not forest giants, but still alive, hundreds of years old. His mother had made him put his palm on the bark, had made him memorise the shapes of the slim frond-like leaves. He had those shapes inked into his skin now: under

the left front ribs, just about where you got a stitch after cycling too far. He wondered if those old trees were still there, how they'd fared in the drought. It was a part of the mountain you weren't meant to go to now, Parks Board property. He wouldn't be able to find it alone, he thought sadly; and Ma was not ever going to make it up there again.

No real trees on this current property, either, what they were calling CitiGreen. He disliked the name, the stupid big G in the middle which he never knew how to write down, uneasy as he was at the best of times with writing things down. Trees didn't do well here. Not enough water, soil too sandy, something. At one point he'd thought they could plant knob thorns, those luminous ghosts with skin and leaves and thorns all the same pale lime colour; spikes as long as your hand. Pretty, indigenous. Hardy. But he just hadn't had the time for that, with all the labour the land required just to give up a handful of carrots at the end of the day.

The last garden he'd made, closer to the mountain, had gone strong for three years before the plot was finally bought up for apartment blocks. It still made him angry. That soil had been so good, amazingly rich – huge cabbages had leapt out of the ground into his hands there. Back when there was plentiful water. Here, in the shadow of the old highway overpass, next to the unfinished bridge and the dirty water coming through the culvert from the houses above, the soil was not so devoted to making things grow. This ground, he sensed, had other business going on. It was busy with buttons and bones and burials, and subterranean movements and campaigns. Sometimes a whole row of plants would mysteriously shrivel and die overnight, as if the soil itself had spitefully diverted its moisture, or if the dune moles had become oddly deliberate in which roots they chose to destroy. Unseen creatures came to dig and plunder. Still, beggars can't be choosers. The land was free, or almost so, and he was free in it. Andrew was not one to invite complications.

But standing there, he was assailed by terrible doubt. Sometimes the place seemed grim to him, bleak and sunburnt, and the soil under his feet just dirt, unspeaking. He saw the sharp mineral grains of it. And there was the broken glass too, and the thrown-off number plates, and of course the condoms on a

Monday morning, despite the fence around the property. He looked at his hands, which were well-worn honest things, but they seemed poor and badly used, ground down and hurt by this abrasive soil.

It was not a new mood. He knew how to deal with it. He had to pull himself together, blink and consciously slide a new filter into place. Make the world rich again.

He sighed, bounced a little on his feet, did a couple of squats and jumps, forcing the blood around. Grunted into the cool morning air. Down again on his haunches. There was soil under his fingertips. He put his fingers in his mouth, sucked it off. Tasted bitter. Sharp bits in it. He swallowed it down.

It wasn't the best bit of land. But it was in him now. He'd make it better.

He turned to gather up some of his little carrots, the new tomatoes, some of the wild spinach. They were paltry specimens but all he had for now.

He was doing a kind of stir-fry this morning, tilting a blackened pan over the portable gas stove. Throw everything in, with salt and a lot of pepper. Add some of the rosemary from the big unkillable bush next to the shed. It wasn't much, but he took care with the cooking, as he did every morning. He tried to keep the little meals healthy and varied. When the smell was right and the onions were translucent, he spooned it all into a billy-can. He kept meaning to bring something better, something that didn't look quite so much like a dog's bowl; but his sisters wouldn't let him take the good crockery from the kitchen. He stuck a spoon into the mix.

He carried it a little way into the shadows under the bridge, moving quietly. He did not put on his phone flashlight or venture too deep into the dim, cave-like space below the bridge supports. His nose told him where Roland's bed lay, and that the big man was not currently present. Sometimes the homeless man would be lying there, wrapped in blankets and darkness, and Andrew's presence would wake him. He'd come up for air, struggling for breath, jerking awake as if he was surfacing from a million miles down. And perhaps he was. But today Roland was gone; he was unpredictable – sometimes a night walker, day sleeper. Andrew placed the pan to cool just inside the edge of the bridge's shadow. It wasn't much but it was fresh, a dense concentration of nutrients. The

soil giving up its small gifts. He imagined he was doing something to keep the guy alive, although it was never acknowledged.

When Andrew got back out into the light, he nearly stepped on a coil of dogshit, deposited impertinently right in the middle of a paving-stone he'd laid himself the month before. That fucking animal, he thought. At least he hoped the faeces came from the dog, not from some human visitor, or from Roland himself. Anyway, if this excrement was a man's doing, it was not a well man; the shit was tarry black and sticky-looking. Grimacing, he scooped the thing up with the tip of his trowel and walked over to the chain-link fence and flicked it away onto the tar on the other side. He didn't want that in his vegetable garden.

Up on the bank that led up to the off-ramp, he spotted the dog itself. It was sitting with its overlarge ears glowing pinkly against a sky that was, once more, turning out to be a perfect spotless blue. A strange creature. It had bothered him from the start, hanging around, inviting him into tremulous game or battle. It seemed both wild and playful, with a mad streak, like it knew humans enough to be unafraid of them. And its looks were odd too. A young skinny thing. The township style of dog, lanky limbed and short-haired with a narrow muzzle, but unusually coloured, with brown and red and black splashes. Big pointed ears. For all the world like a wild creature, one of those painted bushveld dogs. Some kind of throwback – such a mixed bag, Africanis. He'd heard there were greyhound genes in a lot of the township packs. He'd also heard there were rabid dogs in the city now, animals driven mad by thirst, run off from homes where people could no longer feed them.

To be fair, this dog seemed sleek and well; its narrow rear end wagged friskily in the air while its snout was buried between its front paws, worrying something in the yellowed grass. Andrew stooped to pick up a stone and pulled back his arm to chuck it. A puff of dust, and the dog sprang back with a yelp of startlement, all four paws off the ground at once, and then darting forward again, springloaded, up for a game. It picked up whatever it had been chewing and looped around the edge of the plot, sprinting madly like rangy young dogs do, around the back of the shed and down to the bottom of the garden again. Pricked its ears and waited, just out of range. Andrew threw another stone, fast and hard,



without windup or warning. This one clipped the ground just in front of the dog's paws. It dropped what was in its jaws and skittered away.

Andrew went over to see what it was – he didn't want a dead rat rotting away on the property. But all he could see was a stone lying at his feet. Wet with dog saliva – bloody unnatural animal, chewing on rocks. He hefted it in a hand.

An ordinary piece of dull grey stone, but if you knew what you were looking for, it was unmistakable. It was a stone tool, chipped by human hand, shaped like a plump teardrop. It might be a thousand years old. It wasn't the first time: interesting stuff was always coming out of the ground here. From the start, Andrew had been aware that this garden gave forth more than fruit and vegetables. Often, little things would surface: bits of shell and worked stone, some small pieces of scored reddish pottery, molars, beads. A modest hoard of items had piled up on the shelf in the shed, where he kept the hoses and other cheap things that were unlikely to get nicked overnight. Chipped pottery, some of it clay and some of it blue and white. Mostly what came up were just fragments, worn and unreadable, not even the size of his thumbnail. Sometimes he took a pretty piece home for his mother to look at.

He'd told Morne: you probably need to get an archaeologist in to have a look at all of this. The heritage people, from the city. But the man had balked: 'For this pile of crap? It's not exactly bloody Tutenkhamen's tomb. And those heritage wankers can tie things up for years. No. Put the shit back in the ground where it came from.'

And to be honest, Andrew didn't feel like the fuss and bother either. There were real growing things to be cared for here, to feed real living people. Carrots and cauliflowers and spinach, and all the indigenous herbs and medicinal plants Morne was interested in. Let's just get a decent harvest in; then I'll talk to him about it again later, he told himself. And so he skimmed the stone into the shadow under the bridge. Just another rock.

He looked around for Roland: where the dog went, the man was usually not far behind. There was some relationship there, not quite pet and owner, but some kind of alliance. And there, indeed: a narrow figure in the distance, dawdling its way up the highway. Andrew waited for him. they knew each other

well, although they barely spoke, their paths crossing morning and evening in the shadow of the bridge. Close-up, the man was always surprisingly strong looking, lean but upright, his eyes clear.

‘Hello sir,’ said Andrew as the man approached. He should say something about the dog – about the dog-shit, anyway – but he was struck with a strange shyness around the older man. He reminded him of the older men in his own family, the vanished uncles and the oupas dead and gone. That same gaunt and slightly odorous dignity.

As always, Roland simply raised a hand and walked on, his long sloped body disappearing into the slice of shade under the bridge, like a knife sliding into water.

Sometimes Andrew saw the moment when Roland took the meal on the way in from his ramblings; more often he didn’t. When he checked an hour later, the pan or the pot would be cleaned out – not washed but wiped – and left in the same place for him to collect.

Soon, from under the bridge, from deep in its dark mouth, Andrew heard the sound of sleep resumed: deep, growling drafts of air pulled in and out, gravelly but regular as waves. At least he knew the man had eaten today.

It pleased him to do this. It distracted him from the other worries of his life, including the fact that a visit from Morne was due today. And including the fact that his crops were growing meaner, smaller and more shrivelled. The drought was killing this garden, extracting all the hope from it one water molecule at a time. From him, too: the skin on his hands, under the illustrations, was becoming finely wrinkled, the cells contracting; getting ready for the big dry. He felt very tired this morning, even the tattoos lay grey across his sinewy forearms.

In months past, he would always have had a nice array to show Morne. A big tasty pile of all the indigenous herbs and berries that the guy was so interested in: the old foods. Wild malva, pelargonium leaves, confetti bush, wild sorrel, num-num, wild garlic, sour figs, balderjan, depending on the season. But there was no denying it: today’s harvest was a pathetic looking lot. When he laid the plants out on the trestle he could already see that it was not sufficient: no

matter what he did with them, fanning them out or gathering them together in bushels, they would not look juicy or sufficient; they would not tempt.

Right on time, the car came down off the highway at speed and slewed to a stop outside the gate. He didn't recognise this vehicle but it could only be one of Morne's – silver convertible, shiny rims. The cars changed frequently; Andrew supposed they were rentals. Often, the boss arrived on foot, springily – he lived just over the way, apparently, in one of those sparkling high-rises that had sprung up along the waterfront a few years ago – but always, his appearance was turbo-charged. He always gave the impression that he had a zillion things on the go, that he was rushing between far-flung tasks and enterprises. If Andrew had needed a shot of fast-talking energy, well here it was, bouncing across the plot towards him, the car parked at a tilt on the narrow verge outside the chainlink fence.

'Andy! My man!' He grasped Andrew's neck with one hand and pulled him into a neck-hug. Morne was a big one for hugs, and the only person ever to call Andrew 'Andy'. Andrew had wondered at times if Morne was flirting with him; unusually in his experience, he found it hard to tell. On balance, he thought, probably not: too brusque, too direct; alternating with a certain flatness when he thought Andrew wasn't paying attention. But again, he wondered how far he might get if he ever chose to respond to the man that way. Possibly far. It would depend, he supposed, on what the older man was wanting from the deal, and how much it would amuse him.

'Looking strong!' Today Morne was wearing flip-flops and a Hawaiian shirt over shorts, and the usual expensive shades. He smelled strongly of some kind of vanilla-heavy scent.

'Will you look at this beautiful place?' Morne cried, turning in a beaming circle. Under his gaze the plot did indeed turn beautiful, green, thriving. He had the gift of selling. 'How's my farm boy doing today? Are all our little buddies thriving?'

'All good, all good,' Andrew smiled.

He cleared a couple of plastic sacks and a trowel off the potting table and found two rickety chairs. He also got out two glasses and a bottle of beer from

the stash he kept in a cooler box in the shed, for just these occasions. They both sat, and Morne examined the beer label with approval – imported – and they clinked glasses. Morne liked a sense of ceremony. And then it was down to business.

Morne was a peculiar guy all round. Andrew had never really been able to work him out. He just didn't seem like a plant guy, this was the thing. He was hyper and impatient and his attention was all over the place, whereas gardeners and plant-lovers, in Andrew's experience, were generally slow livers. Morne wore Raybans and sandals and loose bohemian clothes in expensive fabrics, sometimes a straw hat, and always seemed breezy and cool. He insisted on sitting down with Andrew when he came round to the garden, like they were in a boardroom or something, even though the table was a tiny rickety thing made of recycled planks. He kept his titanium-coloured phone to one side on the table at all times. At intervals during their meetings the phone gave itself a shake, and Morne would look down at it and touch it quiet with a finger like he was calming a baby. It was hard to put an age to him. He had a large handsome nose and stiff grey hair in a boyishly buoyant cut, and a row of crooked strong teeth of much the same hue; he radiated energy, not good health so much as indestructibility. Andrew had often wondered if the guy was on coke.

Morne was a businessman, although Andrew knew nothing specific about what business or businesses these might be. He was vaguely aware that Morne owned property, in this city and others, as well as various other side-projects and deals; he was always rushing from one to the other. Uneasily, Andrew held the suspicion that, in some as-yet-to-be-revealed manner, he himself was somehow being scammed, or unwittingly participating in scamming someone else. He just couldn't see the details. And it hadn't happened yet. He'd only been working on Morne's patch for a few months, though; there was time.

Andrew had stumbled across the plot half a year ago, when it was nothing more than a rank patch of rubble. He'd come across it like a secret, nestled away as it was in this unlikely spot in the cross-currents of the morning traffic, a still pool diverted from the flow. He'd loved it at once: the solitude of it, right there in the heart of the city. Although he knew that solitude was always an illusion,

even here. Sure, the buildings were quite a distance away, beyond a steel barrier. But he knew that no places were ever completely uninhabited, or not for long.

It had taken him another week or three to suss the place out, observe that no-one was particularly looking after it, and another week to get up the courage to cut a hole in the fence and ease himself in. There was enough here to grow a small crop, enough to take home, with a little extra to sell to the grocer round the corner, or to take to the organic market on Sundays.

It was another ten days before Morne came to confront him. But the conversation had gone surprisingly easily: Morne was intrigued by Andrew's plantings, had squatted down on the ground next to him and made Andrew explain to him all the different herbs and vegetables, their names, their uses. They came to an arrangement: with Morne, it seemed, there was always an arrangement to be made. And he liked what Andrew gave him to sample, that first afternoon: a switch of aromatic buchu he brushed under the man's bony nose. It was a skill of his, he thought: he could find the scent, the taste, to fit the person. Morne seemed to have very little curiosity about Andrew's background or life beyond the plot, which suited Andrew just fine. About himself, though, he liked to talk. Or some version of himself.

He'd told Andrew that he was a kind of party-organiser, a host, and would be interested in Andrew providing fine and interesting ingredients for his occasional dinners. He was particularly interested in the indigenous stuff, and in the medicinal things – his clients liked that kind of shit, he told Andrew in a confiding tone. Each week or two he came to collect a specially curated selection of vegetables, herbs, dried aromatic leaves which he claimed to make into a special tea mix. It seemed curious to Andrew, and not completely plausible – any number of organic farms and suppliers could do the job, did it all the time already. But Morne seemed to have a particular fondness for Andrew, for Andrew's touch with the plants, and for the produce that came from this particular little patch. Perhaps it was simply a rich eccentric's hobby. Morne owned the land, and Morne paid well, paid too for good tools and certain rare seeds that had to be ordered from far away. Andrew would go along with it for as long as he could.

And besides, Morne was quite fun. Or had been. Recently, the relationship had started to seem precarious; with each disappointing crop, he felt more keenly observed, the soil literally giving way a little more beneath his feet.

Now Morne shook his head. Gave a deep sigh. ‘You’re keeping all the receipts up to date, right?’

Andrew stiffened. It was like the guy could read his thoughts whenever they strayed onto guilty territory. Probably this was one of the skills of a born businessman, like reading documents upside-down or being able to forge signatures or tell untruths.

‘Of course,’ he said. ‘It’s all filed. I don’t have the stuff with me right now, though, they’re safe at home. Did you want to see them?’ He looked away, remembering also that looking away was a sign of lying, and that no doubt that was also one of the things Morne instinctively knew. You couldn’t win.

At times, like now, Morne’s gaze lapsed into something cool and flat. Just for a second or two, as if something was switched off and then switched on again. Then he seemed to rally, determinedly reanimating himself. He clapped his hands. ‘Ok kid. Show me the *land*. Show me what’s going on out here. I’m not prepared to give up on this shit just yet.’

Andrew took him around the veggie beds and showed him the newest graffiti on the side of the bridge. Morne liked that kind of stuff. ‘Stunning, I love it,’ he beamed at a row of dancing skeletons that some kids from the previous Youth Diversion group had painted the other week. ‘I’m gonna get those kids’ numbers, give them some commissions for my home.’ He always said the same thing. Andrew felt sure that Morne’s house would never feel the touch of a spray can, still less one wielded by a juvenile delinquent. ‘You see? I told you those Youth Diversion kids would be great.’

‘It’s ok, I guess. There hasn’t been any trouble.’

Andrew hated the bloody Youth Diversion kids. The whole time they were here, which only happened every month or so, he was stiff with social awkwardness. Teenagers were the worst. He never knew how to talk to them, or make them do what he wanted, and he didn’t know what any of them had done to deserve their community service – that was part of the deal – but he imagined

them all to be arsonists, pickpockets, bullies. On the days when the YD kids were here, he couldn't relax into a single thing, couldn't keep his eagle eye off them. He was pretty convinced one of the little shits had gone off with his best secateurs the other day. To do god only know what with. But this was another of Morne's schemes: the Department of Corrections gave the scheme a small daily fee for every Youth Offender successfully Diverted, and somehow in Morne's busy head this calculation worked out advantageously. Andrew wasn't about to question him; his own head went blurry when it came to working out profit margins. He was just the one who had to babysit the little reprobates.

'Don't look like that. We can't turn our noses up at anything. If this place isn't going to keep giving us what we need, we may need to turn to farming juvenile delinquents instead.'

The tone was light, but Andrew read the threat in it. Morne hummed and jiggled his hands in his pockets, making the car keys clink. Andrew knew what was coming. He stood there with his green hands hanging dead by his sides like trowels.

Morne took off his panama hat and ran a hand through his thick crest of hair, squinted at him sideways. 'Joke, joking. Hey, don't look so bleak. Maybe some kind of extraordinary crop is waiting to erupt.'

'It's these restrictions on watering, they're killing us,' said Andrew. 'But it's not forever. If we could bring in a few truckloads of water from out of town, just until ...'

'Well, yeah. You know how it is.' Morne stopped and met Andrew's eyes full-on. It was startling, and Andrew realized it did not happen often, had perhaps not happened before, despite the man's charm.

'We can't keep going like this, you know that. Look at that, just look at it.' Morne swept a hand across the scene.

Andrew looked. What he saw was a piece of land. Here and there worrying patches, dry bits, but over there in the corner, he knew, lay some hardy bulbs that just needed to be coaxed back above ground; over there by the shed was the remarkable rosemary bush; that shaded strip by the side of the bridge, he'd discovered, held the dew in the mornings. In other places places phantom

plants grew, the ones he had in mind for next season, next rains; he could see them clearly. To him, it was a beautifully complicated place, bustling with plans, busy with the commerce of growth cycles, nutrients, the interplay of night and shade, minute exchanges of sunlight and moisture. From habit, he brought his right hand up to rub his mouth, to taste the grit.

Morne clapped his hands together. Another lightning shift: ‘Hey, but let’s not brood on that! Don’t look so grim! We’ll find something for you. Even if this fucks out – I got work for you! Other projects going. We’ll sort you out.’

‘What other things? I’m a gardener. I grow things. That’s what I know how to do.’

‘Sure, sure, sure-sure. But, you know Andy ... gardeners do other things too. You know I’ve got some parties coming up? I can always use you.’

Andrew nodded. He’d worked at Morne’s parties before, cooking, cleaning. Just like his mother had done all her life, serving in other people’s houses. ‘Sure.’

‘See? It’ll be fine. Everything will be fine.’ Hand up to clap Andrew’s immobile shoulder. Always touching. ‘Come round my place? I’ve got some cacti – cactuses – that need a little loving kindness. Your magic touch. They’re being difficult. Or let’s take a walk – walk and talk. Just come see me, either way. We can have a chat about things.’

And then Morne was up and running again, rocket-fired, wedging his straw hat down over his stiff hair, almost dancing back out to his car, hopping – of course – one-handed into the driver’s seat. A man who loves his work.

Have a chat. Fuck. Andrew had lived long enough in the world to know that those words never meant anything good. He kicked at the soil, as if that might somehow wake it up.



The sun set, much as it always had; one more time, the land prepared to dip itself into profound shadow. Not much changed, even if the heat that lingered in the



ground these days was a little much, a little punishing. Enough for the smallest beings to feel a shiver of perturbation. A wrong texture in the not-so-damp earth that the low worm shouldered aside; not quite enough moisture in the air passing through the spider's spiracles; the silver thread coming out brittle, too light, floating like candyfloss in the sultry pearl light. No dew, this morning.

The spider dropped a metre from the bow of the bridge, suspended. It had always been here, although it was not always the same the spider. It was continually replaced by the next spider, and then the next, *Arachnida perpetua*. It swung on its thread in the lee of the bridge.

The spider exercised a certain amount of fear on the man who slept beneath the bridge, who remembered an incident in early childhood – wherever that had been, and when – when he'd poked at a spider's nest with a stick and tiny appalling young came swarming out and up the stick and onto his infant hand. Now this one backtracked a little way up her silken rope in the force of his glare.

Everyone has their systems. Roland knew a few things. Not a lot, and not a complete record of things, but some things he remembered very vividly. Lying under his bridge, he was pressed so close to its concrete flank that sometimes he felt as if the cold did not seep into him so much as his warmth fed the bridge. Softened it, made it flesh. He saw a lot, under there.

When he was awake in the daylight hours, he'd set out quite early from under the cool eaves of the bridge, before the day got hot, and amble down the long straight of the highway until he could cross over the canal by the culvert and make his way up to the station platform, where he could sometimes catch a train without buying a ticket and sometimes not. Often he just walked, he was one of those tireless walking men, feet hardened and sinews lengthened by a life of motion. It was necessary to do this, to collect the bottles for deposit, to sort through the contents of the bins behind the restaurants, to beg and cadge and see what there was in the world for his sustenance. But this was not his true life. It was a dream life. Really his true life was led under the bridge, wrapped in his blanket, floating in his thoughts, listening to the throng of whispers from all around. Sometimes he whispered back.

Sometimes he would close his eyes and let his fingertips trail on the concrete and feel the vibrations coming up through the ground. He was almost there, almost one of the listeners himself, halfway dead. He had almost died many times in his life and his friends under the ground were prepared for him. When the time came for him to join them he would sink naturally and restfully into the subterranean realm, the grains of soil infiltrating the fibres of his body quite painlessly.

Already he was thin as a length of knotted rope, and spent a good part of his hours lying still, an oestivating creature, thinking over the dreams of his life, his many lives, sorting through them and at times living them again. Occasionally, when he woke, the view from the bridge was quite different. There might be no road, or just a dirt track. Sometimes the yellow-green bush came right up to the foot of the bridge and there was a smell of hot river water in the air and the sound of many birds. Once he had sat up there on the span and watched a herd of kudu walking underneath. Another time, down in the hollow, he met a tiny child dressed only in a string of eggshell beads, drinking from the stream. He sat next to her for a while on the riverbank. She was interested in particular in his old wornout trainers and ran her fingers again and again along the seams of their blue fabric. She looked up at him and said, *Oom Roland? When are you coming back home?* But her voice was like the voice of birds, was like the running water, and perhaps he had misheard.

When he woke again the bushes were all gone, and so were his shoes, which he missed to this day, wistfully recalling the satiny sheen on the blue fabric and the two white stripes down the side. She must have wanted them, that little girl. He glared at the ground and wondered if his shoes were down there now, compacted into the thousand-year clay.

Another time he woke and it was dark, and again there were no city lights, no road, the world dark, a damp night somewhere in time. He walked up onto the berm and could see a flickering campfire further up the rise and he went to it, not afraid of the flames now, and found next to it a young man, a teenager still, in a red jacket pulled open and a face pale as milk, a dark curl of hair over his eye and a hole through his chest, black in the flamelight. When Roland came

up to him the boy looked at him with such fear that it made him look down at himself, and yes he did look like death he supposed, with his shoes of hide and his rough trousers that stank of weeks in the saddle and the bandolier heavy across his chest and the long gun in his hand. He squatted next to the boy and looked at his damp face for a while. The eyes were almost completely closed, but when the flames rose up you could catch a glimpse of their pale depths, like snow meltwater. Roland felt in his pocket and brought out a packet of Stuyvesant and a lighter and put one in the boy's limp mouth but he was already too weak to grasp it with his lips, or perhaps there was some rule to the dream here that would not allow the insertion of a new cigarette into this old story, and he watched the English boy slipped away. He stayed beside him for a while, enjoying the warmth of the little fire. There was coffee in the billy and he wondered what sequence of events had led to the coffee being made, so fragrant, and then the shooting, and wondered perhaps if the bullet had come from this very gun he was holding in his hand, sent into the youth's heart by these very hands. He smoked the cigarette and pondered these things, and drank some of the burnt coffee, and waited while the atoms of the boy's life sank into the soil and were received.

There was often fire in his dreams; often they ended in flames.

When he woke from that one, he wondered again with some irritation what had happened to those shoes, the good velskoen, tough as nails and the best shoes he'd ever had. His cigarettes damp too and stomach sour from whatever shit they called coffee then.

Sometime he could feel him still, that boy, trying to get home. He hadn't settled yet, hadn't understood, his body caught in the clay in the attitude of a swimmer, heading for England. He'd got about twenty feet closer to home since the day they buried him.

These were the experiences he had to deal with. It was complicated work and took up a deal of his time, sorting them out. In a previous life or a future life or one of the other many alternative lives at his disposal, he might have written things down, tried to establish relationships and correspondences and explanations, but as it was he did the work in his head, wrapped in his old grey blanket with the white stripes at one end, warm and oily with his own essences.

What he knew was that he belonged to this place. Time was shifting, but the place was fixed: he knew nothing but here, the bridge, the bed.

It was a sweet wine that he drank, mostly, sweet with a very high alcohol content. He did it in the spirit of experiment and self-care. It was necessary to drink this much, in order then to sleep so much. When he set about his drinking he did so carefully and judiciously, placing the bottles before him on narrow shelf of the concrete under the bridge, and bringing out his particular tin mug which he would fill steadily with half measures to knock back one after the other until he was downed, weighed down by the spirits, pressed into the black earth; and then he could close his eyes and open his ears and hear what the world was speaking to him. It was the only way, really. Black treacly liquor. He could not remember the last time he'd emerged fully from the rim of this particular warm swamp in which he immersed himself, night after night. He avoided the hot middays these days, as did many of the night creatures. Animals that used to be out in the day now lay low, like he did, until the cool hand of night fell on them. Everything was evening now. He did not remember the last time he heard the morning come. Except in dreams. In his dreams it was the morning of the world and green and water was everywhere.

As Roland slept on, others were waking. From the lowliest lichen to the oldest clay pipe-stem buried down deep, they were chittering in the knowledge: something had changed. New things were here; old beings made anew. The seeds had split open and disgorged pale tendrils like tiny snakes, edging through the soil, flicking green tongues. Eager as young creatures tend to be. The soil shifted, tasted the roots. Old flavours these. Pupae turned uneasily in their dens.

The dry old lady shivered her bones, her teeth easing open at the hint of memory: sweet melon flesh. A shoot pushed up through her perfect teeth, seeking the surface. It rose. Lick lick, finding the channels left by old sinews, they were as good as sinews even, they wound and levered and lifted. Their vegetable movements shifted the dry sticks of the bones. Her arms bent, her spine twisted, ecstatic mimicry of life's movements. She sat, she opened her arms. The plants rooted in her chest wound up out of the ground and touched the

underside of the surface, soil swimmers. Breaching. Sensing starlight. The stars pricked out slightly new patterns than what these new beings dimly recalled, from previous birthings. But close enough for them to orientate themselves.

Moon shadows slithered over the dug-up soil. The incumbent grasses bowed closer, sniffing, tasting, bending their weightless seed-heads towards the newcomers. What is this? What is this? What signs, what news from the old world? They spoke a whispering tongue, a very, very old language that nothing else there could understand. This vegetable communication passed on the breeze; a porcupine passing in the dimming light caught a whiff of it, took note. The new plants were ambitious, they were seeking. The first one to emerge quickly proffered a bud, and in the bud's pursed-lips expression there was something of the old woman's mischief. She herself was content: her white shards could now crumble to nothing, degraded by the acid juices of the plant's embrace.

The seedlings awaited the humans. They were not afraid of them. They called through the air; they looped and wriggled and eased out green leaf-flags, the better to attract attention. They moulded flowers, delicately scented, proffered as gifts, as seduction. The blossoms glowed softly in the dark, courted by moths, waiting to be seen.

And the dog? The dog's from somewhere else altogether. He was only in this world in the daytime. At night he dissolved into the shadows, the special grainy dark of the in-between spaces between universes. His dappled coat darkened to cosmic black. The black you find beyond the gratings in the storm-water drains; in the sliver of dark under the highway bridge; between the stars. Cave dark, portal dark, nebula dark; all dogs live there in their dreams. Sometimes they come out and bite. The dog's from another story.



*Get up, you, Gaby said. Get up.*

*I don't want to go. I really, really don't.*

It's not that she wasn't awake. It was really early. Like, still dark early. But Gaby, curiously for someone of chaotic habits, had never struggled to rise. Falling into sleep and staying down had always been more her problem, ever since she was a baby.

*Oh god. Just get it done. Just do it.*

*Get it done.*

*Forty more hours.*

Gaby hadn't meant to whimper out loud, but it seemed she had done, because Craig turned to her in the bed and without hesitation wrapped his arms around her, pressing her down with his weight. It was the right thing to do, it squeezed the cry right out of her chest. He waited, holding her, until her breathing calmed. He was very strong but it was ok; just for now, she wanted that restraint. They lay there clenched together for a long moment, not speaking. 'So you've got this whatsit, community service thing?' His voice was almost unrecognisably serious.

'Yup.'

'You know you can talk to me about it. Whenever. Whenever you're ready.'

Gaby squirmed in his arms. When would he be going home? Usually he didn't stay the night. There was another girlfriend, for one thing. She rolled over and put her teeth to his shoulder. Didn't taste so good, now: he'd soured in the night.

But still he wasn't finished: 'Is it safe, to go to this place? With, like ... dodgy people. I can come with you if you want?'

So, that was new. Craig had always been good to her, kind, but he never presumed too much in the way of caring, still less protecting. She almost laughed, then considered this a moment before answering. 'No,' she said. 'No, I don't worry about that. I only go where I want to go.'

After a long moment's silence, he laughed. 'Oh well that's ok, then,' he said, and went to sleep again.

And she did like him a lot for this, for his willingness to take a joke; to

take everything as a joke. Nothing ever too dark with Craig. Although, of course, it just wasn't true, what Gaby had told her lover. She was going somewhere this morning, and she really, really did not want to.

Craig seemed even bigger in the light of day. She was stirred by the ginger hair at his groin and chest, and it was tempting to stay under the duvet shell, in the pod of snoozy warmth and exhalations. She could smell herself. A nice smell, mealy. Sex smell. Craig was a well fragranced dude, she thought again to herself. Biscuits, honey, pepper. An edible man. It seemed a pity to get up so early, waste the pheromonal cocktail that pillowed around them comfortably. Normally she wouldn't shower for hours after sex. But here it was, the morning, and the waiting world, and you needed to be a little bit clean to face it. Didn't you?

She imagined herself properly clean at last, slipping up and away, a dull residue left behind like a snake's skin. Just these bloody hours of punishment to dispose of before she was allowed to lift her feet from the soil of this place and fly. But dirt sticks. *Dirt*, that's what they call soil overseas, where her mother was, where she was headed when all this was done; dirt's what you call the earth beneath your feet.

She sighed and pushed back the covers.

After her shower, she dropped the towel on the bedroom floor and started plucking clothes from the stacks on shelves and chairs. Fiddling with both hands to insert her stud earrings, she caught her own eye in the mirror, head cocked. Held it there for a long, strained moment, feeling the ache in her bent neck. Behind her in the reflection, one of her mother's precious antique botanical illustrations was visible on the wall above the bed. An 18<sup>th</sup>-Century French watercolour. Original, not a print. Although the glass had been replaced, Gaby knew that underneath lay a fine score-mark on the paper where once the glass had shattered in the frame. She'd done it herself, with this hand here. There was a small whitish scar at the base of the thumb, if you looked.

She refocused, away from the painting, back to her own face. Stupid, she thought. She fixed the stud and straightened briskly, shaking out her shoulders, releasing the ache.

Fuck this.

Gaby opened up her laptop and tapped her way through a sequence of windows. She'd done this before, many times; all her details were there. Last-minute stuff, a bit desperate of course, but that was also nothing new. An amazing amount was possible with a decent credit card.

At the side of the bed, she nudged his shoulder with a bare knee. 'Craig?'  
'Mmph?'

'Wake up. I need to go.'

'What?'

'Like, now.'

'Can't you get there yourself?'

'No car.'

'What happened to the Audi?'

'Oh. I don't have that anymore.'

'Don't tell me you crashed it.'

'I don't want to talk about that.'

'Jesus H Christ, Gaby you are such a fucking disaster zone, you know that?' But he was laughing.

'Ok enough now.'

'Fucking disaster zone, honestly. Walking talking disaster zone.' He reached for her hips. But Gaby was clean now, and had no intention of getting dirty at this time. She pushed his hands away, busied herself stuffing a few essentials into her handbag – pinkish leather, soft like flesh. Passport, hairbrush, deodorant. What more did a girl really need.

'Come. Now. I've got to go.'

'Well where is it? This garden place?'

'No, I've changed my mind. Take me to the airport.'



There was something strange about the stars. Morne didn't know his



constellations, but nonetheless he had a sense that things were not quite right up there. Like the patterns of light were shifted slightly to the side, or he was seeing slightly double.

Morne lay flat on the carpet in a small plain room dimly lit with a bluish light. The temperature here was always cool, always the same, and the whole floor comfortably carpeted. It was a pleasure for him to come here, just to go dormant for a while; to lie down where he was and wait for some hours before rising again into the world. And it was silent here; not even the doctor spoke unless he asked her to.

‘It’s never quiet where I am, in the city,’ he said. ‘Always the traffic, always the lights. And you know? My flat is so high up, I can actually feel it swaying, sometimes? That happens, up high. From the wind, or pressure changes, or something. It’s never entirely peaceful.’

‘Serves you right for living in a penthouse,’ said Dr Lerato. She shifted in her chair in the corner. ‘Have you had enough?’

Morne put his finger to his lips. He hadn’t, not yet. Above him, on the ceiling, the river of stars turned in almost complete silence. The projector hummed softly in the centre of the room; he’d asked her to switch off the ambient sounds – there were options, wind chimes or surf or the creak of a ship at anchor; the whole contraption was meant to put you to sleep. But Morne was calmly alert. Right now he was not trying to sleep. He should memorise the constellations, he thought. For professional reasons. Except he wasn’t even sure these ones were real. He couldn’t see Orion, for example. The star projector was made in China – he’d checked, out of curiosity – and he wondered if that explained the differences. He sighed. ‘Okay, you can switch it off now.’

The doctor leaned forward and pressed a button and the light-show died, but she kept the lights dim. It wasn’t like she had to take notes, not for him. He’d been seeing her, in one way or another, for going on thirty years.

They’d been young together: student activists, housemates, sometime lovers. Another life, a younger city. Land reform, that had been the thing then: returning the city to the people. There’d been marches and boycotts, stones thrown, municipal offices occupied.

That was before the first of the rolling water crises, of course. Everyone predicted that the drought would bring on crisis, would exacerbate the city's tensions, the anger, bring about a revolt. Instead it seemed it hushed the city up, cowed it, like a creature weakened by dehydration. Nobody marched, nobody threw rocks anymore; they stayed indoors in the summer, they eked out their water supplies, they saved their strength. Where people could leave, they did; large parts of the city centre lay empty now. The land not so much reformed as exhausted.

Morne and Lerato had stayed; had grown older, got quieter, made lives, made money. And now sat together in this quiet room, talking to each other in quiet voices about life.

Morne eased himself up to a cross-legged sitting position, back against the wall.

'Space, hey,' he said.

'Is that what you'd like to talk about today?'

'Space. Space is the thing, these days. Everyone's wanting space.'

The doctor nodded. 'People live increasingly isolated lives.'

'No, man, not space. *Space*. NASA – that kind of space. Mars, Cassini, Voyager. That's all I hear these days from my clients. People want to get off-planet.

'Big ask.'

'Well. It's not like I'm building rocket-ships for them. Not real ones anyway.'

'What do you do for a space party? I'm intrigued.'

'Smoke and mirrors.' He waved a hand at the star projector. 'This kind of shit. Silver spacesuits. Beep-beep music. Cakes that look like they're carved out of plutonium.'

'Zero gravity?'

'Hah. I'd give them zero atmosphere too, if I could. These people can afford almost anything, but not that.'

'I don't really get the appeal,' said Lerato.

'They like the idea of fucking off just as the rest of the world shrivels up

and dies. Everyone else is just desperate for the rain to fall; this lot are already fantasising a step ahead.’

‘The rich,’ sighed Lerato. ‘What can you do.’ They both looked thoughtful; neither was exactly poor, these days.

‘Get what we can, I guess. Before the apocalypse.’

She snorted. ‘Bullshit, nothing’s going to kill you. You’re going to last forever, Morne.’ She pushed herself to her feet, groaned a little. ‘You and your skinny arse.’

He pushed his shoulders flat against the wall. It was true, he was still trim, still limber. He dressed young, too – today, baggy khaki shorts, open-toed leather sandals and a short-sleeved shirt covered in orange protea flowers. Holiday clothes, always.

‘Organic ingredients, that’s my secret. Here, I almost forgot –’ He reached over to his leather satchel and pulled out a white paper bag, shook it – a sound like a rainstick.

She peeked inside. ‘I’ve been meaning to say,’ she said, ‘the last few batches haven’t been so great. A bit weak, you know? I’m needing more and more to make a proper tea. Some of the clients have been complaining.’

He sighed. ‘I know it. I know. I’m working on it. Tell me how it goes with these. I’ve spoken to my garden guy about it.’

‘The Green Man?’

‘Ah, Andrew, Andy, Andy. More delicious than his veggies. One day you must meet him.’

‘Maybe I will.’ She raised the bag to her nose and sniffed. ‘Still smells good. Can I offer you some?’

He laughed. ‘Stop trying to get into my mind, Lerato. With your witch’s brews. Just some water for me, thanks. Two blocks of ice?’

After she’d left the consulting room, Morne rocked to his feet. He peered into the black mirror of Lerato’s computer screen, shaping his spiky quiff. No problem with that, either. Grey but grand. He accidentally knocked the mouse with his elbow, jolting the monitor into life. There was a picture on the screen, a black-and-white head-and-shoulders of a blonde girl staring straight at the

camera. Small pale face, even paler hair, eyes squinted up as if against her own luminosity. A bit of a mess: smeared mascara, haired a half-blown dandelion. Sexy. Young.

He sank into Lerato's chair, reaching to click through.

'Jesus, Morne, you can't just do that.' She slapped his fingers from the keyboard and he kicked back in her rolling chair, holding up his hands and laughing.

'Sorry, sorry. I was bored, waiting for you. Who is that?'

'Christ.' Lerato tapped away from the open window, handed him a frosted glass of water.

'Looks like a mug shot. A hot mug shot. What did she do?'

'You're incorrigible. And it's confidential.'

'Hah, so I'm right. Come on, who'm I going to tell?'

Lerato sighed, laughed. 'God. Yes, she's a referral. Some kind of suspended sentence. She needs to make a statement of contrition, responsibility, something like that. I'm supposed to wrinkle it out of her. It's basically her mother pushing for it. I think they did a deal with the prosecution.' She hesitated. 'They have money, so.'

'Poor little rich girls, don't we love them.' Morne stood with a sigh, slinging his bag over his shoulder. 'Thanks sweetheart, that was a tonic. As ever.' 'I didn't do much. One day you should actually, you know, let me give you some therapy. I have rooms spare, you know. Check you in, you could sleep for a week.'

'You know I live strictly in the present. And I don't sleep. You let me talk. It's good, it's what I pay you for. Nobody else does that for me.' He leaned to kiss her on the cheek. 'One day you should let me throw you a party.'

'Hah.'

'No, serious. Surely you have birthdays. What would your theme be?'

She gave a slow smile. 'I think I would embrace the apocalypse. Bring it on, the end of the world. No rocket-ship escapes for me.'

'That's not bad, actually,' said Morne. 'Burn the world down. The Last Party. I like it.' He pondered for a moment. 'Would be cheaper than this Mars

rubbish, too. All you'd need is some kind of blasted-Earth setting. Some crappy tinned food. I can think of a half a dozen venues already.' He put on his straw hat, tapped it straight. 'Thanks for the idea!'

'No problem at all. Send me an invite.'

'Of course – if you bring along that cute little felon.'

'Oh, sure. I don't want you corrupting her.'

'I don't think you need to worry about that. Whatever it is that girl's done, she got corrupted years ago. I can smell it.'

'Through the computer screen? Impressive. What does corruption smell of?'

He closed his eyes and breathed in deeply through his nose. 'Like smoke,' he said. 'Like something's on fire.'

She breathed in sharply.

'What?'

'You read her file, you sneak!'

'What? No, I promise – that's just what came into my head. Fire, flames. Why?'

She glared at him.

'Hah! She's a firebug? Hardcore.'

'Not funny. People got hurt.'

There was a pause, like he'd skipped a track in his head and was waiting to see what song came next. It happened to him sometimes. But then he rallied. 'Well that's too bad,' he said. 'Can't say I was wrong, though. She's hot.'



Gaby hadn't even got as far as boarding the plane before things started to go to shit. Her passport was cool, the visa amazingly still valid, but it wasn't enough. She sat at the grim little table in the interview room, pouting. Opposite her, the airport security guy observed her severely, flipping her cigarette lighter over and over in his fingers. How many times had she sat like this, across some shabby

administrative desk, receiving a look like that? It said something like: *Lady, what the hell are you doing here? This pace, this situation, is not meant for girls like you.* This dude was just a little younger than usual. Junior officers. I'm moving down the chain of command, she thought morosely. Earlier, she'd tried out a smile – he was not uncute, and only a couple of years older than her, maybe twenty-two – but no dice, no cigar, as her mother liked to say.

Gaby sighed, and applied her lip-gloss again. How much longer? She had some water, at least; she'd been slightly surprised they'd given her that much, and not made her buy a bottle. Water wasn't cheap. Maybe some legal thing – you weren't allowed to parch your prisoners.

That had been this morning. Now it was late, too late. Her boarding time had been two hours ago. She had a vivid sensation of the plane overhead, lumbering onwards through dark skies without her. Her seat poignantly empty – or maybe occupied by some overweight dick bumped up from economy, adjusting the seat to fit his bulky frame, putting his feet up on her footrest, sipping her free champagne.

'Can't you call your parents?

'No.' *Where's my goddamn lawyer.*

She'd got as far as the hand-luggage check – she had no big bag for the hold, just the one handbag – and of course she'd forgotten to get the silly clear plastic bag for all her liquids, the toothpaste and whatnot, and the guy at security was holding her up and insisting on pulling out some of her (actually really fucking expensive) perfumes and was about to dump them in the bin and she was jiggling just about out of her SKIN with impatience and anxiety and clicking the lighter in her pocket like she did when she was tense and then of course THAT caused a problem and they tried to take the lighter off her and she went off, full-flight, loud and shrill, almost elated by the release of it all.

There was one of those body-temperature cameras next to the conveyer belt, left over from the last bird-flu scare maybe, and on its screen she could actually see a portrait, her own face and hands pulsing yellow, orange, furious dark pink, getting more and more psychedelically flushed as her temper soared. Struck, she'd paused mid-flow, flicked the lighter like she was at a concert – and

a flame shot up unnaturally high and the scanner-screen kind of *strobed* and everyone gasped in shock and that's how she ended up in this little room with her lawyer on the way.

The door of the interrogation room opened abruptly, no knock, and there he was, in his usual grey three-piecer. With his usual expression of weary forbearance.

'Gabriela. For crying out loud.'

'Yeah, I know.'

'A cigarette lighter?'

'Sorry.'

Already he was fussing and organising, picking up her bags from the floor, and her jacket, and her belt. Dusting down the coat, slapping out wrinkles.

Gaby glared at the security officer, held out her palm. She was so done here. He glared back at her for a moment, seemed about to protest.

'You can return that,' said Mr Franks tiredly.

And there was something in his tone, something lawyerly and patient with the dried-blood dust of red-lettered notices in it, that made the officer do what the older man said, shoving the tray of expensive scents and creams back over the steel table-top to Gaby, who snatched them up with bad grace and jammed them into her bag, and then the heavy old lighter, which she pushed into her pocket. She almost stuck her tongue out at him behind Mr Franks' back, but she controlled it.

*Fuck, Gaby*, she told herself, feeling suddenly unbalanced, swayed by a small vertigo of confusion at herself. She regained her balance, swung her bag over her shoulder and left the room without another glance.

Mr Franks was already far ahead, striding across the glossy tiles of the almost-empty terminal, and Gaby had to jog a little to catch up.

The outside air was hot, even at this time of night. A spotlit billboard against the sky told everyone to suck it up. *Every drop counts*, it shouted. *Days since water-saving targets missed: 0.*

She felt in her tote for her sunglasses. Flipped her hair away from her face. He'd pulled the dark Mercedes up to the curb, door open to its pleasantly

air-conditioned interior. Déjà vu. Unlike anyone else, it seemed Mr Franks was allowed to park at the kerb here, without challenge. Of course. She ignored the passenger door and chose to sit in the rear, to make him feel more like a taxi driver. Inside the car, she would not take off her shades. Small rebukes.

‘My mother’s going to be pissed when I don’t get off that plane in New York,’ she said once Mr Franks had closed the door and the car had pulled away. She tried to not notice his expression, which looked horribly like pity.

She sighed. ‘Ok take me to this fucking garden then.’ She did feel a bit bad, inflicting her dirty mouth on him so early in the morning. But screw it.

He paused circumspectly. That was Mr Franks for you. Never release a word without the old circumspect pause. ‘Don’t you want to change clothes? You will be ... ah, working. Physically,’ he added cautiously.

She didn’t bother to reply, or to lower her eyes to her outfit. Her clothes were perfect. They always were. Cute little button-up blouse in pink cotton with three pearl buttons, sheer. Jeans – good ones, but nonetheless jeans. Tan leather ankle-boots with a modest heel. Minimal jewellery, just the one slim rose-gold chain with the solitaire diamond and the matching diamond studs. Nothing fancy. Practical, even. Even the scent she’d chosen this morning was something outdoorsy, in her opinion. A floral.

‘Let’s get this over with, shall we?’ she said.



Lerato was restless, moving through the cool rooms of the clinic, adjusting a bedspread here, shifting a cushion there. She was still annoyed with Morne. It took a while to relax, after a session with him. The man had a certain hectic energy to him, like a held breath. She couldn’t believe she’d discussed her patient files with him. This was a thing that Morne did to you, she was reminded once again: he got you to tell you things. And to be honest, it was nice, it was freeing, to just let the words come. Instead of always being the one digging, the one extracting words from other stubborn minds, like pick-axeing frozen soil. It was



nice to loosen the tongue, to let thoughts out without examination. And he delighted in it: he liked to have information squirrelled away, she suspected, for when he might need it.

Despite what he thought, Lerato knew quite a bit about his restless mind. Morne liked to be doing deals. A bit of this for a bit of that; a tit here for a tat there. These tea-leaves, for example, were gift, but also not altogether. If she hadn't paid for them yet, at some point she would, somehow. He had a long memory.

Still, she shouldn't have told him anything about this Gabriela. Morne would find a way to use information if he could, perhaps in exchange for another favour down the line, just to feel like he still had a finger in every possible pie.

Her other patients were much calmer, more contained, more predictable. They came at precise times and were always punctual; Lerato made sure to have the door ajar for each one at the appropriate hour. For people with a lot on their minds, they were very good at remembering their appointments.

Lerato herself had an appalling memory. She couldn't remember the least damned thing, and relied almost entirely on systems of computer alarms and warnings and notifications to jolt her forward through the innumerable small gradations of the hours and days. She'd be lost without her intricate Excel spreadsheets documenting the specifics of each of her patients, for example.

Her whiteboards, too, were essential, and the graphs and diagrams that she taught her sufferers to draw on. Each room in the clinic was equipped with a large board, and a variety of fat-nibbed pens in different colours. They were an extension of the kind of gimmicks and tricks she'd been using on herself for years. They calmed her and she knew they calmed her patients too.

Of course the patients were of different types. Some were there for the remembering. Some were there most emphatically for the forgetting. Some came just to have a good long sleep. She found the whiteboards worked equally well for all sorts. The wonderful thing about whiteboards was they were fully erasable.

Mr Mazibuko, for example, had had a lot of terrible stuff written out in longhand on his board; each morning, after a session of working through painful

recollections, they would wipe out a few more lines. By the time she was finished with him, when he finally got sent home, his board would be an immaculate spread of white, his numbers down to zero. Mr Mazibuko would sleep the untroubled dreamless sleep of an infant, and never turn his mind to the past. The thing he was attempting to forget was awful indeed; but Lerato was the soul of discretion, and the world would never discover what it was.

When it was deemed necessary for the patients to stay at the Clinic, overnight or for longer periods, they spent a lot of their time asleep. Sleep was a very important part of the technique. Ideally, when the therapy was most intensive, Lerato encountered each of her patients immediately after they woke, when recall was strongest and usefully interleaved with dreams.

In all, she had more than forty patients, some dormant and some active cases; although in recent months she'd noticed a slightly worrying decline: older patients leaving – in some cases leaving the country, and in two cases, actually dying on her; new ones not arriving at quite the same pace. Her meticulous spreadsheets told the story. The few younger patients seemed to her to have less profound problems;. Perhaps the world was really gaining wellness (no, she didn't really think that); or perhaps it was just adjusting itself better to the terrors of forgetting. Learning how to forget itself, without her help.

At any one time, she had three or four sufferers in residence, undergoing sleep therapy in her basement, dream therapy, memory therapy. None of the rooms down there had windows; she found it worked better that way. The bedroom doors were kept closed, not locked. There were peepholes that she could use peer in on the dreamers. But also in her own small office upstairs, with its view of the sea, Dr Lerato could watch them as they slept. She had discreet cameras trained on each of the beds. She liked best to watch them in the small hours, in that suspended time before they woke from their separate dreams. Filled up with or emptied of their pasts. She felt like a spaceship captain up there, observing the surfaces of half a dozen alien planets.

At the moment, she had an almost full house. She flipped quickly through the channels, making sure that one two three four five were all present and correct. Five of the eight beds down in the basement were occupied. Mr

Mazibuko, who was on full medical aid, was in the largest room, room one. In the smallest, darkest room, room two, was her current pro bono case, Vincent, the boy who would not speak; she had intuited that he needed dense quiet and darkness. Another forgetter. Mostly, the patients wished to forget. In room three was Caroline, a woman who'd lost more than one child. She slept deeply. It would be a long time before she was ready to remember. In the bed she lay with her arms clutched around a pillow. Her face was set severely. She disapproved deeply of the past. She would not let it in. In room four, Jana-Maria, older, obese. She too was trying quite actively to lose her memories, which had to do with a wicked uncle. Lined up on the side of her bed were a collections of little plastic figurines, superhero and comic book characters. Lerato thought that at some point she may have to start taking these away, deducting them one by one; again, it was a long-term project, this one. Both women, she knew, enjoyed coming here. Private healthcare clients, they booked themselves in every few weeks and let Dr Lerato iron out their minds for a long weekend. They liked, too, the mutis she made for them, her herbs and tinctures; she had to be particularly careful with Caroline's intake.

Guest two was restless this morning, although it was not yet time for him to wake. Vincent was only thirteen, and the youngest person she'd ever treated. His problem was that he had so many memories, several sets of them, tangled parallel paths of memory, and he did not always find it easy to tell the true one from the false. He was thrashing uneasily in his bed that evening, restless, unable to settle.

She opened the door softly and went to him. He was a thin child, with a beaky nose and deep-set eyes, smudged with sleeplessness. She sat on the end of the bed and pushed back his hair. It's as if he'd been trying to fly in his bed, the sheets spread out to either side like sprained wings, limbs twisted in the sheets. Like he's got stuck, a bird in a trap. She'd brought a glass of iced tea, cool from the fridge, and handed it to him wordlessly. He sipped, and she saw the relief in his eyes at once. He looked at her with what she knew was close to love. All of them, they loved her, they loved her with a cloudy imprecise love seen through the murky depths of a glass, the murk of their minds. But it was

love nonetheless.

‘Drink half,’ she said to him. ‘Keep half for later.’ He nodded, drank exactly one half. She took the glass away and put it to one side.

‘I dreamed,’ he said. ‘What did you dream?’

‘I dreamed there was fire coming through the walls.’

‘You’ll sleep now. In the morning we’ll write some things down, okay?’

‘Okay.’

‘This is what you are doing now. You have’ – she checked her watch – ‘four hours. It’s three am, four, five, six. These are for sleeping. That is all you have to do in them now.’

He nodded, already drowsier, but also surer, more confident. Going into dreamland with a roadmap. He had four hours, and he knew now what the plan was, what he had to do in each piece of time. He would be ok for those four hours at least.

She watched him for a moment more, then rose and headed wearily to her office to switch on her computer. The real day would be starting soon, and she needed to do her housekeeping. Lerato was very organised. Every one of her patients, past and well as present, was thoroughly documented in her extensive files. If in her patients she insisted on erasable pens, her own records were multiply backed upon the cloud. She knew how to control the records.

Sometimes, when she mentally took a step back from her files and half-closed her eyes, she saw the bigger fabric that they made up, all her holy spreadsheets, like a vast cloth of white lace laid across the countenances of all the people she’d counselled over the years. Full of holes and torn and frayed in places, reworked and darned in others, eaten away by fish-moths, but with a pattern coming through. Not yet discernible, not yet complete; but perhaps by the time she retired – in not too many years, now – she would have some meaningful corner of embroidery to hold. A handkerchief’s worth.

The records were not eternal. Once a client had been off the books for five years – an arbitrarily chosen figure – she erased their files entirely. The right to institutional amnesia was one she took very seriously. She erased swathes of records with a brisk click of the mouse. This was pleasing to her. She had her

own mental hygiene to take care of, after all. It felt good to erase the lingering memories of all those fussy, funny, troubled lives that she'd entertained for weeks or months or sometimes years. She was positively looking forward to her retirement, when she could start eroding the back end of her own career, rolling it up, while accreting nothing further. She imagined, with pleasure, her life's work eroding steadily like an icicle in the sun, until nothing was left, not even a spot of damp. She thought about the parties Morne had told her about: end-of-the-world parties, abandoning-earth parties. She could understand it, in a way. There was something celebratory about letting go.

She saw now, next to her computer, that Morne had left her a little gift before he went: a small white ceramic bowl of baby tomatoes. She smiled, popped one in her mouth.

The fruit was sweet, but not as sweet as it once had been.



Of course the place, CitiGreen, was on the GPS – and of course Mr Franks, ever diligent on his clients' behalf, had checked the route beforehand. But finding it – a small swathe of olive-green grass and hoed soil, clearly visible from the road if you knew where to look – and finding a way down into it were two different things. After a fairly convoluted couple of go-rounds and switchbacks on the spaghetti junction, they finally escaped its whorls to come out on the shoulder of a steep embankment. The broken bridge extended off to the left – impossible to cross, the way being blocked by a line of concrete bollards and no-entry chevron signs. Down at the base of the embankment lay the garden. A flat expanse of tussocky grass, and now Gaby could see more clearly the beds of turned-up soil. On the far side the highway shot past, packed with morning traffic heading into town, but on this end things were quieter.

Gaby was overcome by a kind of shyness. 'You can leave me here,' she said to Mr Franks, who'd kept the motor running and was peering down at the set-up, his long creased face hawkish with protective worry. 'I'll call you later.'

Look, it's fine, I can see a guy down there. Look at the van – CitiGreen – it's the right people. It looks great.'

*It looks like a freaking crime scene*, was what she actually said to herself, in Craig's voice; and he wasn't wrong. It was exactly that kind of place, half in the shadow of the highway bridge. From the gloom under the concrete arch, the declarations: *Junkie Funkie Kids*, *Young Americans*. Dollars signs and penises. But the guy down there was a reassuring presence, relaxed and purposeful, bent over his work, marking something out with string. Or something.

'I'll be fine. Please, Mr Franks.'

He didn't like it, but he went, making sure before he left that her phone had charge, that she had his number. Of course she had his bloody number.

Funny place. She looked down into the cool hollow and sniffed the air cautiously. Something out of the corner of her eye made the air crinkle, like something was shifting in the soil. Her palms prickled. She turned back and half-raised her hand – to say goodbye to the lawyer, to call him back – but Mr Franks had already slipped his big car back into the flow. She felt a tiny pang of abandonment, then turned back. Forty hours, she thought. A working week for those who work. Or so she understood.

For some reason she felt eyes upon her, although the only person in sight was the man down there, and he was bent over his work. She wiped her palms on her jeans, stepped over the crash barrier and came at a crooked trot down the steep embankment. The noise of the traffic concealed her approach, and when the man looked up she saw that she'd surprised him.

'Hi,' she said. 'Sorry, didn't mean to startle you.'

He straightened up and brushed his palms on his overalls. He was smiling a bit tightly. Cute, she thought. Maybe too cute. Lean, long-limbed, dark hair cropped close, but dense, a black pelt, nice bluntly regular features, a sweetly cautious smile.

'Andrew,' he said, drawing his hand from a glove and holding it out. A good shake; strong. 'I guess you're my Youth Diversion.'

'That's me.'

'Did you bring any clothes to work in?' He looked at her critically: the

smart jeans, the summer blouse.

She touched her hair. ‘Uh, no.’

‘Okay. I might have some gumboots in a small size, at least. And I’ll tell you all about the place.’

He took her around the property, droning on about mulching, art projects, seedlings. He showed her the vegetable patch, the areas set aside for the corms, for the buchu; the areas that were protected from birds by netting. Organic indigenous blah-di-blah.

‘I haven't seen any birds?’

‘Gotta get here early. They come first thing in the mornings, and in the evenings,’ he said. ‘You’ll see them. Starlings, ibises, thrushes. Greedy.’

‘So who do you sell all this stuff to?’ She was watching the backs of his hands, green and lithe. She’d only now noticed the extent of his tattoos. ‘Do you have a shop or something?’

‘No, I sell to clients. Actually just one the main client.’ He sounded oddly evasive. ‘He’s the owner of the land, actually.’

‘So he’s like ... your landlord?’

‘I do all sorts of veggies for him. Morne’s like a kind of ...’ – here he seemed to drift off for a moment, considering – ‘... caterer? Does fancy parties. The food has to be special – organic, super fresh. People want the indigenous stuff, the heirloom fruits and seeds. That’s what we do here.’

‘Cool,’ she said reflexively, although she thought: I totally wouldn’t eat anything grown here. The traffic fumes were already burning her throat.

In one corner there was a small triangle of mixed, tangled vegetation. It was carefully marked off with twine.

‘What-all grows in there?’ she asked, for something to say. ‘Looks like a bunch of weeds.’

‘Yup, it’s a bunch of weeds. There’s kids from the university come sometimes to sample it. Inner-city ecosystems, wasteland biomes – it’s a hot topic, they tell me. I can’t identify everything. I know mostly the indigenous plants but this stuff ... this stuff’s all sorts.’ He stared at the plants, somewhat morosely.

The vibe between them should be weirder, her some kind of ... jailbird; and him the gardener, of all fucking things. But she was quite liking Andrew. He was older, but he didn't try to boss her around or talk to her like a child; when he called the students 'kids' he didn't seem to consider she might be included in that category. She didn't like it when people assumed she was or should be a student, instead of what she was, which was ... not much of anything. She was hoping he knew nothing about her; although the difference in their stations in life must have been obvious with every flick of her hair, every syllable, every pricey thread in her jeans.

But he hadn't yet asked her anything personal, in fact didn't seem to be particularly interested in her or her background at all. Most probably gay, she thought. All of it was a relief.

They came past the compost heap, and up to the overhang of the bridge. Shadow made a velvety wedge of darkness in there. On the side of the bridge was a selection of graffiti. It was the usual stuff, the big chunky glowing 3D letters; and another painting, of a woman in a headress and vaguely African wrap holding in her hands a melon, its top cut off in a neat section to show a dense mass of seeds within. The seeds were rising up out of the centre of the fruit and had gathered in a cloud around the woman's head like flies, and indeed were transforming into little winged creatures, dragonflies, filmy, multicoloured.

'This is cool,' she said.

'Hmm? Oh that. Some assholes broke in one night and did it.' She laughed. 'You don't like it?'

'I think it's quite shit. Kitsch. Anyway. It will wear off eventually I guess.'

Grumpy, she thought as she put out a finger and touched one of the little winged forms. Like fairies. And him with his tattoos.

All at once Andrew was in her face, holding something up to her nose. A soapy green scent seemed to thrust itself like two rude finger up her nostrils; the skin of her scalp tightened in shock, and she gagged and jerked her head back.

'Jesus!'

'Whoah, sorry.' The gardener dropped the mashed-up leaf, wiped his



hands on the seat of his pants. 'It's meant to be a nice scent.'

'Yeah, I'm just – sensitive to smell.'

'Hmm. Well I hope that's not going to be a problem. This work gets quite physical, you know. You're going to get ... stuff on you.' He looked at her sceptically. 'You'll need some gloves. Hold on.'

The gloves he brought her were made for a man's hands, tough fabric with the palms and inner edges of the fingers beaded with nubbly black rubber. 'Too big.'

'They'll be fine. I'm only here for four hours today,' she said grimly, although she got the impression he wouldn't have minded if she'd said two, or one, or none. She contemplated asking him to sign off on all her documents at once, so she could fuck off out of here and leave him in peace.

He handed her a rusty trowel and pointed at the unpromising looking patch of ground right up against the side of the bridge. 'There. That bed needs weeding. I need you to get down into it and pull up all the crap. Think you can handle that?'

'...Okay. The students weeds? Are you sure?'

'Yup. They won't be coming back.'

Soon she had to lose the gloves; she couldn't get a grip on anything through the floppy oversized fingers. The weeds were tough and she did the job not very thoroughly, hacking at the roots in despair when she couldn't wrestle them cleanly out of the ground. It grew hot as the morning wore on and she could feel slick sweat creeping behind her ears and down her temples. The troubling smell was everywhere.

She'd expected that this would be an emotionally gruelling thing; that burying her hands in soil would be an act of guilty penance. But instead she found it quite straightforward. Just a physical chore. This was not a garden in her sense of the word; certainly not in her mother's sense. This was not topiary and formal beds. It was possible for her to relax here, a little. Her mind started to wander.

It was funny place. She squinted up at the concrete rising on every side, smelt the fumes in the air as rush hour arrived and passed out of sight from where

she sat crouched, wrist-deep in soil. She felt sealed off. There were cars on all sides, whizzing past across the bridge, along the highway into town on one side and out again along the third side of a triangle, but somehow the traffic noise seemed to cancel itself all out and leave a bubble of silence here in the centre, so that the only noises were her own, the tick and tap of the trowel in her hand, her own breathing, the slight fluting noise the breeze made when it came through under the bridge. It was restful, almost like being out in the country. Her work took her, creeping inch by inch, almost under the bridge. Its shadow lapped the back of her hand and she pulled back – it was so chill, like a lick of black paint had been laid across her skin; or – more fancifully – like a cold tongue had swiped her skin briefly. She sat back on her heels and stared into the dark. Was something moving in there? Not completely dark. Gradations, patches of ambiguous texture. A smell. Rust and water. Something long-buried. She shuddered, melodramatically.

But that was the only moment of drama she could coax from the situation. The work was basically bloody dull, and after twenty minutes digging she had the beginnings of a blister on the base of her thumb. After another twenty, it was starting to feel like some specially tailored hell. This was what they would get her to do in hell, the devils: get down on her knees every day and with her bare hands sift through dirt, like looking for something vital and lost, like car-keys in beach sand, by digging up every inch. And knowing that there was more, more and more grains still below that, down into the core of the earth, and any hole you tried to dig just collapsed in on you with the soft sand falling back over your hands even as you dug, burying the hole, smoothing out its impression, filling it in again and leaving it as trackless as if you'd never been there at all.

She rested back on her heels, eyes actually welling with foolish tears at the grandeur and hopelessness of this vision. She wiped her face and hurled the trowel petulantly into the soil. Andrew, who arrived at that moment with a tray of seedlings like nasty hors d'oeuvres, unexpectedly laughed.

‘What?’

He pointed a finger at his face. ‘You might want to take a look at yourself in the mirror.’

‘What? Shit!’

She stood and went over to the shed and reached into her bag for the little makeup mirror. She had to laugh – there were mud-brown tracks under her eyes where she’d put her fingers. Weeping in the veggie patch! Ridiculous.

She mopped her face with the wet-wipes she always carried with her, four, five wipes, until her skin stung with it, then took out her makeup bag and started to redo her face.

When Andrew came to stand in the doorway, she felt discomfort in the small space. He wasn't a very big or tall man but there was a solid physicality to him, plus some subtle challenge to boundaries – perhaps he was standing two centimetres too close – that made the small shed feel very close, the air between them condensed. Plus it was embarrassing to have someone watching while you were fixing your face.

‘Is that really necessary?’

‘Yes,’ she snapped. And him with his tattoos!

Andrew was slow to register her tone. ‘You’re not really cut out for this at all, are you?’ he asked.

Gaby gave him a cutting look. She wished she’d put on more eye make-up this morning: more glary. ‘I’ve never done much manual labour, as it happens, no.’

‘Maybe I shouldn’t have put you on digging so soon. It’s tough on the hands. Sorry.’ He seemed genuinely remorseful. ‘Look, I can give you some other things to do.’

‘Like what?’

‘Well ... how are you with numbers?’

She snapped the mascara wand back into its tube. ‘I’m excellent.’ It was true. ‘Also computers.’

‘Okay, well have a look at this.’

He rummaged in a shelf under a pile of seed-trays and came out with a ratty notebook, one of those hardback ones with the red spine. A chewed Bic was tethered to its spine with a bit of dirty string sellotaped to the end of the pen. She took it from him with fastidious distaste. Paper can be the dirtiest thing.

‘What’s this?’

‘The records.’ Now it was his turn to look embarrassed. ‘See, you could help me a lot by ... well by taking on all that kind of thing. I’m not the best at keeping things all nicely written down, you know?’

Indeed. She’d never seen worse handwriting. She opened the book at the middle and looked in some horror at the vile scrawls on the page. The thing was an old school workbook, horrible cheap newsprint scored with blue lines, although the handwriting set down on it paid very little attention to those. It was all over the place like snared up fishing-line, in a variety of ballpoint pens of various colours, half of them running out, whole lines incised into the paper when there was no ink left at all, half-pages torn out here and there, coffee-rings, smears of soil, in one place a pressed leaf – the works. It was a disgusting object. She could feel herself itching to fix it up, to sort it out, to get the chronology straight.

‘What do you want me to do with this?’

‘Well ... can’t you see?’

‘I can’t read it at all. It’s unreadable.’

‘OK well ... like here.’ He flipped to page. ‘This is the inventory of all the plants. New seedlings, old one out, deaths, varieties – all of that. In and out, what gets planted, how many, how many have died, all that kind of stuff. Here’s the money ... the money whatever ...’ He was flipping the pages a little hysterically now. ‘Back here is all the ... ah fuckit, where is it now, your stuff, the hours for the Diversion bullshit ...’ Now he was laughing. ‘It’s hopeless, isn’t it?’

‘Yep. Actually I think it would be better if I started a whole new book, wrote it all out again.’

‘Do you think that would be possible?’

‘Of course, that’s completely possible. Why don’t you use a computer though?’

This seemed to make him nervous. He folded the book to his chest.

‘I have a Mac,’ she said soothingly. ‘I can bring it. We can do all of this really nicely and neatly.’ She was starting to feel quite pleased with the idea.

She'd done whole spreadsheet classes at her high school. She flapped the scrappy book in the air. The leaf fell out of the book and they both watched it spiral to the ground. She laughed.

'Look, do what you like,' he said. 'You just do your hours, you know, great. I'm happy.'

'You're okay to let me do the money stuff. You don't even know me. I mean, I could be, well.'

He looked at her. He knew what she was saying. 'Yeah, well, there's nothing here to steal. If you bring your Mac on site that's probably the most expensive thing that's ever been on this plot.' He paused, and she knew that something awkward was coming. 'Anyway, I don't know what it is you did to get sent here, but, you know. I don't think you could have done anything too hectic. Anyway.' He gestured sourly with his chin towards the plot of land. 'What does it matter, anyway? You coming in again?'

'Sure, I have to get my hours.'

'Ja, well, you better get them while they're going. Not so many hours left in this place.'

Four hours seventeen minutes, done and dusted, she thought, grimly totting it up as she ducked into Mr Frank's car at the end of the day. Mr Franks, of course, was dead on time, waiting for her outside the CitiGreen gates. Craig had offered to fetch her, but she was feeling a little sick of him now; he wasn't part of this. This was hers, this shit she was in. Hers and Mr Franks', she guessed. Everything that was hers, he'd take his lawyer's commission on, including on her trouble and strife.

'How are we today, Gabriela?'

'I'm tired,' she said, honestly. 'I could use a bath.'

'We can arrange that,' he said. And then paused. It was an even more tentative pause than was usual for Mr Franks.

'What? Ok, ok, I'll take a shower. Jeess. Just get me home.'

'Well.' He coughed.

'What?'

‘I’m afraid we can’t go to the bay apartment. You are booked into a ... ahh... another establishment.’

‘What?’

‘I thought it would be for the best. We can’t have you, ah, absconding again. I’m sorry.’

It was so cold in the car. Gaby was freezing. ‘What do you mean, *establishment*? This is a clinic, right? You’re putting me in a loony bin again, aren’t you?’

‘It’s a clinic. A very upmarket one. It will be part of your therapy.’ He hesitated. ‘Your mother requested it.’

‘Oh my god.’ But all the fight was out of her. She felt like crying. ‘Fuck.’

‘I’m afraid it’s part of the terms of your arrangement with the courts,’ he said, his voice gentler. ‘And you know, it’s better that we choose the therapist, rather than ...’ They drove in silence for a moment. Gaby chewed her nail, worrying at the broken edge. ‘The probation officer will approve. I’m most delighted and relieved that I won’t have to report to him that you’ve fled the country. We can’t be too careful. And this therapist, I understand she’s ... different,’ he continued, mollifying. ‘New techniques. Good with young people.’ ‘Oh. Fun.’ She looked down at her chipped nail polish and bit her lip.

‘Can you put the aircon off please,’ she said in a small voice. ‘I’m fucking dying back here.’



Andrew took his battered bicycle out from behind the shed, locked the wire gate and pushed himself off into the gathering night. Andrew’s routes through the city were different to Morne’s, to Mr Franks’. He travelled along the lesser back roads, the short-cuts, avoiding the cars bullying their way through rush hour. Along dirt tracks where the tar gave up, pushing his bike through holes in the tattered wire fences, under the clatter of the railway line through the piss-reeking subway. They were paths he’d learned through his feet, and lately wheels, over

all the years of his life lived in this city. He knew their smell and feel, every bump under his much-mended tyres; could ride them blindfold. They all led back home, to his mother's house.

He wore earbuds in his ears as he rode, but no music came through them; he just liked to be left alone in his head, the traffic on mute. But he was distracted this evening, thinking about the day.

That bloody girl. Clumsy, bored, obviously not suited. Debbie ... Gaby? When she first appeared, Andrew's first thought had actually been, was she a jumper? The bridge was a bit of a notorious site for that. He'd escorted one person down already, since this job started. And there was something about this girl that suggested wildness, desolation, something not quite under control. Her staticky hair standing out from her face as if she'd been shocked; her eyes too wide. Cold, was what he'd thought when he looked at her; not her attitude, although that had indeed been a bit frosty at moments, but actually physical temperature: so pale, her nose pinched and her lips bloodless despite the coral lipstick which seemed to float on top of her flesh. When she came close he could smell her limey deodorant, but also something sharp underneath it, like a cold sweat. She'd seemed wary, trembling like a leaf or a flame. The way she circled and watched and approached and stood there shivering reminded him of the stray dog watching for the stone in his hand.

That girl was a pain in the arse, simple as that. She wasn't strong, had obviously never held a spade or exerted herself in the outdoors in her entire life. It was going to be more bother than it was worth, trying to find things for her to do. It could only lead to trouble.

It irritated the hell out of him that this was the type of person they sent, too, some spoilt little princess who'd got herself into shit and had enough money to pull some strings to get this, frankly peachy, community-service deal. It was weird at the best of times being in this position, some kind of jailer to these Divergence kids, but most of them Andrew could relate to a bit a better. But it was part of the terms of Morne's funding, of course: he had to accommodate a certain number of person-hours of community service for at-risk youth.

He remembered the way she'd laughed at his writing. Taken the pen from

him, and the book. He hadn't known what to feel: embarrassed, annoyed or grateful. Fuck. Showing her that, all the records ... it might have been a really big mistake. Or maybe not. What had he been thinking?

Still. Maybe he was mistaken; he often was. She seemed educated; familiar with money, too. He should just introduce her to Morne, let the two of them get on with it. Morne would probably get a big kick out of that. Cute little delinquent chick like that, cooking his books for him. But somehow it made him uneasy, the thought of those two tricky characters meeting.

It took a while to get home, to the windswept neighbourhood of cramped tin-roof houses on the edge of town where his mother lived. His mother's was a small bungalow that had been repeatedly extended with rickety added rooms and wendy-houses and enclosed porches to accommodate all the children and children's children. Andrew came around the the side to the back yard where one of his little nephews was hacking at the dust with a stick. 'Howzit china,' he said softly, slapping the little boy's hand as he wheeled his bike past. He was sweating in the dry air. Andrew stayed in a kind of hut out back, a wooden shack designed originally to be a garden shed, and not too different from the one in CitiGreen. It was quiet here, though hot under the corrugated iron roof in summer.

The lights were on in the main house, and through the open back door he could see two of his sisters moving quietly, laughing, cooking. The air smelt of curry, of the roses that were the only thing that grew well in the sandy soil of these parts.

At any one time there was always a collection of women and children here, differently composed; some resident and some not, some permanent and some passing through. His mother stayed mostly in her room these days, nursing a bad chest, and around her moved his four older sisters; three of them had daughters of their own, and there were also aunts that popped in. Fathers and uncles too, but they were rarer sightings, their places in the house not as assured. The family had never gone in much for men; the existence of Andrew, the baby of the family, born after a gap of several years, was something that still seemed to slightly startle the whole family at unguarded moments.

Inside, the house was dim and cool. Dried flowers arranged on the



mantelpiece, next to photographs of the old people: solemn-faced ancestors in hats, dress jackets, clean white tunics, touches of colour in the scarves. This house had stood here a long time, existing in one of the pockets of the city that miraculously escaped redevelopment, the people clinging on. The women in the photos all look like his sisters, his mother. The few men hovered in the back, long fingers resting on upholstered shoulders.

Surita, his favourite, was sitting on a scuffed couch, checking emails on her phone. Her nose-ring glinted in the half-light, a curve of evening light settling on her jawline. It was softer than it once was; she was getting older, plumper. In a moment's glance he saw their mother in her, their grandmother. She looked up at him and smiled.

'Boetie.' She reached out her hand.

He took it. 'Nice, sis,' he said, looking at her manicure. 'I like the purple.'

Andrew could still remember the time when his sisters made him comb out their hair – they all had great hair, long, black and straight – and paint their nails. Surita stroked the skin of his forearm. All the pictures on his skin were hers. The wild one, the artistic sister, with a thin gold ring through her eyebrow as well as her delicate nostril.

'What have you got us for dinner?' she asked.

It was becoming a little joke, this. Always he'd been the one bringing food to the house – apples or cabbages or potatoes; things he'd grown. But these days the takings were few and far between; particularly after he'd had to provide for Morne. Really the sisters fed him, and he had less and less to offer. They cooked the same dishes their mother always used to make, and her mother before that.

The day's meagre takings from the garden filled only a quarter of the small cardboard box that he'd strapped to the back of his bike. Nothing really, some shrivelled herbs. Andrew felt ashamed. One of these days there would be nothing to show, and then what use would he be?

'That's a nice bit of wild garlic you've got there,' Surita said kindly. 'Show that to Mammie, she loves a bit of that in the curry.' She combed her finger through the other assorted leaves. 'Oh! And what's this?'

She brought it out between finger and thumb. A flower.

‘I don’t know. I found it on the plot today. There were these weird little plants coming up, things I’ve never seen before. Like succulents, maybe. One of them had a bud coming up.’

‘Funny-looking thing.’

It was indeed an odd flower: a fleshy starburst, yellow and bruise-brown like leopardskin. With an unsettling scent, musky with hints of smoked meat.

She twirled it slowly in her fingers, sniffed it tentatively, frowning. ‘Mammie would know. Ask her later, she’s sleeping right now.’

As they ate, he told Surita about the Space parties that Morne had been planning. He thought it might amuse her, and he was right.

‘Space travel! Cool.’

‘Going to Mars? To a dead planet? What kind of weird fantasy is that? I don’t get it,’ he said.

It was everything he hated. The airlessness, the dumb square portions of colourless goop, the hopelessness of a fantasy that ended only in sleep and death. To be strapped down, immobilised, blind, while shot through the universe at warp speed in something like a submarine. The idea gave him a terrible sick shearing feeling, the speed of the internal and the external at horrible odds with each other.

‘It’s exciting,’ said Surita.

‘It’s terrible. All those people wanting to die. Just wanting to dead-end their lives.’

She was silent for a little while. ‘These people, with the parties,’ she said at last. ‘I guess they’re pretty old?’

‘I think so.’

‘See, a dead end is not necessarily such a terrible thing for them. You – you wouldn’t understand. You’re a baby. You are brand new, my boy.’ She cocked her head, listening. Some vibration not perceptible to him. ‘She’s moving,’ she said. ‘Go say hi.’

Andrew’s mother had once been a larger woman, but illness had shrunk her down. She made a small neat mound in the centre of the bed, plenty of space

for him to sit and watch her laboured breathing. She was not awake, but not quite sleeping either; she coughed fretfully and turned her head aside.

It was Ma who'd given Andrew what knowledge he had of plants, of gardening. She who knew the names of things, though not in English. Who had first taken him collecting bulbs on the mountainside, when he was her last baby not yet in school. It was for her that he'd grown everything, every leaf and root. When he started his gardening gigs, he'd told himself that it would heal her, his fresh fruits, his green fingers. But as her illness had progressed, it had become clear that no amount of vegetable broth would plump her up again. And now? His paltry offerings were not enough, had never been enough.

Her hand twitched on the sheet, looking for a task. She had never been still in life, always planting or stirring or stitching. Andrew leaned forward and quietly tucked the strange little flower into her palm, closed her sweating fingers around its stem.

### 3.

Gaby woke late, it felt, although she didn't know the exact time and the low-ceilinged windowless space gave no clues.

The evening before, Mr Franks had brought her to this long low house half sunk into the mountain, high up. Not far from the apartment actually, with a view of the same sea. A blank granite façade, small barred windows, and a tall electrified security fence around the property. No number on the door. When they arrived at the house and made their way up the black brick driveway, someone must have been waiting for their arrival because the door cracked open as they approached.

The woman on the other side seemed not to want the outside spilling onto her skin. Gaby could make out only a gleam of curled silvery hair around a shadowed face. A vague figure, dark and large, not exactly welcoming, but a solid presence. Morne had left her there on the doorstep with a few murmured words.

There was a dense cool inside the house, and a pleasant mineral smell like damp stone. For a moment Gaby was confused, thinking that perhaps the smell came from the woman herself. She stepped into a rectangular living space, sparsely furnished. There were no pictures on the white walls. A window ran clear across one side, filled with a band of darkening Atlantic, needled by the aerials and chimneys of the buildings below. By some trick of perspective, the horizon seemed to lie above eye level, a blue wall of sea standing in the window. The floor was bare wood with one or two plain rugs, the furniture unassuming. Some books. There were no pictures on the walls, here in the living area.

'You can call me Doctor. Doctor Lerato.'

Gaby recognised the vibe. The discretion, the hushed anonymity. Like the waiting room of a hospital or a clinic. She'd been here before, or somewhere like this. If this clinic was cold and almost entirely odourless, Gaby could still smell the state she'd been in, the last time she'd been sent somewhere like this: the whiff of her own burnt hair, the gagging toxic taste at the back of her throat, the electric fright in her heart.

‘Downstairs, please. You must be tired.’ The woman’s voice was low, soft but commanding. Gaby followed her as she descended the twists of a circular stairway that sank through the floor in the corner of the room – the doctor whisking along neatly and silently, despite being a tall, solid-built woman – to the lower floor. Another long, low space: a corridor. Dim and cool here. You could feel the dense granite of the mountain leaning on the near wall, pressing its chill through the bricks. Heart-stone of ancient lava: nothing colder. Dr Lerato led her down the chill passageway.

It was carpeted in cool grey, with pale grey-blue walls and a low ceiling of acoustic tile. There were doors on both sides of the corridor, as in a hotel. Each had a small curtained-off window, peepshow style. A staticky noise that seemed to be seeping through the walls. It was fuzzy, a blank sound but a rhythm was discernible. A slow low see-sawing rhythm. An in ... and an out. Snoring. Gaby sensed a sleeper secreted like a grub behind each one.

Beyond one of these doors was a small room for her, a single bed, a small bathroom, and not much besides. Lerato left her there with instructions not to wander in the night. Gaby, surprised at her own fatigue after the day of digging, undressed – quite startled by the grit on her scalp, the sand tracked into her shoes under the edges of her socks. She put on a cream-coloured nightie that was laid out on the mattress for her, without showering. It was new, this feeling. The dirt, the sweat and exertion. And the exhaustion – she felt tired, so tired. She thought of trying to call her mother, but when she stepped across the small patch of carpet towards the bed the sensation was as if her legs were crumbling beneath her. She fell upon the bed like a pillar of ash at the end of a cigarette tumbling into the ashtray. Knocked off at the knees. A line of smoke coming up out of her head and rising straight for the ceiling.

Now – in what she assumed was the morning although there was no changed light, no clock – she dressed in the clothes she’d arrived in, sat on the bed and observed the door. For a paranoid moment she wondered if she’d been confined to some kind of asylum or posh jail cell; but when she tried the handle, it was not locked.

Again, the dim corridor. Gaby felt her skin pricking, as if she’d been

ambushed into something. She crept down the passage, very quiet. This place cowed her. Within these cool walls, Gaby knew, she'd be made to sit still and summon again and again: flames, fear, the hot stench of burning leaves. It was the sensual equivalent of a state of shame. Of offering up, again and again, some terrible confession, with no forgiveness in sight.

She went on past the closed doors and on into a large open-plan kitchen and dining area, laid out as if to cater for several guests but empty now, with small separate tables and a large coffee machine on a sideboard. One low down-light coming from above the oven. She'd thought she was the only person there, but then the woman's voice emerged from behind her, deep and marbled.

'You need to clean up,' it said.

She looked down at her stained clothes – she hadn't been aware of the extent of it, in the dim light of the previous evening, but it's true she looked like shit. There were dark-green smears on her jeans, and under her fingernails was a rind of deep green.

'It's not really dirt, it's just ... plant stuff.'

'Wash your hands at least. Are you ready for your session?'

'Um ... shouldn't I be going back to the garden place?'

'It's Sunday. I don't think it's required.'

'Oh ... ok. If you say so.' Weekdays, weekends. They'd never intruded too much on Gaby's sense of how time was structured. But she'd take this efficient person's word for it, why not.

'Make yourself some tea.' It wasn't a request.

Gaby couldn't remember when last she'd had to make a pot of tea – did she even know how? There was a tea-set on a tray on a side table, which, Gaby realised, was where the slightly sweetish, brackish smell was coming from. The tea was already brewing in the pot, thank fuck. Grey stoneware, slightly gritty to the touch, a minimal, modern Japanese design. Gaby could find no evidence of sugar, milk, teaspoon. Usually she was a bit of a sugar junkie, but today she'd let it go. The tea came out the spout an odd lake-green colour, but fragrant.

'Bring your cup. Come with me.' Doctor Lerato turned and walked away; she was a monumental figure, her dark caftan, which gave her a priestess-like

air, fluttering behind her.

Gaby followed the woman up the spiral stair and into a smaller office. Ah yes: another chair, another desk, another disapproving face across the table. Same old trouble. She felt almost at home.

The woman was behind her desk, typing something into her computer, apparently ignoring Gaby. The walls were lined with large empty whiteboards, like a classroom. There was only a hard upright chair to sit on. Weren't you supposed to get a couch? A box of tissues, at least?

Tap. Tap-tap. Pause. Frown. Tap-tap-tap. She was stern, with dark-grey hair in thin braids woven close to her scalp, pulling taut the dry, unlined skin across her broad face. Age, hard to tell. She was older than Gaby. Old. Hard to get an angle on.

She looked up at Gaby over her steel spectacles. 'Are you comfortable?'

Gaby shrugged, shook her head, jiggled her knee.

'Forgive me,' continued the woman, 'but you seem ... a little tense.'

'Haha, yes, that's what people always tell me. Buzzy boots. Fidget. Just the way I am.' She sniffed the rim of her teacup cautiously. 'What is it? This isn't rooibos. Or green tea.'

'I don't know the exact name – it's a mix of herbs, I have it made up for me. It's a relaxant. My clients find it helps with concentration, with sleep, with memory.'

'Your clients have amnesia?'

'Some of them. I work with all kinds of memory. People with bad memories, people with good ones. I help them.' Pause. 'That's why we are here today, you and me. I am hoping to help you too. I understand there are some things that you are having trouble recalling. Or at least talking about. Is this the case?'

Gaby felt accused. She was itchy in her skin. She twisted her head side to side, getting the crick out of her neck. Looking around the room. 'If you don't mind me asking, what is this place?'

'As you know, it's a clinic.'

Gaby chewed her lip, made a conscious effort to still her bobbing knee,

which was making the liquid in her teacup choppy. ‘But like ... are there other people here? In the house with us?’

‘We have various people staying here for lengths of time. Some long-term, some short. It helps, sometimes, to have one’s time supervised. Monitored. As you will find, it is very comfortable here. Very peaceful. You can sleep as long as you like. You won’t have to worry about running into anybody. I am careful about that.’

Gaby shook her head, cautious. Afraid of the quiet of this house. ‘I’d really rather just ... go home?’

The woman rested her heavy hands on the keyboard, looking straight at Gaby. ‘My dear,’ she said. ‘That is not possible. You would not be here if you were not in some difficulty. You need to speak to me. It is part of your healing to talk about what you have done. You understand, I have the police reports. I have your probation officer’s report.’ She paused. ‘I have your mother’s statement.’

Gaby felt herself flush. ‘What if ... what if you have no memories. Like genuinely.’

‘That would make life very hard indeed.’

‘Or just one or two that are like ... erased.’ She swiped a hand across her face, laughed.

‘That I can help with too. Do you find yourself in this unfortunate position?’ The woman had a slow, low voice that you had to concentrate on to hear properly, but that you also could not ignore or talk over.

‘Maybe. Can’t remember. Hah.’ Gaby kicked her chair with her heel.

Lerato considered her. ‘Why do behave as if you are a child? You are not a child.’

Gaby glared down at her tea. ‘I didn’t sleep last night.’

‘Were you anxious about this appointment?’

‘Well duh.’ Gaby ducked her head, took a sip from the cup. It was bitter, and the smell, although not bad, frightened her somehow. She wanted to spit it out.

‘It is not something to fear. My technique is quite relaxing. Very simple in fact. Very methodical.’



‘Okay.’

‘Let me explain.’ In combination with her relaxation techniques, they would bring back Gaby’s memory, bit by bit. First they would establish what they were working with. Make a list. Once Gaby had a scheme, a programme to follow, she could compel the squishy material of her brain to obey, to give up its secrets to the rigours of the numbered list.

‘We write things down. We order things. It is very systematic. We make an inventory of thoughts, what is missing and what is not missing, and together we try to fill in gaps and put things in proper sequence. We give the memories numbers. We start from one and go from there. Do you think you would be willing to do this?’

Gaby shrugged. She’d been through this before. Many therapists, many techniques. She had outlasted them all.

‘Try.’

‘Okay.’

‘Excellent.’ Lerato rewarded her with, not exactly a smile, but a somewhat warmer tone in her voice. She straightened in her seat, clapped her palms together. ‘Stand up. Go over to the whiteboard. Choose a colour pen. We are going to write.’

Gaby picked red. The whiteboard was huge and rectangular and entirely blank. She touched the tip of the pen to the board, skittishly pulled it away.

‘Begin with one,’ said Lerato. ‘The figure one. Write it.’

‘One,’ sighed Gaby. She wrote the numeral on the board and put a neat ring around it. And in fact, she did feel immediately more calm. She’d always been good with numbers, neat and quick with them too; her maths homework was the only thing in her life that had ever lined up straight, that had come out right. She smiled at the figure one, an old and secret friend.

‘Go on. Put down two, three, up to ten.’

Gaby wrote them, one under the other. Well, that certainly looked systematic. A beautiful empty list. Perhaps they could call it a day.

Lerato had moved – silently, which was rather alarming – to stand next to her. She tapped the numbers 1 through to 10 with her own pen, black. ‘This,’

she said. ‘This right here. These are the numbers we are needing to fill. This is the empty time in which things happened to you.’

Gaby nodded.

‘Now, first things first. Tell me the first thing you remember about the incident.’

Gaby’s brain was blank as a whiteboard. The first number, number one, was the longest. Number one had no beginning really. It was the whole of her life up to then. It is where the shadowy form of the Thing that Happened started to take shape, but if this process took in the day before, or the year before, or nineteen years, it was hard to tell. She cleared her throat. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Well. Think about where it happened. The place. The time.’

The place. The before, the after. When she closed her eyes to consider the hours in which the Thing had occurred, what she saw was a carpet of changing colours. Some bits of night, some bits of day. Spikes of refracted white light. Dense smells, a green swill in the back of her throat. The memory senses were full, pulsing, hot and dense with meaning.

She wondered how much Lerato knew, had been told. The police report had been vague, the policeman who filled it out barely literate. It was hard to read, scrawled in an unschooled hand by someone whose first language was not English. That’s how it often went in this town, Mr Franks had explained to her. Some dockets were never filed, some went missing; they were only ever handwritten on thin sheets of paper, never transferred to computer. The system was a recipe for forgetting. If her mother hadn’t decided to put her foot down this time, to teach Gaby a lesson, the thing would have gone away long ago. *Not this time Gabriela. It’s time you took some responsibility for your actions. I just want you to acknowledge this.*

But the incident she was meant to be acknowledging was almost unrecognizable to Gaby, and in any event there was this gap at the heart of it, a silence in the middle that mirrored the black hole at the heart of her own memories. The police report was tasteless, scentless. But all that was Gaby’s fault of course; it was her statement, it had her signature there beneath it to say it was hers, and so suffered from what she suffered from: a fatal absence, a fatal

uncertainty, a blankness and a lack.

Every now and then Gaby felt that some new tiny seed of memory was lying just under the surface, that it would need the smallest jab of the pen to poke it out of its hole and into the light. Sometimes she felt like she had whittled back a few millimetres of the darkness around the blackness. But only that much. And it was not enough.

She coughed, timidly. 'It was ... at my mother's.'

Lerato nodded, diagonally, in a way that was not exactly confirmation. 'Write it down.'

She wrote, next to one: *Mother*. Then paused, added: *Garden*. Then she stalled.

'My mother loved her garden, you know? More than anything, more than anything in the world. She –'

Lerato cut her off with a shake of her chin. 'This is not relevant to us now. It is not that kind of therapy. I do not wish to hear about your mother. I wish you to list what you remember.'

'Oh.'

A firm nod. 'Proceed, please. When did this occur?'

Gaby addressed the empty board again, cleared her throat. Next to two, she added: *Summer*.

'Sounds? Sights? Is there a smell in the air?'

Three. *Smoke*. Then Gaby capped her pen and stood back, a little scared 'That's it. I genuinely don't remember anything else.'

Lerato, unexpectedly, clapped her hands. 'Good! This is enough for today. There might be more points to remember, there might be less. We may not ever get the full picture. But we have more now that we did. Three points. Three is big.'

Yes, thought Gaby, standing back and looking at the spaces filled on the boards, the spaces unfilled. Three things is quite big. She cleared her throat timidly.

Oddly, but somehow rightly, it seemed it was time to sleep again. She found she could barely keep her eyes open.



Again, into this landscape of dreaming beings, others had come, as they often had before. They moved very quickly, with purpose. The bridge with its crude imperfect senses, the skeleton clutching its narrow fists, they could barely keep track; the new humans blurred and fizzled, leaving contrails of light. Standing, kneeling, digging, worrying. The new human girl. That girl in particular. She'd skittered over the surface of the place, picking and plucking at things – a source of acute disturbance, especially among the older inhabitants. They'd shrunk from her, sinking fractionally deeper into the ground at her humming and shrill laughter, her ceaseless motion.

But today, there was nobody here to see with human eyes. A day of rest. The land took the hours to shake itself out, to stretch and relax, unbothered by the pokings and proddings of its human visitors, the familiar and the new. Under the eye of the sky the new plants stretched and raised their heads, and looked around, and raised the gaudy little parasols of their flowers into the air. After millennia of slow waiting, they were urgent, seeking, pulsing out their desires. The flowers manufactured a scent that had not been registered on the air for many, many years. Certain small sleeper beasts – one beetle with a bright blue spot behind its mandibles; a tiny butterfly of soft mauve; a rusty-coloured, endangered bee with a buzzing flight above the range of human hearing – which had held on all these years for just this moment, to consummate and then expire; all these caught the call. All came scrambling, did their duty. The flowers spasmed, absorbed, shed their petals on the smiling ground. Swelled and fattened.

Fruits grew. Grew tasty.

In the night, a film fell from objects and they grew larger, filling and overfilling their footprints. Calmer and more confident. A small furred creature stirred in a hole that the man had dug earlier. The spider measured the span between the forgotten trowel handle and the ground. The bridge itself stretched, cracking its iron knuckles, feeling the tickle of a new graffiti like a tattoo.

Everything took stock. Of the damage and the gains.

Roland had given up on sleep that night, sitting up in his blankets. The night was turning cold and he'd had to make himself a fire in a small tin drum. He fed it stingily, eyes tightened against its light as if against pain. Drawn by the heat, the dog came slinking in and curled its back against his legs in the blanket and he let his hand fall on the animal's skull, which was warm and smooth. 'Yes you devil,' he said.

He couldn't remember when the dog had first appeared, but it had always seemed natural, always there. When the dog occasionally disappeared on whatever mysterious canine mission, he missed it as if looking down at the ground on a sunny day and seeing no shadow self attached to his heels.

This old dog, he thought fondly, she was with him in his dreams, too. But no, that couldn't be right, this one was a young dog, new, lively and unflecked with grey, still up and biting – he chuckled – but in another way it was the same, the same dog each time, over and over again. And maybe he too had been here before, the man under the bridge, time after time, and maybe if he waited long enough the woman he remembered would return too, with her small dark eyes and the twist to her mouth, and her small hands, he remembered them delicately plucking the melons from the soil, but then he thought of how she had looked with the orange light of the cooking-fire on her cheek, and some deep ferocious part of him unfurled shuddering in such rage that he took the dog by the ears and hurled him away from him and the dog yelped and hurtled into the night. Roland rolled over and pulled the blanket around himself again tight, tight, because this was the problem: his memory was too good, it was sharper than sharp, sometimes so bright that he had to knot himself up and bury his head in the cradle of his own arms and knees and still the light came seeping through the cracks, because fully all the sky was a sheet of flame.



'My darling, just listen to me. Forget the Mars thing. It's done to death ... no,

the kids are into all this dystopian shit.’

Morne had pushed back the driver’s seat and had his seat up on the dash, one eye on the CitiGreen Gates. It was seven-thirty a.m., a good time to spring a change on an unsuspecting client. ‘Apocalypse! ... just listen to me, ok? The last scattered remnants of humanity, surviving off the land, as our ancestors did in the dawn of time, as the world dies around them! ... I don’t know, some kind of disaster? Nuclear? Just climate change? We can decide later – there’s time to get the narrative right. But there’s a whole lovely hunter-gatherer vibe we can tap into. We have good tubers, lovely herbs. All totally authentic. They’ll adore it.’

He shut off the call – McAlpine in full flow – when he saw Andrew arriving for work. He waited for the younger man to lock up his bicycle, then slung his arm round Andrew’s shoulders.

‘Andy! Let’s take a walk.’

Walks were one of Morne’s favoured modes of meeting. For difficult subjects, tricky interactions. He liked to walk – unusual, in a town where many of the roads had no verges, no official place for human feet to pass. It calmed him to walk through this city, many parts of which belonged to him; and sometimes it usefully unsettled the people he was with.

Not that he was trying to unsettle the lovely Andrew; heaven forbid. But it felt right to take him walking. He enjoyed Andrew’s company, and he didn’t want to hurt him. A good walk can soften many blows.

Today they passed along the edge of the old canal, where a new walkway had recently been built: a broad strip of plain oatmeal-coloured composition brick with a low safety rail, just not wide enough to sit on. On the other side, a concrete bank, also at an unwelcoming angle, separating pedestrians from a slope of artificial grass above, behind which in turn soared a big glass and steel building raised ten storeys above the odorous canal. When the sun dropped, this whole pathway would be in deep shadow. It seemed attractive from a distance, but up close it was an environment that did not encourage a human to dawdle. Andrew trailed his fingers across the concrete, which was studded at various intervals with mysterious brass ferrules.

‘Oh, don’t touch those,’ Morne murmured.

Andrew put his hand into his pocket. ‘Where are we going?’

‘I just wanted to show you a few things. This here, all along here this is ours,’ said Morne, gesturing along the tow path. Another of his habits, to refer to things as ‘ours’, as if he was the representative of a vast corporation – or perhaps even as if he wished to include Andrew in ownership.

He liked to do this, to touch on the various pieces of the city that were in his name. Location, location. It was a situation he’d inherited: once, his family had owned a portfolio of stately estates, places with grand facades, sweeping elevations, vineyards. But over the generations, through a series of mishaps and inattentions, somehow what once had been a real-estate empire was now reduced to scraps: small patches of land, verges and embankments, chunks of this and that forgotten now in the city registries, some only a few metres wide. And the family line was reduced to one proprietor of these illogical holdings: himself. One such patch was the troubled acre below the bridge where CitiGreen now staked its claim.

It gave him pleasure, his scattered empire. Morne had a map he’d sometimes consult, on which were marked the irregular portions of his inheritance. He didn’t quite know what he wanted to keep them for; it was much like collecting stamps. It seemed to him the shards might be collected together again, some time, into some larger domain. He enjoyed his scraps and offcuts and remainders of land. And there was a little bit of money to be made, here and there. Enough.

Because – as he explained now to Andrew – although you might assume such little properties had no purpose or demand, you would be wrong. Back in the day, when there was still money in the film industry here, location-finding had been one of his gigs. He knew all the angles, all the nooks and crannies, the sweeping vistas, the run-down back alleyways; he owned a number of them. He’d never made a film himself but he was good at securing interesting spots. Later, when that work dried up, he found different avenues. He found himself scouting novel settings for festivals, for getaways, for parties.

In some lucky instances, a scrap or strip of land belonging to him turned

out to lie across the path of some grand new development, or in the way of its attractive view: people would pay quite large sums of money to ease or defuse these fortunate inconveniences. Of all things that the rich were willing to let go of, it seemed, the view was the last to be relinquished.

And security, of course. What he'd also realised is that high-end buildings prefer to have a dead zone around them, for protection; strips of buffer land that could be sealed off and armoured and covered in anti-vagrant spikes or live electric wires or discouraging sprinkler systems. Many of the bits of land he owned had been made over into such fiercely armoured defensive spaces in this way, and were rented to the establishments they protected. He owned the median strip, for example, that ran alongside the office park that abutted the old city cemetery. Previously, he'd let university kids gather what were – apparently – a fascinating collection of median-strip-adapted dung-beetles. But now the students would have had to dodge ingenious motion-detecting metal spikes that erupted from the ground when the median was breached. The dung-beetles were in fact doing fine; they were too light to trigger the mechanism. He owned this canal path.

Sometimes – and this part he did not say to Andrew as they walked – he thought it was his touch, his blight, that turned these spaces toxic. If he was a farmer, it was these strange things he nurtured: spikes and shocks. No, he did not have green fingers. Sometimes he thought they might be red.

It was a living, of a kind. But even this niche demand was drying up, now. Business was fleeing ever further and further from the city centre with its water-supply issues. There would come a time, he mused, when all the world would be used up; all of it seen, seen to, trodden in and down, fenced off and photographed. Every last inch covered in life-repelling blades. And his niche in all this, curator of little forgotten corners and patches, would be made redundant. 'Why are you showing me these things?' Andrew broke into his thoughts.

Morne sighed. 'I'm trying to help you,' he said gently. 'I own these spaces, like I own CitiGreen. I'll need help with all of them, with maintaining them. You could help me. I want you to help me.'

Andrew was stubborn. Like a child. He scuffed the ground. 'There's



nothing for me to do here. It's all ... paved. What can I grow here? This is all I know how to do – grow shit. Living things. I'm not a ... caretaker. I'm a gardener.'

Morne's eyes were on the young man's forearm, rippling with green life. Ah, Andy. An innocent, with his baskets of sad produce. Morne would have enjoyed it if Andrew had had a little frond or leaf inked into the corner of his mouth, or maybe the nostril, to complete the Green Man impression, and had at times thought of suggesting it, but had restrained himself. It was only for Andrew, and his enjoyment of Andrew, that he hadn't arranged for the CitiGreen garden to be levelled long ago, covered over in spikes or bumps or razor wire. He remembered the first time he'd seen the young man, digging in the soil under the bridge. He'd been passing by, checking his properties, as ever, and had been transfixed by the sight. It had never occurred to him before that someone might find life in any of his spaces. The young man had, of course, reacted like he was about to be arrested; he'd had to soothe him. The boy had plucked a fragrant leaf and held it out to Morne like a gift, like an identity card. It wasn't stealing, he seemed to plead, if you added to the land instead of taking things away. And he was a beautiful young man, and Morne was an appreciator of ornament.

'Will you sell it?' Andrew asked. 'CitiGreen.'

A tricky pause. 'I would tell you if I was going to do that.'

Andrew looked at him. He was so tense he seemed half suspended above the gravel path, not quite trusting his weight to it. The air between them vibrated. It was not quite sexual tension, but almost.

'There's a party coming up,' Morne said. 'I could use the help.'

The young man's body did not relax. His big hands hung, waiting for the right work. 'I'm not a waiter, I'm a ...'

'Gardener, yes, yes I know.' Morne sighed again. 'It's a twenty-first. You won't have to do anything weird. I know you can use the money.'

Andrew allowed his chin to dip in assent. He had a lovely jawline

'It's a themed party – end of the world, is the idea,' Morne continued. 'So we need some kind of blasted place that looks like the apocalypse has come and gone. People gone back to living off the land, etcetera. Maybe it's all

radioactive.’

‘Do you want me to cater? There’s not much ...’

‘No, no – actually the opposite.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘New instructions. What I’d like you to do is – dig it all up.’

‘What?’

They’d walked in a big circle by this point, back to where they started.

‘Dig up CitiGreen. Basically lay waste. Can you give me a Mad Max vibe.’

Andrew stood speechless.

‘That’s what I want from you now, Andy.’ He put his hand on Andrew’s shoulder. ‘Pull it all up. Do a bit of ungardening for me.’



‘I’ve never seen you dirty,’ Craig smiled when he arrived to pick her up. She’d been snoozing quietly in her windowless room, her mind filling with numbers and erasing them again.

‘Don’t be rude! I showered just now.’

She had, feeling magnanimous; it felt like her grooming was a favour to the people around her, and particularly to Craig. But she couldn’t get it off, all the dirt. Days later, she could still feel small granules of soil crunching between her molars. And there was a new smell that had infiltrated her hair, something green and pungent.

He’d brought her one of his old t-shirts and had actually gone and bought some track pants and trainers, as she’s asked – she had nothing of that nature in her normal wardrobe. The ones he’d chosen were kind of gross, shiny blue with big logos, but anyway.

She showed him her hands. ‘Look! Blisters!’

Craig took her hands in his and turned them palms-up, like a teacher about to smack them with a ruler. His hands seemed different against her skin. She could not help comparing them to Andrew’s; they seemed soft and too pink

and somehow overly padded after those lean green-brown tools.

‘Seems like they could have found something better for you. Something more appropriate.’

‘What do you mean, more appropriate? I can do it. You should have seen me yesterday.’

‘No, I mean – just more suited to you. Come on, you’re not exactly the outdoors type.’

‘My mother had a garden. I used to follow the gardener around. I liked him.’

‘There, you see, exactly,’ he said with a laugh. ‘You always had a gardener to do this stuff for you, love.’ He looked at her curiously. ‘This is the first time you’ve mentioned her, you know.’

She looked away, then held her fingers up to Craig’s nose. ‘What is it? What can you smell?’ she asked.

He blinked, puzzled. ‘Nothing. It’s nothing. I can’t smell a thing.’ He looked at her suspiciously, as if she might be trying to trick him.

Impatiently, she pulled her hand away. She was bored with this guy now. Ready for more.

When they pulled up at CitiGreen, Andrew wasn’t there. She checked her watch tetchily. Okay, she was pretty late. The gate was locked. She groaned and shook the bars, feeling a little flame of anxiety lighting up deep in her belly. What the fuck. She couldn’t just turn around and go home. She’d forgotten to ask Andrew to sign the goddamn form yesterday. And it was what, a good four hours she’d spent here yesterday? Make it five, who’s going to know. Irritating, though. No sign of the man on the horizon.

Craig leaned out of the car window. ‘Everything okay?’

God, the guy was getting annoying. Soon it would be time to stuff that up, she supposed. The usual ways. She gave him a curt half-wave and a thin-lipped smile and turned away, leg jiggling, to face the gate again. She was a little jazzed, truth be told, to be back here. To see Andrew again. There was something about him. Not sexual exactly, but ... something that spoke to her. Like she’d

known him before. She turned and waved Craig away impatiently, and at last he finally did peel off back up the off-ramp to the highway.

Beyond the wire, she became aware of shadows under the bridge. It seemed like night was still pooling there in the cracks. She glanced shiftily up at the elevated road, and back – and my god, it really did seem like the black shadows under the bridge were welling, were expanding out ... she gave a yelp when a slab of darkness broke away and came unsteadily towards her.

A figure. Human at least. Tall, ragged, loping aggressively directly across the beds. An old guy, bearded. Maybe some kind of caretaker? She clenched her fingers around the metal of the gate, forced herself to be still. If he came from inside, surely he must on some level belong here?

The man came right up to the gate and stood there, as if equally puzzled to find her in his path, waiting for her perhaps to dematerialise. Stubbornly, she let her hand drop from the bars. ‘It’s locked,’ she said unnecessarily.

He nodded, although he didn’t seem to want to meet her eye. Then he reached one hand into the grimy folds of an old khaki woollen scarf he’d wrapped around his throat, and extracted, inch by oily inch, a length of twine – the same kind Andrew used to tie back the plants, she thought – and at the end of it, jumping from his collar like a fish-hook that had lost its fish at the last moment, a brass-coloured Yale key. He worked it into the lock, opened up.

‘Hah,’ she said, smiling foolishly.

He didn’t laugh, but paused and looked at her with mild surprise. Then without warning the man took Gaby’s hand in both of his: a cool, unconvincing clasp, hands unaccustomed to such contact. The grip lasted only a second or two.

‘I’m Gaby, hi,’ she said.

He nodded thoughtfully. She wondered if he could speak at all. But just then he looked around and split the air with a whistle, a surprisingly pure and silver note to emerge from such a figure. Gaby turned to follow his gaze; the dog was up there right on top of the bridge, head turned towards them, its overlarge ears pointed towards the sound. It seemed to be waiting.

‘I didn’t even know there was a way up there! Uh. That dog? He’s yours, right?’

The dog slipped from the skyline and now a few moments later was coming out from under the shadowed bridge and trotting towards them. It was like the bridge was birthing all these beings out of the darkness, she thought, one by one. All day yesterday she'd been working metres from the structure, with no idea anyone was under there, that there even was space for a person down there beneath the concrete span.

'Why?' the man asked without looking at her. A single deep word, his voice surprisingly pleasing, dark and grainy. 'Why do you ask about the dog? Did you get bitten?'

'No, no, but he comes in here and leaves his shit on the plants. The guy, Andrew – he was throwing rocks at him!' Her voice sounded high, childishly outraged, to her own ears. '*Does* he bite?'

The man swung open the gate and then took up her left hand again, picked it up quite casually, as if now that they'd conversed he was free to be intimate. Gaby was too startled to resist. Normally, she was not one for casual contact, not unless she was making it, that is. He looked closely at her hand, as if he did not believe that she had not been harmed. Turned it over, examined the lines of the palm. Gaby felt embarrassed by the grime under her fingernails. They looked like shit. She knew what he was thinking, what everyone was thinking. These hands didn't belong here. The girl these hands belonged to, what good could she do here.

'No,' he said. 'The dog is a female, firstly. And no, she is not mine. That is a bad dog but she is quite clean. I know her.'

And then the dog was there, pushing between their ankles and out through the gate, unafraid. The man was heading off up the bank towards the highway too.

'Hold on.' She fished in her tracksuit pocket for her scruffy folded hours sheet, a pen. He's got to be a caretaker, she thought. So, then, a plausible figure of authority. 'So, um, ja – can you sign this form for me then, please?'

He took the pen and paper like foreign ritual objects. Mystified.

'Just ... just please put your signature there in the block. See, I've filled in – five hours.' She paused. 'Your ... name?'

He held the pen more confidently now, pulling off the top with his teeth – yuck – and scowling at the piece of paper. Now he was making an impatient rotating motion with his pen hand – turn, turn around. She did.

She felt him press the paper up against her back; the pen digging in just under her shoulder blade. An emphatic stab, then another. It made her think of a game they'd played as kids. You closed your eyes, someone punched you in the back and said it was a dagger going in. *Crick, crack, stab in the back*. The illusion was so real you could feel the blood on your skin, queasily cool.

He folded the paper crisply, capped the pen, handed them back to her and with a nod was on his way again, striding with big ferocious steps straight up the bank towards the highway, where the traffic was hotting up. That was another girlhood game: *we walk straight, so you better get out the way ...*

When she unfolded the piece of paper, she saw there was nothing there but a big, crude cross inked across the bottom. As bold and archaic as an x-marks-the-cross on a pirate's treasure map.

She made her way over to the little corrugated-iron shack in the corner. The door was not bolted. Inside it smelt fruity, and there were indecipherable shapes stacked on the shelving. Books and rocks and things. She didn't look too close. She'd just wait here quietly until Andrew pitched up, she decided.

Bored after about three minutes, she cracked open his crusty old notebook – soil trapped in its spine, green and brown smears on the pages. Just for fun, she located another notebook with clean pages, a nibbled old ballpoint pen – yuck – and started to transfer Andrew's crap handwriting into the neat uniformity of her handwriting.

This was nice, it was restful. It took her back, again, to maths class in high school. Smoothing things out, combing out the grit and the errors, weeding out the faults and planting neat clean rows of figures instead. One thing for sure, she quickly figured out: this business was going down the tubes. Whoever this Morne guy was, he was clearly prepared to shovel the cash into a bottomless hole, in exchange for, what? A couple of artichokes or whatever? Thoughtfully, she picked at her fingernails – never had such dirt, such grime. She'd have to get them done again soon, after her hours were up. Something was jammed in under

the nail so it was actually uncomfortable. She fished around in her bag for a hairclip and used the end to dig the thing out. A little capsule, shiny black. It glinted at her like an eye; inscrutable. She flicked it off her finger and into the dark garden, and then immediately regretted it; wanted to find the tiny seed again, take it back. Grow it in a pot, maybe, or just keep it, like those lucky beans that had been a brief collecting craze in junior school. She sighed. It was gone. The air was growing warm and dense around her. She could hear traffic buzzing in the distance. What now?

She shoved the books back into place on the shelf – neater than she'd found them anyway – and located a trowel and a fork. No gloves, fuckit. She just wanted to get on, finish up the job. She hustled over to the plot she'd been working on yesterday, almost at a jog, then barreled to a halt at the edge of the weeded patch. Or what had been weeded when she last looked. 'What the fuck!'

The soil was no longer a flat page of brown, but dotted here and there with the nudging heads of some kind of plant. Strange-looking little green nubbins poking up out of the soil. She felt responsible for the plants' appearance, like she'd done the job wrong the day before. But ... but no. These were different. They weren't the same things as she'd ripped up the day before. She knelt to get a better look.

The thing about tiny plants, of course, if you lack green fingers, is that they are all much of a muchness. Little green jobs. But up close, this plant was ... interesting-looking, juicy and fat and a healthy green, like a chameleon. Spherical, a modest circlet of chunky lobes radiating in a spiral from the centre, each dotted with tuft of pale fibres. Plump globes, like taut green labia, with a sheen to the skin. Some of them had tiny spiky flowers, funny mottled fawn and yellow, and smelling – she bent to make sure – very faintly of meat. And so fast! What kind of thing shoots up overnight, when everything else is dwindling and dying? Already they were the size they sell decorative cacti at garden centres – cute last-minute gifts or party favours, covered in wacky prickles or hair or barely plausible fluorescent flowers.

She poked at one of them investigatively – then pulled away with a yelp. There was a tiny bead of blood on her fingertip. 'Eina!' She peered more closely.

The prickles were there, embedded in the skin, but they were very slender, almost transparent, fine as hairs or asbestos fibres.

More carefully, she plucked a few out of the ground, but her motivation was low. What was the bloody point? She wasn't getting anywhere. The more she pulled stuff up, the more eagerly it seemed the plants replaced themselves. All the work she'd done before – for nothing. In fact, the plants seemed to have grown beyond the bounds of the previous bed. Plucking them out at random, she found herself edging closer to the bridge: the new little plants seemed to grow even more thickly at its base.

A noise up there, something moving between her and the sun. She peered up at the bridge, just in time to see a flash of bright fur, the silhouette of a dog's muzzle against the pale morning sky. She glanced around, confused, but the gate was still shut and there was no man in sight. Could there be two dogs? A pack? Curious, she walked along towards where the curve of the old bridge intersected with the ground. Here there was a barrier of old concrete bollards and a corrugated-iron barrier painted with chevrons, presumably to stop motorists accidentally driving up there at speed and ejecting themselves off the broken end of the bridge. A barrier that once had thought itself to be temporary. She folded her gloved hands across her chest and contemplated it. The patch of weedy sand around the bollards was grubby with the signs of teen usage: beer cans, cigarette packets. *Poesgat* said the paint on the bollard closest to her; a broken bottle-neck lay at her feet. Apart from that, the place had nothing to offer in terms of human purpose. On the other side of the barrier, where the old bridge rose, a band of tough thorny-looking bush had grown up; it seemed impassable. But not for a dog, apparently. A narrow track wormed into the bushes. Beyond it, the grey flank of the old bridge rose up, a ghost road, a ramp into the haze.

Although she couldn't see the dog, she thought she heard an encouraging little yip from above. Come and play.

She put a leg over the barrier and eased herself over. Good thing she was wearing the old track pants, after all. Thorny branches slapped and grabbed her thighs as she waded in, following the narrow track. The bushes were higher than they seemed, almost meeting over her head at one point. A compost stink, an



ambient cicada shriek, on the edge of audibility. She pushed on, and the curve of the bridge rose up under her feet and carried her out of the bushes and into the full sun. She carried on up, the slope like the listing deck of a beached aircraft carrier. Two broad lanes had been intended here, though the markings now were faded and ambiguous. It would be too narrow, now, for contemporary traffic. It did seem a little quaintly undersized, fragile, even swaying a little beneath her feet – although might be an illusion created by the dry breeze. The tar here was an elderly grey, not black, and cracking apart into rough tetragons. This was a little alarming: the substance of the bridge dissolving beneath her feet. The road markings gave up, growing paler and more hesitant. The central line had petered out, as if the road-painters had run short of steam or will. The tar dwindled away, and by the time the bridge had delivered her to its crest, there was none left: just sand. The broken edge was a straight line ahead of her, a clean horizontal line drawn across the city vista, echoing the horizon. The bridge had arrived, but no road had come to meet it. She was an ant on a diving board, suspended in on the lip of the cracked and dried-up swimming pool that was the city bowl.

At her feet, poking up through the sand, she noticed the green shoots of the strange new plants. They had spread up here too, pressing closer to the sun. Indeed, it felt hotter up here. She could feel the rays crisping her, simultaneously aging her and wearing her down to a younger layer of skin.

The view was very fine, though. She could see far and vividly, as if Andrew's efforts in the garden below had produced a crystalline local atmosphere, a clear bubble in the smog. From up high, she found it easier to view the garden; it had a different, more impressive aspect from here. She could see its symmetry emerging, an orderly vision. She saw now that the beds were arranged in a neat green spiral, a maze not in fact not meant to bewilder, but rather a tight design of precise convolutions. The plants looked like cogs in some complex green machine of mysterious purpose.

The Krebs Cycle, the phrase came to her from nowhere, from some sunstruck classroom of her childhood. Those neat arrows indicating cycles of ... what, photosynthesis? Yes. She remembered that quite well. At the time she'd liked reproducing those diagrams, but now they seemed very dry chalkings to

stand in for all this shape-shifting growth and decay. Mulching, she thought. Another concept she was not entirely clear on. It was good to observe it all from up here. Lifted up into another dimension, she could see the plan and pattern of it all.

A tremor through her soles. Was the bridge actually shifting, shivering a little? The whole situation seemed precarious: this unsteady, unsturdy bridge swaying over Andrew's garden, and Gaby riding its back. She felt a swell of concern: CitiGreen was hidden from the eyes of cars and houses. Nobody was watching. Anything might happen. The mountain was far away, and she out of its protective shadow. Beyond the bounds of the garden, the spaghetti curls of the highway curved away in several directions, and she saw deep into the zones on either side, into more odd space she would never otherwise have seen. On this side of the bridge, beyond the sagging fence was a sand track leading into homely suburb of modest houses, turning their faces away and covering their rears with corrugated-iron cladding. They were blandly coloured, flatland houses, not tin shacks like on the other side of the bridge but still small and huddled close together, people living in each other's backyards. She could see down into small plots. There was no person in the landscape. In one of the yards a dun dog, pitbull or some related mix, paced back and forth, chained to a fence on a runner. In another, a line of washing flicked and straightened its sleeves.

On the other side was a long concrete fence she hadn't noticed before, made to stop people breaking through to the highway; beyond that, shacks. A parking lot, painted with faded lines and arcs like some vast court for a forgotten, archaic ball-game; she made out the faded H of a helipad. Around the edges were various low buildings of the government type, barbed wire around the edges, towers with radar equipment and aials, but everything run-down, desolate, cracked and neglected, weeds sewing the hardstands together with straight seams. She caught a waft of that green scent from below. Could the stubborn weeds have infiltrated there too? Could they have got so far, so fast? She imagined them pushing though the cement, drawing green lines on the grey ground. Dipping in and under the surface, knitting it all together, pulling it apart, radiating out into the city and beyond. Only the newer tar of the highway was

free of their splitting shoots. The thought made her shiver. She edged forward until she was near the drop, peering to see the cars passing up there on the overpass.

But under all this, under this running commentary she was giving herself on the scene before her, on its surfaces and gradients, something else was starting to happen. Her heart, she noticed, was beating a little too fast; something to do with the smells of the plants at her feet. She lifted her gloved hand to her nose, sampled the scent again. There was a strange swelling feeling in her chest as of a balloon inflating. She gulped down a mouthful of air. And that smell, that smell was clouding her sinuses again and making her eyes water, thick as soapy water in the back of her throat. Soap, or smoke. Something bad creeping into the air, the view, the space about her. The clarity in the air she'd noticed earlier was being fogged by something, a murk creeping over the landscape. *Trouble. Trouble.* Something was slotting into place, airy building blocks falling around her and settling into some terrible ... some familiar ... some constellation of ...

She felt like she'd stepped out of a spaceship onto the surface of a strange planet, one where she didn't know if the atmosphere would sustain breath. She swayed like a tightrope-walker, not daring to run unless she lose all balance and direction and float right over the edge. But she breathed. The hostile air allowed her to edge forward, to put out a hand for the gritty railing. Carefully, carefully, she lowered herself into a sitting position, legs over the edge, feet hanging in their new cheap trainers. She rested her face against the broken railing, sighed. There was a slight winter-sun warmth coming through the metal.

Completely still. No twitching, no jiggling or fiddling. She remembered her mother had been able to sit just so, for hours, elegantly. *Be still Gabriela.*

But she couldn't focus because everything was growing dim and murky, was growing choked with smoke, and the old rusted hand-rail was growing hot to the touch and she was very afraid that if she looked beyond her knuckles into the void another time she would find it lit by flames, flames rising. A flame in her palm.

She tried to remember a relaxation technique a previous therapist had taught her: in times of doubt, go back to the body, your body, keep your gaze

and your mind on your own small centre of gravity. She stared at her knuckles: skin stretched white as the bones beneath. This. This my own hand. This is up and this is down, my head my feet. These were the techniques.

But when she looked at her narrow hand, there was something else shouting for her attention. Right there, growing out of crack in the concrete barrier right next to her pale knuckles, was one of the plants, the new ones. It dangled before her a fruit so taut and swelling that it seemed liable to burst in her face. Its scent so dense and musky-rich that she could almost see it winding its way up through the air. She held her breath.

She bent to pick the deep green globe. Sharp pain, blood on her palm. She'd forgotten the spines. A red trickle down her wrist, twisting down her forearm and onto her t-shirt sleeve; it seemed like sign, a confirmation: something was coming out of her. Something was coming clear.

She brought the fruit to her nose. The faintest delicious scent. Lime jelly. Childhood smell. On impulse she took out her phone, thinking to dial, then changed her mind. Nobody would answer, now or ever. Instead she flipped it to video mode, balanced it carefully against the railing.

'Look, mum,' she said, holding up the fruit. 'I'm a proper gardener now. Look what I grew!'

She smiled, turned the round fruit in the light so its green skin gleamed. There was no response from the world, from the phone, from the quiet air for miles around. Again she got a waft of that delicate scent. 'I thought you might know what it is, Mum. We could plant it in the garden.'

The fruit seemed to have softened even in the few moments she'd been holding it: her thumb imprinted it, like a ripe pear. The skin seemed to split almost of its own accord, her fingernail slicing into the tender skin. The eruption of aroma was immediate. Saliva burst at the back of her jaw – she hadn't eaten for so long, she couldn't remember when last. She was never hungry, usually.

'Is it good, Mum? Should I try it?'

She sent the video message. Then put the phone on the edge next to her thigh, watching it from the corner of her eye. The phone remained still. After a minute the screen went black. No reply. There never was.

*Fucked up you fucked up you fucked it all up again.*

The thing is. The thing. The thing was.

She closed her eyes. *One. Start with One*, said Lerato.

*One was: Sun. Two was: Water.*

The memory was there, was waiting. A dark seed nestled in the flesh of a sunny day. She could not turn her head away.

*Three was: Grass.*

A man held up his flaming palms.

*Four.*

Fire.



Andrew sat very still in chair, bent over to expose his back. He'd been angry, earlier; too angry to return to work that day. To do what Morne had asked of him. *Ungardening*. Christ. It made him sick to think of it; of pushing his hands into the soil and ripping the life out of it at the roots.

But now he was a little calmer. Behind him, his youngest older sister Surita passed her fingers soothingly over his skin. She was looking for a space to fill. If he raised his eyes, he could see what she was looking at in the mirrors facing each other: his back a riot of intricate green. She'd done all his tattoos; he trusted her sure small fingers, surprisingly strong, and always cool like this, however long she gripped the needle. His other sisters came in and out, busy in their quiet way, checking on his progress.

'Where shall we plant this one?' Surita said. 'Running out of real estate here.'

He reached over his own shoulder, touched the spot. It was that tricky patch, always itching, hard to scratch. 'Just there. Below the Euphorbia.'

He knew she didn't know which one was the Euphorbia, but she found the small patch of clean skin easily, pressing her fingertip onto the spot. 'Small,' she said, 'and the last one here. You're gonna be all filled up. What will you do

next time? Not your face, please boetie.'

'No,' he sighed. 'I'm not sure. Maybe I'll be done then.'

She nodded. 'You were just waiting for this one missing piece, huh? Waiting to finish something off.'

He nodded and lowered his eyes from the reflection.

'OK, so tell me what you want,' she said.

'The flower.' She'd put it in a tumbler of water on the windowsill; it seemed to be glowing an even brighter yellow here. He pointed at it. 'Can you do that for me?'

She nodded. 'Sure, would have to do the line drawing first. You want me to do it now? I don't have anyone else coming in.'

'Yes please. I can wait. If that's ok.' It was all he really wanted to do: sit here in the warmth, having someone kind pay close attention, with her eyes, her fingers, with the fine painful attention of the needle. Right now to go back to CitiGreen seemed like the loneliest thing in the world: all that denuded ground. It scared him somehow; it was true, he did feel that it was all coming to an end. He was pulling his feet up into the armchair in the corner like a child, teacup to his lips, when his phone rang. Fuck. The number was Morne's. He ignored it. But then it rang again, and again, and the noise made Surita glance up from her sketch-book with a frown.

Andrew ground the green call button with his thumb. 'What?'

'Andy, mate, there's someone up there, on top of the bridge.'

'What?'

'There's a person at CitiGreen. On top of the bridge. You're not there?'

'No. Christ. Who is it?'

'Looks like a girl.'

Ah. Of course. He should have known. 'Oh Jesus Christ. How the did she get in?' Andrew muttered. And then: 'Oh fuck, oh no, she's not going to jump, is she?'

'Hmm. Hard to say, isn't it? I mean, she hasn't taken the plunge yet.' An assessing pause. 'Dunno, she's not going forward or back at this point. Just sort of ... hovering.'

‘I don’t know what the fuck she’s doing up there,’ said Andrew. ‘I certainly didn’t tell her to go up there. It’s a fucking death trap.’

‘Who is she?’

‘Who do you think? The YD girl. At risk. No kidding.’

‘Huh. I’m quite impressed, actually. All this time, it’s never occurred to me to go up there myself. What’s she like, this girl?’

‘She’s ... flaky, let’s just say?’

Andrew flexed his fingers, flicking them out as if to rid them of soil. The tattoos shivered on his wrists. Surita was watching him, listening to the conversation with interest.

Morne’s voice was an irritant buzz: ‘Well, don’t you think you should try and get her down, at least?’

‘No. No, no. No fucking ways, I’m not going up there.’

On the line, Morne sighed theatrically. ‘Well, I suppose it’s up to me then.’



Morne found the way up to the bridge quite easily and climbed its slope, enjoying the uncanny feeling of striding up the middle of an abandoned highway, and one set at a fairly steep tilt at that. It was a clear fresh day, scoops of cloud in the sky; an Earth day, not a day for contemplating the end of the world or thinking of planets beyond the blue. He almost whistled. At the top, he could see the girl sitting right at the snapped-off edge, legs poking through a gap in the railing, hair wafting up a puff of brightness against the blue sky. It was a pretty sight, clean, despite the morning petrol fumes rank in his throat.

He didn’t notice the new growth around the edges of the bridge, the bulbous leaves pushing up through the seams in the concrete. The vines might loop around his ankles and he would simply snap them unawares with his stride. He was not really a plant guy, after all. It was people he liked to watch, and now he was watching her.

He stood still to watch the figure in fascination for a moment or two. She was still too far away to make out much but the figure seemed stiff somehow, stubborn. A small scrap of life against the concrete. A child, a girl. Skin and hair almost white in the new sunlight. Would she, wouldn't she? He found himself rooting for her to step away. But also holding his breath and waiting for her to float off the edge, weightless as a dandelion seed. She didn't look around to see him.

He didn't want to call out, in case he startled her and god forbid send her over whatever psychic edge she was currently balanced upon. That's the last thing he needed right now, he thought – a dead body on the property. So he stood for moment, irresolute. He couldn't say he felt entirely secure up here himself, although he'd never felt afraid of falling. What does one do in such a situation? Call out and startle, approach and make it worse? He was considering quietly reversing his steps and distancing himself from the whole situation when the girl turned her head and looked at him.

She seemed calm. She was holding one hand with the other, and waiting. 'You okay, darling?' he asked.

She nodded. He closed the gap between them.

Up close, the girl was not quite as golden as she'd seemed from a distance. Her pale eyes were evasive and dark-ringed, as if she hadn't slept, and there was dirt on her thin face. She was oddly dressed, too, in an ill-fitting tracksuit in a shade of petrol blue. He saw there was blood on her hand and running down her wrist. She met his eyes then. Pale grey. Not much innocence there. Trouble.

He wondered what was wrong with Andrew. If he was young again, with an attractively tattooed body like that, and with a crazy girl like this literally suspended in the air above me, he would not have held back. He didn't understand why young and lovely people didn't spend every minute of every day on the ground fucking. Instead of bugging around with vegetables. But Andrew seemed tangled with hesitations and silences, bound by them, like the ink ivy binding his arms. Such an intensely serious young man. He, Morne, for all his faults, was at least not that.



He came cautiously alongside her, glanced at the view, whistled. 'Pretty high up here,' he said. She nodded. 'You like it here?'

'It's ok. I've broken a fingernail.'

She held up her hands, palms up and the nails curled in, for him to see. The nails were painted in a pearly pink, but rimmed with dirt and a couple were indeed snapped short. But he couldn't concentrate on that because the palms were greased in blood. He could see the lifelines chased in red.

'I'm Morne, by the way,' he said.

'I've heard of you. I'm Gaby.' She gave him a little smile. 'I won't shake, with these hands.' A little flirtatious, maybe? He smiled. The girl gathered her forces well.

'You know this whole thing is condemned, right? We shouldn't even be up here. If we both jumped together we could probably bring the damn thing down.' He jumped. Nothing happened. Emboldened, he went to the very edge and looked down. The tips of his shoes – new trainers, white and jade green, expensive – poked over the edge.

'Don't do that.'

He laughed. Waggled his toes. Stepped back. 'So what do you reckon,' he said. 'This place?'

'What do you mean?'

'You're nominally a young person, right?'

'I definitely am. I'm totally young.' She rose to her feet, pushed back a puff of hair. 'How come?'

'Well, I'm having a party. For young people. Is this a good place for a party?'

She flexed her knees a couple of times, as if for real the bridge was undulating, as if she were surfing a wave. 'Sure,' she said. There was something weird in her voice though, and odd coldness. She gave him a kind of witchily distant smile. 'So what kind of party?'

'Depends. What does it feel like to you, up here?'

'It feels like ... it feels like the end of the world. Like you could just ...'  
She placed her palms together, then slid one off and up towards the sky, a rocket-

ship trajectory. ‘Go.’

‘That seems,’ he said, ‘that seems pretty exactly right.’

‘I’ve been to a lot of parties.’

‘I bet you have. Do you want to come to this one? I need a waitress.’

‘Hah. I’d rather jump off the edge right now.’

He considered her a moment. ‘Listen, love, enough of this, okay?’

And she turned her face towards him and said, with surprising meekness, ‘Okay.’

‘We need to get you down from here. You want a lift home?’

He floated a hand not quite on her back and shepherded her by force of suggestion away from the edge, deftly back along the bridge and down towards where his car waited. She floated towards the rear door and waited for him to open it for her, like a chauffeur, he noted. As she settled into the seat, she mused: ‘And I don’t know where that dog went.’

Morne took a clean handkerchief from his jacket in the car and passed it back to her. ‘Is that what happened to you, with the blood? Did a dog bite you?’

She seemed to consider. ‘Oh, no no no, it was that plant ...’ She wiggled her fingers, puzzled. ‘They hurt, they’ve got spikes. But the smell ... delicious!’

She seemed a little spaced-out, blotting her palms with his handkerchief with dreamy concentration. ‘Wow. Handkerchief. Didn’t think people had those anymore.’ She rubbed the fabric between finger and thumb. ‘Cotton. Nice.’

Now she was rubbing her hands with a little bottle of hand sanitizer that she’d magicked from somewhere, and her hair appeared to have been brushed. There was a little pink lip-gloss on her lips and she looked at him bright-eyed. A remarkable transformation.

He gave her his best grin in the rear-view mirror. ‘Where to, Madam?’

She was staring straight ahead with a little wrinkle between her eyebrows. ‘This party.’

‘Yes?’

‘Will it count? Like, as hours?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Like, for my Youth Divergence. I have to do all these hours. If I come

to the party, can I count it as hours? Will you sign off?’

‘Sure.’

‘How many hours?’

He gave her his greyest grin. ‘As many as you want, darling.’

Neither of them had noticed the phone left lying up there on the bridge; nor heard the muted vibration of its ring, which shuffled it once, twice, three times towards the edge, then tipped it over the brink.



Roland too had been thinking about the girl. He didn't like it, didn't like it one bit, seeing that figure from his dreams take form in front of him. She'd come towards him with that, with that paper in her hands, tried to press his fingers onto the pen. He'd sent her off with the sign of a cross.

It was those eyes, those pale eyes that perturbed him. He knew them. She had the eyes of the dying soldier, the child at the river; the eyes of the crying mistress. He'd seen them too many times, flames flickering orange in their shallow curves. Danger.

And now she was here. In his waking world, and sleep was gone. He couldn't sleep, hadn't slept all day; and now here he was as evening fell, his contradictory dawn, and still wide-eyed. Usually, he would drink deep from the brown bottle tucked into his blankets, and that would help him close his eyes to the light. But today his eyes remained open, and a calm and ordinary voice seemed to speak in his head. *Get up*, it said, with absolute certainty. *It's time. Sun up, sun down. You remember about all that, right?*

He didn't want to. He didn't want this speeding up, this here and the now, this urgency. He tossed and muttered and turned over restlessly, as if he was already half in the ground and was pulling the topsoil over him like a slipping blanket. Troubled.

Well, he wasn't stupid was he. Though he might be prostrate on the

ground and half buried with the dead, still half of him poked through the surface, was still in the land of the living. He hadn't quite forgotten human speech, had he? And he listened, yes he did. So he knew. He heard. In his echoing concrete vault, ears pricked, he'd heard all sorts of conversations. He knew he did not have long left in this place.

There had been other signs, too, troubling indications. Moments when the present scratched through into his long absorbing slumber. Last week, for example, in town a woman had come up to him as he bent over a bin and the intensity of her gaze had made him stop and look up, a half-packet of chips still slightly warm in his hand. She had a long face with a mouth that might have been sensual but was twisted up now, her eyes squinting like someone who is sighting something far off across a sunlit plain, and she'd stopped short a few steps from him with her Checkers bags suspended – they looked heavy but still she had brought them halfway up to her chest and had frozen like that, in a position that was both strained and self-protective, moving her lips slightly as she peered at him. 'Oom Roland?' she said, her voice swooping upwards in astonishment and dismay. 'Is it really you?'

She seemed unable to move forward, balanced as she was between her bags, and he took the opportunity to throw the chips in her direction and turn and walk briskly in the other direction, his heart going like anything, walking and walking and not stopping until he was back on the highway, back under that bridge, tucked in, cool, dark, heart beating and seeing again and again in his mind that long face, the tense lips, and no, no that didn't seem real at all. He'd turned his face away from it all in dread, pressing against the cool roots of the bridge, and covered his face with the smelly old blanket.

He'd tried, before now, to convey the message to the rootless rooted bones beneath the surface, but they were frustratingly serene. They'd been churned up so many times, and all of them had seen death before. The old lady had nipped his fingers with her chapped teeth, affectionately. Come on down, she said, stay. You belong to us. But did he? It hurt his head sometimes to think of this. Oh, he knew, he knew alright. Time to wake, time to rise and sniff the immediate breeze. But he wished it wasn't.

He'd spent the day walking distractedly along his old paths through the city. Usually he did these strolls in a daze, a sleepwalking state not too distinct from his snoozing one; the voices and images of the dreams accompanied him as he travelled, growing softer as he moved away from the bridge, which tethered him; but sound travels a long way underground. Anywhere in the city he could place a hand – on an old brick wall, against the bole of a blasted palm surviving on a traffic island, on the head of a stray cat – and catch vibrations from the deep.

But not today. Today the world had seemed thin, containing no resonances. He couldn't get rid of the feel of that girl's skin.

He went down to the canal to sit and watch the oily lip of the water. Sometimes there were fish, most often not. The water passing slow, the level so low you could see the shadows of dead bicycles and shopping trolleys just beneath the surface. In years past, the river had been horribly polluted, tarry and scummed, so much so that the leaves of the trees weeping on its banks were burnt black in a sharp line where they dipped into the water; but there'd recently been a clean-up, a riverside path built. He could see the pale strokes of fish down there in the water, and a flotilla of gulls around the bend.

Sometimes, even flamingos passed through. Although that was one of his out-of-time visions, those sherbet dabs balanced on their toothpick legs, that maybe had leaked in from another, older, more watery time. The water remembered the flamingoes: the same water that had passed between these banks, many times, down to the sea and around again. He let it run through his fingers. He thought it would recognise him, from their many adventures, but the water barely knew his fingerprints. The drought had affected everything.

He used to come and lie here on a patch of snaggly grass in the shade, but that was all gone now. There was a single bench but it was segmented by handrails, preventing a man from lying down at full stretch. Further on, in the shadow of tall new insurance company building, a tilted concrete bank seemed to invite repose. For a moment, he leant back on it, uneasy. High above him, a couple of office-workers were huddled on a balcony to smoke; he could smell it. One of them flicked a butt down onto the path, rolling to perch on the edge of the canal. He watched the smoke simmer off it, felt his own scalp simmering too with

unfocused indignation, while at the same time calculating whether it was worth it to pick up the fag-end. There were little brass studs under his butt, annoying him; he couldn't get comfortable. He shifted in impatience, and his movement must have triggered something, because he heard a mechanical ticking and then there were jets of water pummelling his back, shooting up at him from the ground. He pushed himself upright with a shout, turning to look in time to see the streams of water from the brass valves dribbling to a halt, their arcs declining. It was as if the ground itself had pissed on him.

Enraged, he staggered on, into the dry city, in his soaking clothes.

So when he got back to the garden and found the expensive cellphone lying there in the dirt, miraculously unshattered, he was in no mind to give it back to anyone.

#### 4.

Gaby was back at the whiteboard again, again with a pot of scented tea. Evening now; shadows suited Lerato. The older woman sat enthroned in them in her leather-padded chair. Gaby felt like a grasshopper in comparison, knees up, nervy and ready to jump. Once more, the white board, once more the markers. The list of numbers on the board had grown slightly.

But there were many, many numbers missing. An infinity of numbers, each one splitting into tinier and tinier subsections of time, seconds and microseconds and nanoseconds, clustering thickly, receding infinitely yet still also magically tucked up into the finite space of The Incident. An infinity of lost hours, folded up into the soft grey matter of her brain, sunk there, lost.

Lerato spoke from behind the desk. ‘Five. Five points. We need to progress.’

Gaby touched the pen to the surface again. Wrote a small figure: 6. Paused.

‘Well? What happened then?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said in a small voice. ‘Truly. Truly it’s gone. One minute I’m standing there looking out into the garden ...’

‘Yes, that’s point four. We know this.’

Gaby breathed in deeply, raised the pen again and wrote, hard: *Cigarette*. ‘What? What’s that? You lit a cigarette?’

‘No. No. Maybe the gardener. I think maybe he was smoking where he shouldn’t have been.’

There was a long silence. Lerato sighed. ‘No, Gabriela. No, that is not what happened. We know this is not the case. Try again.’

All Gaby’s impatience came back in a swell. She kicked her foot out like a pendulum, crossed and uncrossed her arms to still the tremor in her hand. ‘I don’t have any more,’ she said stonily. ‘I just don’t. It’s a blank.’

More silence. Lerato was much better at it, this silence and stillness thing, than Gaby could ever be. She puffed out her breath, blowing up her fringe. ‘Honestly.’

Lerato nodded, but not exactly in an understanding way. 'I see. Well then, I think we are probably finished here for today.' No smile.

'OK, cool. So ...' she cleared her throat, offered the folded sheet of paper. 'Can you sign my form please?' The woman took it with a frown. 'One hour. Well, one hour ten if you count the tea-break.'

Lerato took a million years to find a ballpoint pen, to peer at the paper as if she'd never seen it before, to lay down a big loopy signature. Crazy, Gaby was feeling sleepy again. Perhaps it was the tea. She yawned.

'You should rest more. Everything is fine. It's comfortable in the room, isn't it?'

Drowsily she nodded. Clutching her signed time sheet, she allowed herself to hobble back down the long cool corridor. The passage was never entirely silent. There was that undertone, a rhythmic hush and swell emanating it seemed from the walls.

She found a room much like the one she'd been in before, and laid herself on the bed. She tried to be still, she really did. She stared at the clinical white ceiling and watched as if on a screen the flames unfolded. But the tea was having an effect. She closed her eyes. Counted up her hours. Fifteen? She could justify fifteen hours. If you counted in the therapy, the two days at the garden, the travel time ...

When Gabriela opened her eyes again, there was a young boy peering at her from the door. Thirteen, fourteen maybe, beaky nosed, huge-eyed, jet-black hair and soft brown skin.

'Hello,' she said, pushing herself up on one elbow.

'Hello,' he whispered. 'Sorry to wake you up.'

'No problem.' She sat, rubbed her eyes, combed her hair out with her fingers. 'Who are you?'

'Vincent.'

'And what did they bust you for?'

'Sorry?'

'Why are you here? What's your crime?'



‘Oh, no,’ he laughed nervously. ‘I’m just here for my anxiety. And my ruminations. I am quite obsessive. And, ah, compulsive too.’

She looked at him sadly. ‘Just remember, you don’t have to tell them anything.’

His eyes grew wider still and his slender form sank against the doorframe. He seemed almost winded by her presence. ‘What are you ... er, bust for?’

‘They want my memories.’

He nodded eagerly. ‘And? Have you had any?’

‘Nope. Look, can I help you with anything?’

He swallowed, Adam’s apple in spasm. ‘I wanted to ask you. If maybe. Maybe I could use your phone? To phone my mother. They won’t let me have one here.’

‘Oh well yeah ...’ she felt for it in her pocket, then patted the mattress.

Nothing.

Fuck. ‘Shit,’ she said, struggling to her feet, patting every pocket. ‘Shit shit shit.’



Roland woke with a shout of fear, jolting upright so that he almost slammed his skull against the top of his concrete alcove. Something he had not done since those first few weeks of sleeping here, years ago now, how many he could not say, when every tiny night sound would make his heart thrash in terror. Strange sounds echoed around him. He lay there for a moment, breathing intensely. A melody.

Were there people out there? Too dark still for the gardeners. Sometimes kids raced their cars along this stretch of highway in the early hours, and parked off on the grass to drink brandy and smoke zol. But they never bothered him, never coming in to the deepest corner of the underpass where he lay rigid and wrapped like a mummy in a crypt.

This was something else. Music, a few repetitive notes. It was not coming from outside; not from above, or from below. It seemed to coming – unsettlingly – from his own body, accompanied by a faint vibration. The tune stopped, and he waited in the silence, heart beating. Then it started up again. Cautiously he shifted to the side, craning to peer out at the patch of grass illumined by the streetlights. He wanted nothing more than to wriggle back deeper into his odorous blankets, pull darkness down over his eyes along with his woolly hat. But a nugget of unease pressed into his breastbone. He thought of policemen coming here, ripping away his blankets, scattering his few special objects, pulling him from his hole like terriers pulling out a rat. That hadn't happened for ages. This bridge had proved a good place for him, so far. Safe. Impossible to remember himself before the bridge; what he did with himself, how he moved through the world.

With a groan, he pushed himself upright, wrapping the stiff blanket around his shoulders. He worked a hand in among the folds and felt the hard case of the phone, up against his chest. He'd been sleeping with it and its metal skin was the temperature of his own body, pleasingly smooth.

He wasn't an idiot; he knew how to switch a phone on, how to look. There were images of the garden, of the bridge; faces he didn't know, city scenes. The photos were puzzling, and then quickly became dull. He scrolled impatiently through frame after frame, thumbs twitching. A tune hissed between his teeth. Some song he'd known forever, although it had no words. The camera held a catalogue of someone's recent memories, of the light refracted through a stranger's eyes. They might be mine, he thought. Here, this nice house, the mountain behind it. These rooms, these views, even slender white hand that intruded into some of the frames: I could make them mine, and who could say no?

He didn't of himself as a thief, more as a curator. There were quite a number of interesting items filed away in the back of the cranny where he slept: articles of clothing, cigarette lighters, a set of car keys. But never anything quite so pleasing and intricate as this. He'd thought to himself that later he would like to take it apart, look at its insides. He might learn something from it, something

about how things fit together. Although that might also kill it. Torn and turning it over in his hands, he'd pressed a button and a blue light had manifested, leaving him dazzled and the world speckled with magical black. Not wanting to waste its powers, he'd tucked it inside his shirt and cradled it there for the rest of the night. But now it had woken up.

A third time it rang, the screen lighting blue. *Mum*, said the word on the screen. A small image of an older white woman's face appeared next to it. He raised it to his face, throat dry. He knew to press the green button, he wasn't a fool. Stared straight ahead of him as a voice emerged. And it said, rapidly and at high volume:

'Oh my *God* Gabriela what the *hell* have you got yourself into this time?'

Roland held the phone up in front of his eyes. A blue glow. On its screen the woman flickered and focused. At first he was confused because the face seemed just like that of the blonde girl, the same but older, but then it resolved and he saw it was different, harder and more relentless. It made him anxious just to look at it.

'GABRIELA.'

'Hello?' he tried to say, then had to clear his throat and start again. '*Who is this?* What have you done with my daughter?'

Weakly, he gestured his confusion. He should throw the phone away, switch it off. He felt, for the first time under the bridge, intensely claustrophobic. 'Gabriela. Gabriela Michaelis. This is her phone. Put her on for me at once, please.'

'She's not here.'

'Where are you? What is this place?'

'I don't ... I don't really know,' he said. 'Hold on.'

Phone in hand, the screen light flickering on concrete that had not felt light for many years, he wandered away from his bed and out into the open air. He glared for a moment at the sky, confused by the constellations. The woman's voice was still barking in his hand. He held the phone up and turned in a circle, scanning the horizon. 'See?' he said, turning the screen back towards himself. 'It's dark here, and I don't ... I don't really know what's happening.'

‘Put my daughter on the phone at once or I’m calling the police.’

Roland shushed the phone by holding it to his belly. But still the voice continued, shrieking into his flesh.

And then he heard another disturbance coming from the dark outside, and turned to face it.



Gaby came down the embankment, feeling the icy prickle of the stars above and the dew in the grass soaking through her canvas shoes. The taxi pattered away above her, and the highway lay still and dark.

She stood by the gate, fists bunched, looking on the blackness of the plot. It seemed emptier than ever, lightless, bereft. The little lights of the city high-rises watched her hesitation.

If she’d listened, if she had opened her ears, she would have heard it: the creeping sighs, the small explosions and expostulations from deep down, from far back. But she had never been good at listening. All she heard was her own heartbeat, bang bang banging. The gate was locked of course, but down the side she knew there was a hole just big enough to fit her. Maybe that dog had made it. She wriggled through, stood and breathed, shaky.

Opposite her, on the far end of the field, the bridge gestured, holding its immense pose as it always had. Pointing up, pointing out. And underneath, the deepset pocket of blackest black.

This was of course not a place to be, alone. And of course it was ridiculous. She had no torch with her, the idea of searching the ground for the phone was preposterous. And she was afraid of this dark. But she did not allow herself these thoughts. She kept her mind’s eye on the image of the phone, her eyes scanning back and forth, seeing the object to match the picture. Everything else, the dark and the danger, that can come later, afterwards. Just do this now, just get the phone and get through this, hold your breath like a swimmer going under, make it through the dive ... but she couldn’t, she couldn’t; couldn’t bring

herself to go up there again. It gave her a reel of vertigo to remember it. And in the dark? She could imagine herself walking straight out over the edge, into the twinkle of the distant city lights.

She was almost crying. She'd been fearless on the way here; but the knowledge of where and what she was had entered her like the cold. A girl abroad on a dark highway, at the centre point of hostile terrain, a focus for bad forces. All she could make out were the nasty little dark-green shapes of those damn plants, that hateful vegetable stink in the back of her throat. She kicked out at one particularly provocative specimen, poking its head up like a dumb *dick* out of the ground. Her foot connected, the plant detached from its stem and rolled away from her. 'Fuck,' she whimpered, and kicked again.

The plants were satisfying to kill. Despite their spininess, they were easily wounded, easy to take a chunk out of that crisp bursting flesh, that silky taut skin. A solid impact, a spray of sap. Once she had started it was not hard to carry on. There was a very pleasing crunch and snap to the action of kicking the plants to death, a solid impact both crisp and wet. The smell of the spilt sap was intoxicating, a piercing green scent. Her fingers grew sticky with it, and then her face. There was no sound except for the chop and thrust of her feet and her own heavy breathing.

Part of her mind watched in exhilarated horror, observing herself in the act of destruction. That moment: when the fine crystal slips from the fingertips on its way to the tiled floor, the moment after you've hit someone in the face, when they reel back on the point of understanding the violence, but just before your palm begins to sting with it. You can't call it back. *You've done it now, Gaby. You've really done it, you've done it again.* She laughed out loud.

She'd worked her way back to the bridge, and now she laid her hands flat against the concrete. Her legs and arms were trembling with adrenalin. It was cold, she realised for the first time. Behind, she could see the path of her own destruction, a track through the careful beds like a black frost. No phone, and now all this, unfixable, broken. The shattered chunks of plant flesh could not be put back together, glued or sutured or apologised for. She allowed a brief fantasy of stopped time, time halted for everything and everyone except herself and the

plants, secret days to grow and heal their split skins and find lost things before the gardener returned in the distant morning. A childish fantasy, an old one, and bitter to let go of.

A blue glimmer caught the corner of her eye. She caught her breath. A patch of spooky light, floating on the pulsing blackness deep under the bridge. It was the wrong place to go now, the worst place, obviously, the black troll den under the bridge. And somehow this fairytale demanded that she do it. Perhaps all the other damage would be magically undone. Again: a lozenge of blue light. Phone light, she realised. And sounds. She was not alone. A murmured conversation. Voices back and forth. Voices that caught in her ears, in her throat like hooks. Pulled her.

So she made her way towards the dark portal. Pausing only to bend to feel around at her feet, finding what she needed: a good big stone, small enough to hold in the hand but large enough to do some damage. For courage. This was what she used to do as a teenager, walking home at night through dark streets: hold her keyring in her clenched right hand, keys bristling outwards between her fingers like a knuckleduster. It was a trick they'd been taught in some self-defence class at school. Stupid, it would probably hurt her own hand more than anything else if she ever tried to lash out with a fistful of front-door keys. But it gave her courage. Just in case.

She was almost at the opening of the cave when she recognized the voice. 'Mum?'

The blue light swooped and circled, reflected up against the concrete, and a tall figure was revealed coming towards her, hand outstretched, and trailing behind him on an illumined concrete screen a shadow like a spectre overtaking them both.

'Gabriela??' the impossible voice called on a rising note, and as the man lurched towards her she instinctively lifted her hand, the hand with the rock in it, and swung.

There was a gap. A time flicker. Gaby was panting. There was something lying in the dark before her, a bundled shape in there, but some instinct of preservation

made her turn from that blackness, stagger away. Phone in hand. At least. At least.

She pressed herself right up against the fence, under the light of the freeway. Pressed a button, speed-dial. It was late, god knows how late.

Signal sent, a melodic ringtone, a voice. Caught off guard, and sounding suddenly old.

‘Gabriela?’

‘Mr Franks,’ she said. ‘I’ve done a thing.’

A pause. Circumspect. Or had his circumspection always just been horror; loathing even?

‘A bad thing, Gabriela?’

Or maybe just exhaustion.

‘Well, it’s not good.’

It was only after she’d hung up that she saw, in her other hand, a stone clutched. It was gleaming; it was wet.

Gap. In his car, she sat trembling on the back seat. There was a dark smear on the back of her right hand. The knees of her jeans were dark with vegetable fluid. Several things she noticed about the rock, sitting quietly now in her lap, concealed from the eyes of Mr Franks in the rearview mirror. First, its sharper end was dipped in something sticky, which was now also on the upholstery. Secondly, there was more to the rock than she’d realised. It was long, a symmetrical tapering oval, nicely weighted, with a rounded butt for gripping and a pointed tip, its edges neatly scalloped into facets. It had design. It had been made to be employed, probably, very much as she had just employed it. For bashing. For cutting. For releasing blood. The tendons in her wrist stood up as she clenched it. Then she pushed it under her sweatshirt, and turned her eyes forward, into the darkness.



Plants die seemingly silently, but their death releases loud signals of alarm on

many frequencies. The chemicals in their sap signal hurt and spite and fear, traces lofted into the air to warn the nearby weeds and stunted bushes of animal threat: rogue elephant, locust swarm, spiteful child with thorns in hand.

Under the ground, the listeners felt the seep of the green sap into the soil, they tasted and sampled and deciphered its particular bulletins. Something happening, up there in the world above. Life spilled, anger. Interesting. The mischievous bones trembled a little in interest and anticipation. Decided to stir things up. What might happen now? Let's see.

The soil took the sap and spread it through underground channels, via the thin capillaries of hair roots, through the microscopic loopholes between soil grains, channeling and directing it in under the bridge, into the black dank space where Roland's body lay unmoving.

As the bridge bowed over him, the earth raised the scent up to steal into the sleeping man's nostrils, as if solicitously reviving a patient from a faint. An earthworm rolled silkily in its tubular bed, relishing blindly the olfactory drama. A little fox yipped out in the night. Everything loves a little drama. All the night creatures.

It was quiet under the bridge now. The listeners lay still, shaken, alert for further activity. But soon their vigilance subsided. The strangers had left, back the way they came, flickering and melting like ghosts as they stepped beyond the horizon and into the far unknowable.

But the listeners were not dissatisfied: something of their substance travelled too. Messages and signs had been sent out into the world. The ground seethed, busy with recent impacts absorbed and fluids spilled. Flies and beetle gathered at the rim of the stain, gathering up the traces, tasting, savouring; the blood was sumptuous to them. Under the ground, the listeners tremored with pleasure. New spices, stirred back into the old, old stew.

The rock lay suspended, moving smoothly at one hundred kilometres an hour across the city grid, faster and further than it had ever moved before, pressed back into the car seat by unfamiliar g-forces. Its molecules felt the elastic stretch of their bonds, moving further and further from the site of its birth, from the native massif that still, on one of its exposed faces, bore the rough hollow



where the shard of stone for the axe had been hewn. Gaby was wrong: the tool had never been used in violence before. It was for digging and chopping, for scraping and shaping wood. A previously peaceful implement. But now it was blooded.

Underground, there was excitement. The worked tool had been passed up, hand to hand, from a very deep stratum, below the mix of bones and stones. It had been left on the surface as a test, as a message. Which had been received, and was even now being whisked away. The others below the ground had felt the stone leaving them, a fragment of their world shooting out, into the world of the new, faster and further, a messenger, and arrow, a tool. They felt its progress across the dark city as one might watch a comet cross the sky, or a rocket, leaving for other worlds. They could still feel its weight, but that weight was growing lighter as it shot along the highway, stone arrow in flight, into the heart of a changed world.

Roland lay there for all the rest of the night; and on through the following day and into the evening; he would not be seen by any of the young people who would arrive at the bridge as the sun went down, dressed in their party clothes, eyes only on each other, eager for the end of time.



In the morning the stone was still there, wrapped in newspaper and shoved under the bed. The sticky matter on it was blood. On her too, Gaby realised: on her fingers, and a dark-brown streak across one cheek. She'd commanded Mr Franks to take her back to the bay flat, not that creepy bloody clinic, and he'd seemed so alarmed by her appearance that he'd complied.

She ran a bath and took the stone into the water with her, realising her error when the blood rinsed off in a rusty awful cloud around her body. She should have showered. Not her blood: and entering through the many tiny wounds she'd given herself last night on those prickly plants in the dark. She should worry about contamination, infection, but that all seemed superfluous

now. The pain of her scratches was sharp, revived by the water. She dumped a capful of Dettol into bath and that made the pain worse, and better. The night was black and smoky in her mind, with scents as clear as broken glass. Sap. Blood. Fear in the throat.

She scrubbed at the flint with her hand, but the blood seemed to have been absorbed into the granular surface, leaving it darker. She was reminded of the rockery in her mother's garden. How the stones looked beautiful only after the rain, with their lustre and their deep tones.

When she started shivering, she realised how long she'd been sitting there in the cooling water. She stood and let the horrible pale-red broth run out. An admonishing voice from long ago – someone else's mother? *Baths don't get you clean. You just sit there in your own dirt.*

Gaby moved into the shower, clasping the rock to her chest. Grossly, still more blood rinsed out of her hair, and then the water ran clear. But she couldn't get out from under the stream just yet, expose her skin to the air. She waited until the shower, too, ran cold and it felt punishing; only then did she step out, shuddering, onto the tiles.

She dabbed the stone dry with a clean towel as if it were a baby. Her bed was pulled straight but the sheets had not been washed since she was here – the maid must be off. When she lay down she smelt the scents of those nights, of her and Craig, his toasty musk still there. It wrenched her. She wanted to slide between those sheets now, soak up that good essence, but her raw skin didn't deserve the balm.

So she lay there on her back on top of the covers. She placed the stone on her belly, so it weighed on the taut concavity below her ribcage. And went through the drill. Breathe. Let the panic build. Remember, then forget. Let it pass through, spin and rinse and out. And breathe. And repeat. It was something a previous boyfriend had taught her. He hadn't been good for much except this mantra, and she remembered little else about him: he'd lain lightly on her. One of the boys. And the boys and the boys and the boys. She felt her chest hitch and rise again, but the weight of the stone kept it in check. She ran her fingers lightly across its skin. Grainy but smooth.

It was not so different to lying in with a hangover or the flu. But it was different. There was something working within her. She groaned. But even the groan was subdued, not quite making it out of her chest. She liked this constricted feeling, the way it forced her to measure her movements. A containment. Her breathing steadied, grew faint and fragile. Delicate but durable, like her bones. She hadn't eaten or slept for ages. Everything was growing light, so light it might fly away, if not for the anchoring stone.

Once, long ago, she'd had a dream that she'd never forgotten: a lucid dream of great opulent depravity, in which she'd flown between the tall buildings of a ravishingly evil night-time city, indulging in every vice, penetrated and penetrating and intoxicated and murderous, opening doors to forbidden rooms with a set of silver keys. When she'd had enough, she'd woken up, congratulating herself on her controlled indulgence and escape – but then noticed the silver keys in her hand and realised that the dream hadn't ended, that she was still within its nested boxes. And then woken again from that. And from that state too, and so on, until finally near morning she felt she was in the clear. Perhaps.

The stone was real. She'd been lying with it pressed to her belly for so long that it felt like it had entered into her flesh, was within her, inside the cavity of her body, a burden impossible to extract or lay down.

Eventually her stillness built until its own weight, its own momentum; it pressed her towards the memory without her having to move. She came at it sideways, sneaking up on it, afraid to startle it away or herself away from it. Eyes closed; let it come to you.

The man rising up. The blue light. Her mother's voice. The swung arm, the rock slamming down. The impact.

That was the worst, the sense memory of the blow, in her fingers, the bones of her hand and wrist. She had brought the rock down hard, very hard, she could still feel the force travelling through the arc of the swing and transferring completely, deep into the man's skull, beyond the man's skull. A crunching sound; no other noise, no cry or grunt from him as this hard chunk of rock intruded into inner space. The shock of it; the soft organ sheared open, razed, blown open, slammed by matter. It made her flinch to think of it. Had her dirty

fingers touched his inner substance? Certainly they had touched broken skin. Broken brain? The brain was never meant to feel, to move, to feel light or air. It was sacred, a boneless, exquisitely tender organ made to be encased, numb, insensate, treasured, flickering only with its own secret lightning.

Damage, she'd done so much damage.

Later, when Craig came looking for her, he got quite a shock. Gaby was laid out straight on the bed like a sacrifice, her thin limbs glowing against the sheets. A strange black thing crouched on her belly like a toad. Repulsive. A twist of electric alarm ran through him, groin to scalp. The picture chimed with something, something he'd always known or expected: this image of her stretched out, lifeless.

His impulse was first to take that thing away from her, whatever it was. Pull it off her like a black scab. But when he tried to lift it her hands came to life, blue fingers clutching at the stone, pressing it down against her stomach. Eyes opening, those great pale eyes set deep in their sockets, lashless, blind with light. And gasped and curled her body away from him, tipping the rock onto the floor with a clatter.

He stood back, holding up his hands. Backed out of the house and back up the driveway, and far away

Be brave, Gaby told herself. Get up, go back, go see what you've done.

*No.*

Find out what happened. What you've done this time.

*No. No.*

Her heart swerved violently away from the possibility. Her mind tumbled down several alternative paths: go and speak to Lerato, fill in some more numbers. No. check the news. No. No. Lie here in bed forever. Until the cops came looking. Until Craig returned with his busy solutions. No. Her phone was still switched off and she left it that way. If she brought it to life it might contain horrors.

All the twisting paths she'd made for herself were dead-ending, eroded,

blocked. Only one remained. Her passport was still there in her bag, and with it the credit card.

This idea made it possible for her to lift herself up from the bed, open up her computer. switch on. Straight to the ticketing website. She'd been here before. What were the chances? She chose the first flight she could find, barely glancing at the details, just clicking in the spaces of the online form, applying the magic credit card. Up and away.

## 5.

He'd taken care, collecting this final crop. He knew it was the last. Andrew had ungardened it himself, ripping every last useful scrap of green from the soil beneath the bridge. He averted his eyes from ground now, spread out naked and unprotected from the hard gasoline-soaked air. The evening traffic echoed across the space.

Two long steel trestle tables – suitably battered, for the apocalypse, Andrew supposed – had been laid out up on the bridge, halfway across. One table was for the buffet, one had space for a dozen guests. Rows of candles lined the drop on either side. The caterers went back and forth, putting the last touches to the party spread, but Andrew was sitting as still as he could. His shoulder stung a bit where the new tattoo was settling in. Surita had done a neat job.

He was sorting through a punnet of the unnamed fruits that had come up so quickly in the last few days, stripping them of their silvery spikes. They were plump dark-green spheres, with taut silky rinds covered in spines. Oddly uniform and perfectly spherical, almost machined-looking. Dark green with light yellow stripes, and speckles, like something his ancestors might have picked from the veld in the dry season. Tiny melons.

He rubbed them briskly with a dishcloth, which seemed to do the trick. Cleaned, each fruit had a glassy shimmer to it, like a pearl; as if there was a reflective surface lying a millimetre under the rind. A rightness to the feel of it in his hand. He tossed one in the air and caught it.

Ow. Andrew sucked his finger where a needle had entered. That special bitter sting of vegetable toxins, giving him a momentary headrush.

It was not the best crop in the world. Some of the veg they'd been forced to buy in, and there wasn't a lot of it. But still: there were all the old good foods here, the things he had cared for and raised with his own hands. He heard his mother's voice reciting the names, in the old languages. He felt proud, liking the look of his own hands moving to place the plates. There was beauty in this, still. He would have liked to have seen proper guests at the feast. A host of grave and appreciative elders, the grandmothers and grandfathers, who would taste the grit

in the soil that had given rise to this miraculous crop; who would respect the skill in bringing it up out of the ground, again, again, again, still, after all this time. A company of ghosts, perhaps.

He'd done these things before for Morne, and he didn't really mind. It wasn't like being an ordinary waiter, which he'd done his fair share of as a younger man; it was actually less debasing, more like theatre. And it was interesting to watch Morne in these interactions. He saw he was beholden to Morne, and how Morne in turn was beholden to the people who came to him as clients. Andrew saw his place very clearly on the scale of things, passing things up with his hands from the ground to his boss, who passed them onwards, upwards, at a price. Costlier and costlier, as if each vegetable that came from the ground became progressively gilded with further thin layers of gold the further away it got from him, as it passed from his hands to those of the rich people who sat at Morne's tables. Transforming into some other kind of food altogether, not quite fit for human lips and stomachs, or at least not his.

Of course that bloody girl, Gaby whatsisname, hadn't pitched up for duty. Didn't matter. Andrew doubted she had any experience of serving other people.

'Have you identified them yet?' said Morne now, coming towards him with a couple of luminous blue cocktails. It had been Morne's idea to include the little melons in the menu tonight.

'It tastes almost like... melon? Although it's not anything I've ever seen. It looks like a little tamma.' The name came back to him easily, as if the sap on his tongue had re-awoken a word. 'The people used to dig them up in the dry season. They store the moisture under the ground.'

'Neat,' said Morne, picking up the golf-ball-sized melon and tossing it into the air. Andrew felt a surge of tender concern for the fruit, for bruising. 'The final crop! Last fruits of Earth! A survival kit for futuristic end-times hunter-gathers. They look like they're from frigging outer space anyway.' He handed the fruit back. 'And you're quite sure we can eat them? Hundred percent?'

'Yes,' said Andrew without hesitation. The lush flesh, that fruity aroma – this was a thing that was made to be eaten, there was no way it was not for eating.

The first one he'd cut one open, as soon as he split the skin, a gush of white milkiness had spurting out and over his thumbnail. And a deep green scent, pungent as cum. He was disconcerted by the porniness of the fruit. He rinsed the stickiness off his hand, then brought his fingers carefully to his nose. *Ahh*. The scent was different now, it had changed with exposure to the air and the warmth of his skin, layered like a fine perfume. His mouth watered. And he could taste, deep behind the root of his tongue, his mother's kitchen. It was hard to stop himself putting it into his mouth straight away and swallowing it. He put his finger to his lips and sucked. Biscuits, ginger. A hint of buttermilk. Startled, he felt tears prickle. He put the split fruit down cautiously, and had to take a moment to blink back the moisture.

The flesh was spongy, white, snowy almost, and pitted with dark spherical seeds embedded in the flesh like burrowed insects. He dug one out with the tip of the cutting knife. Sucked it clean on his tongue and then examined it on his fingertip. Hard, shiny black, almost gunmetal, perfectly round. If you spilled a jar of these they would scatter in every direction like dropped ball-bearings.

'Do they taste good at least?' Asked Morne.

'Here, try for yourself.' He held out a halved fruit for Morne to try.

Morne dipped his tongue into the pulp, a snakelike sampling gesture. He smacked his lips a few times. 'I dunno,' he said at last. 'Is it nice? I can't even tell anymore. Everything tastes like fucking Mars dust to me these days.'

Andrew shook his head. 'No, it's good,' he said. 'It's really good. It's the best thing that's come out of CitiGreen, in all this time.'

Morne looked at him almost pityingly. 'Wow, there's a shitload, too.'

There was. Andrew had spent the whole morning, alone, plucking every fruit from the vine-like plants that had taken over CitiGreen. Every one that hadn't been crushed or splattered by the strange rampaging animal that had passed through the garden the night before, trashing everything.

'They look like little planets,' Andrew said.

'Yes! Little wandering moons.' Morne beamed at him.

Then the man was bustling out again, leaving Andrew alone with the



plump spheres, packed tight like bombs with their curious seeds.

Andrew clicked his jaws together. Teeth made for chewing melon rind, tongue made for spitting seeds into the dark.



Rich people's children. How young they looked, glossed and moneyed and bright. He'd been older, Morne was sure, at twenty-one. And somehow desiring the end of the world.

Morne had wanted Andrew to give a little spiel about the food, explaining the origin of each dish, saying their names in the old languages, but he quickly realized the young man was too shy, stammering even when he'd tried to practise it earlier. Andrew was someone who spoke mostly with his body, with his hands. Morne started to give an introduction, but he soon realised the kids weren't that interested. He suspected the food was not really to their taste – it was a subtle thing – but also that food was not really their prime concern.

There wasn't much for him to do here, and already he was bored. The kids were helping themselves to drinks; they didn't seem much concerned with the dishes so carefully arranged for them. They didn't even drink very much, though they seemed to get drunk quite quickly. Parties were not as he remembered them. There were forgettable speeches. The birthday boy lazily leant across the table to scoop a spoon of ruby-coloured berry jelly and tipped a bowl; the green fruits tumbled. They rolled like marbles, like ball-bearings, like planets in a gravity well. The young people ate. They pulled the fruits apart with their hands, they scooped the soft flesh out of the rinds; they spat the hard seeds at each other, laughing. Lit candles trembled. They laughed and talked.

He really would prefer to be here in solitude. His natural state: suspended above. Sighing, he retreated to the end of the great broken diving board of the bridge, seating himself on the twisted railing. A couple of the little fruits had rolled around his feet, and he bent to pick three of them up. Juggling. Another lost skill of his youth.

Andrew, too, was standing around like a lost fart. Morne gestured him over. 'Come stand here by me a bit. Just in case one of these idiots barrels over the edge.'

Andrew laughed, but Morne noticed he stayed away from the edge: fear of heights. Maybe fear of Morne, too, he thought. The young man was always uptight around him, straight-backed, watchful. Maybe that's just how a person stands when they have tautly strung muscles like that. But still, he always wanted to shake the kid up a bit, shock him. He felt a little judged, too.

One young guy lurching unsteadily towards the edge, and Morne and flung one of the fruits in his hands so it banged off the steel railing next at the guy's left arm. Accurate. The kid looked around, startled.

'Toilets down at the bottom,' Morne called. 'Portapotty, down where you came in.'

The young man nodded in a blurry way, readjusted his course back down the bridge.

Andrew just smiled. He seemed unusually quiet, distracted.

Morne turned to toss the fruits off the edge, then stopped. Didn't. Turned quickly back to Andrew, moving to shield him from the view down. 'So what do you think? Of tonight. Of this lot.'

Andrew shrugged. The shrug seemed to sway him more than it should; it took him a moment to come back straight. God, was the kid ... drunk? Well at least someone here was.

'Andy? Are you feeling ok?'

Andrew shook his head, fretful. Definitely unsteady on his feet.

'Hey. Why don't you take off,' he said. 'You're tired, I can see. We can clean up in the morning, it's cool.'

'No, no ... I'm ok ...'

'Do you have far to go?' He didn't even know where the kid lived. 'Hey, I've got a better idea. Just go take a nap in my car. It's comfortable. I can give you a ride later.'

Andrew looked blurrily startled by the suggestion. So Morne put his arm around the young man's shoulder and walked him down the length of the bridge,

down to ground level, got him out the gate, installed him in the back seat, made sure the seats were pushed forward so he had enough room. He gave him the keys. 'You can put the heater on if you like. Open up the skylight.'

'Will you come?'

'I must look after this lot. I'll come later. You'll be ok here. Close your eyes.'

Andrew watched him like a fretful child as he closed the door on him, made sure it was locked. Kids were such a mess these days. Didn't even now how to get pissed. Morne sighed and made his way back up to the top of the bridge. The party seemed to have calmed and quieted. Maybe they would all bloody go home and give him some peace. Morne avoided the table and walked casually over to the end of the bridge. Peered down.

Fuck.

It was still there, what he'd spotted earlier. Lying there at the base of the bridge upright. The human figure lay flat on its back with darkness pooling around its head. A man, a big man, laid out like a crucifixion. Fuck, had he fallen from the bridge? He'd just managed to keep Andrew's attention from it, but how soon until one of these kids wandered over and started making a fuss? Health and Safety a-go-go. He'd been dreading just this for years.

Dead, surely? Morne leaned forward surreptitiously and picked up one of the wandering fruits. Tossed it down. It thwacked the toppled figure's left shoulder. Nothing. Not a twitch. Fuck. Now what.

Now nothing, he told himself firmly. Now you carry on. Deal with it later. Nobody's seen a thing yet, and it's getting darker. They're all still distracted.

But were they? Everything was quiet back there. Extremely quiet. In the flickering candlelight, it was a little hard to see what was going on. Everyone seemed peaceful, bent over the table as if in conversation, their features animated; but nobody was speaking.

With a sigh, he pushed himself away from the railing and approached. His feet kicked a path through the shucked shells of the fruit. Nobody looked up.

It was a curiously peaceful scene. The kids were slumped over their

plates, eyes glassy. Some pillowed their heads on their arms, some had their head tilted backwards. Some leaned on each other's shoulders. They might all be fast asleep, little kids at a pajama party, except for the fact that their eyes were half open and glassy. He saw now that the small movements of their eyes and mouths were just the changing shadows of the candle flames. Their faces were shades of chalk and beige and grey. As he watched, a stream of thin green fluid leaked from the corner of one kid's mouth, like something trying to get out.

He switched off the music, which had been starting to irritate him anyway with its uninflected electronic moans. The breeze came up, crackling the candle flames, but otherwise there was no sound at all.

Morne made his way to the head of the table. A plate was there, and an empty place set. He sat, and looked down the length of the table. At last entirely alone here, in this silent company.

In front of him on the plate was a scoop of green plant. He could smell it thickly, that scent forcing itself into his nose. He lifted a piece to his mouth, sniffed. Nothing. The fruit said nothing to him; they didn't like each other. At the far end of the table, a girl's arm gave way under her chin and she smacked her forehead on the table.

'Shit,' said Morne. 'Now fucking what.'



Up late as usual, Lerato was updating her files. Deleting here, erasing here. Two more regular clients had written to her in the last twenty-four hours to tell her they were leaving. One was leaving the city, off to an old-age home on a golf estate somewhere out of town; and one was just closing his account, no further explanation given. Annoyed, she was tempted to delete their records at once, all the precious fragile memories she'd teased out of these two over the course of years; the lacework of their lost lives. But that would be petty – often client came back a little later, wanting to pick up where they'd left off, or just wanting a copy of the records, to look at, she supposed, when their own frail and unaugmented

memories failed them. Also, it was a kind of vandalism. So easy to do, delete, delete. And anyway, she had her systems. She would keep everything recorded in her archive, and then five years from now she would press the button, and all of the retrieved memories, which they had been so miserably bad at curating for themselves, would be gone with a digital shimmer and pop.

It made her want to spit. And she blamed Morne. It was his inferior herbs, she was quite certain, that had allowed certain of her clients to loosen the hold Lerato had on them. Only later would they learn the loss. Her fingertips itched. She brought up the file of Gabriela Michaelis. There she was, her grandiloquent name, her narrow little face. The picture was a mugshot, although nonetheless one for which she'd taken care to apply full and perfect make-up.

Lerato examined the girl sternly. An irritating miss, that one. Big eyes and too much money. It would be good to erase her, in the end.

And now the girl was gone. But she'd been preying on her mind, and Lerato didn't like that. She preferred to work clean; purely in the space between the mind and the page. With her technique, you did not need more than the whiteboard, than the writing and erasing. You didn't need the kind of personal reaction she found herself having towards this young woman. She'd had to suppress distaste. Not a good thing, in therapy.

Lerato was intimidating. She knew she frightened people sometimes, that she was hard, that her judgement was apparent to them. Strangely enough it seemed to work, therapeutically. Some people needed to have the wits frightened back into them. But with some it was hard to control her annoyance. Partly it was the obvious money, of course. The girl hadn't flinched at the cost. Daddy paying, no doubt. And then: the fidgeting, the manicure-examination; the fishing in her bag for her phone; the childlike voice. The hair! Looking at the girl jiggling and sulking and dissembling, it had been hard to think of her as grown woman. So petite and pretty, a snub little face under hair that was light and silvery and very clean, all of her very clean and smooth it seemed, as if it had never been damaged. It was hard to imagine her at the scorching heart of a conflagration. The police report said that three men, firemen, had been hurt in the fire; no dead, or the court case would have been more consequential, she

supposed. But what unspeakable pain. Gabriela's skin looked like it had barely been exposed to the smoke of a single cigarillo.

Of course, the doctor knew it was always a danger with intimate work like this: that her own dislike would show, would seep through and jeopardise the treatment. Lerato often had to remind herself, with so many of her clients, that of course there was damage, of course there was. There was a reason for those thin limbs, for the milky skin, for the look of fierce watchfulness darting across that pale face.

But also. And furthermore. Lerato did not entirely believe the girl was telling the truth. Oh well, thought the doctor, all the more work for me then. If Gaby's game was to make up memory gaps, or memories themselves, Dr Lerato was not one to spoil the game. It would not be the first time that she'd played mental manicurist to the idle rich. Still, she highlighted Gaby's entry in blue, an almost ultraviolet hue. She didn't really know what this signalled, except a kind of warning to a future record-checking self.

Content with her night's work, she was about to retreat to her own sleep – she often spent the night in one of the unoccupied therapy rooms – when her calm was interrupted by Morne's frantic call.

Lerato hadn't been out this late for years. When she got to the bridge and the garden she was struck first by the smell of it: like the tea, but stronger; like something triumphant had risen up from the soil. It made her afraid. But Morne was quickly by her side, hand on her elbow – odd that, too, she didn't remember him touching her before – and guided her through the open gates and towards the dark corner of the patch of land, past empty beds of soil and into some kind of thicket. It wasn't easy for her to move; she'd never been athletic, and her heavy thighs rubbed against each other and the bashing vegetation, hams struggling against the gradient as the bridge started to slope upwards.

Morne was cleaning up. Scraping leftovers into a big garbage bag. Lerato watched.

'What have you managed to do now, Morne?' she asked, not ungently.

The young people sat slumped upright in their chairs, most of the half

upright, and their eyes were not entirely closed but glassy slits, irises clouded with a greenish light, as if staring into the depths of a deep forest. Their hands rested lightly on the table, cleared now of plates and glasses, as if they were at a cool morning-dewed seance.

‘I don’t know. I think, ah fuck I think they ate something poisonous.’

‘Something you gave them?’

He shrugged, shivered. ‘It was something Andrew brought me. Something ... from the garden, yes. I tried ... I tried to stick my fingers down one of their throats but ... nothing. No response at all.’ He turned to her with sudden snappishness. ‘You’ve got to help me.’

‘What do you expect me to do? I’m a therapist not a paramedic. You need to call an ambulance.’

‘Please. Please. Just take a look, see what you can do for them. You know about ... about sleep, and stuff. Please just give it a go. If you can’t ...’ He shrugged.

‘If I can’t you’ll call the ambulance. Yes?’

‘Yes.’

‘Promise?’

He just let out his breath in an impatient huff and rolled his eye at seated figures. ‘Please.’

And so, she took a look. And yes, she told herself, she was indeed an expert on this: on sleep, on erasure, on forgetting. Although, she thought, what Morne was asking of her was not so much to wake the sleepers as it was to erase this situation from his mind. All the trouble of his life, she thought. What if they died?

She approached the diners cautiously. Their breath smelt green, aloe-ish. It’s good they’re young, she thought; young people survive things better. Traumas. Still, she didn’t actually know what she was doing. She put her hand out to touch the arm of the girl sitting closest to the corner of the table. She had soft cool skin, cooler than it should be. Lerato touched her eyelids, lightly opening them. The girl had large dark eyes, the irises almost black, and made blacker by the enormously enlarged pupils. No response.

‘Do you have a light?’ she asked, looking around. Beyond the table, in a niche in the concrete railing, a last candle still sputtered. ‘Bring that to me.’

Morne brought the candle, its flame now almost invisible in the dawn light that was creeping up beyond the city silhouettes. But when she brought it up in front of the girl’s eyes the flame was a sharp orange in reflection, clear as in an obsidian mirror. The girl’s pupils snapped tight into a pin-prick and she gasped and flexed back, eyelids snapping shut with a gasp. Behind her, Morne gave a croak of what could be relief. Lerato went round the table counter-clockwise, applying the flame gently but firmly to each blank gaze, leaving each diner blinking in her wake, their eyes returning to normal. They blinked sleepily at each other, catching each other’s eyes sleepily and smiling in bemusement.

‘Are we there yet?’ asked one in a sleepy child’s voice, and laughed.

‘Thank fuck,’ muttered Morne. ‘Ok let’s get these idiots out of here. Gonna order a bunch of taxis.’ He was furiously keying his phone.

They were a little unsteady on their feet, a little woozy. ‘What the fuck did we drink last night?’ muttered one.

‘Ok so here’s what we do,’ Lerato stepped in. ‘Step one. It is now six a.m. Soon you will get into the cars that are waiting for you. It will take one hour for you to get home, and when you do, you will drink a full glass of water and then you will get into bed and fall asleep. In two hours you will be fine. That is all you have to do now.’

‘What happened last night? I feel super weird.’

‘It doesn’t matter. You don’t need to remember that. You had a lovely time.’

The girl looked at her, a flicker of a memory jostling her. ‘Yes, I did, didn’t I?’ She smiled.

And so each of them turned and were led, docile, unsteady at first but then with increasing confidence, down the long decline of the bridge to where the first taxis were pulling up. The young people were all healthy, quite strong; they had spent hours of their lives in gyms in the city, eating good foods; though at first they wobbled like lambs, soon their strength and agility returned and they walked confidently down towards the cars, pulling their sleep-creased clothing



straight, a little sheepish, but laughing too. Some of them queasy in the guts, but nothing they hadn't got over before. They had all just come to the end of their last year in college, and being fortunate young people, many of them were travelling now, in the next few days: trips overseas, trips to islands, or holiday homes on remote coasts, to climes both cold and warm. They would carry this night with them where they went.

On the outside, they were recovering their colour; rosy pink, milky brown, the colours of animal health. But the inside of the body is another landscape. And within each of their guts, if you could let each of them pass through an x-ray machine in this moment, you would see, gleaming luminously, marinading in red wine and cradled in their healthy toned bellies, the luminously green glowing chunks of undigested fruit, and encased within each chunk the bullets of the seeds, gleaming, eager, on their way.

'Thank you,' said Morne to Lerato, after he'd led her down the slope in the dark.

'I didn't do much. This was stupid, tonight.'

'Yes.'

'What will you do, now?'

He glanced back at the darkness at the base of the bridge; then towards home. A single small square of light caught his eye, set up high against the dark: his own window. Andrew must have made it there safe. He hesitated.

'Oh my god,' said Lerato. 'There's another one.'

With a weary sigh, he followed her pointing figure to the grim figure laid out on the ground. It had actually slipped his mind.

'Ah,' he said. 'Ah yes. Him.'



Roland had awoken to a great silence. He lay flat on his back, his arms outstretched, and saw the night sky. The true one, not a concrete roof. A bright silence climbing leagues into the air above him; and below him an equivalent

drop of dumb clay. And him a bony creature wedged between the two. He lay flush with the ground but not part of it. Its surface gritty and unkind, expelling him like a thorn from a wound. A wave of nausea forced out a groan from him. The world swayed beneath his back but he held on, digging his fingers into the soil. He felt very sick.

Everything was different.

Silence. No voices spoke, no ticking or belling or muttering in the heart of things.

And for a moment he felt, achingly, the lonely muteness of the universe, all the stones dumb, the bones unspeaking, his own bones containing within themselves cores of silence. The spaces around him not rich with manifest life but just a brute arrangement of matter. The sickness rose in him again.

He seemed to be the only spot of life in this world. Beyond, just a stretch of faded tar and concrete. Shapes heaved and chuckled, *an old lady telling bones*, but they were fading, leaving him rapidly now, passing away like dreams. He became aware of his own stench, at one with the nausea inside, indistinguishable from the sickness in air and soil.

With a moan, he thrashed his arms at his side, an upturned tortoise; stretched his old neck out, peering and writhing. At last succeeded in heaving himself onto his side, got an elbow under him. Stared panting into the dark.

Then saw there were further complications. People. Two humans, standing some way off, one of them with a flashlight pointed at the ground. They looked up quickly over towards him, as if they too had just caught his scent. Was he meant to know them? From where, from when? Was he meant to know their *names*? He whimpered at the enormity of it all.

The figures came forward. A slim man, a stout woman. Some long-forgotten impulse to dignity made him bring his feet up under him, attempt to hike himself to his feet. In a panic, he raised his hand in a half-forgotten gesture. A dumb lunge of pain in his head.

‘Are you ok, man?’ The man was coming towards him. His voice was flat, with no echo or resonance. ‘You’re bleeding, whoah.’

Seized with urgency, dizzy, Roland lurched forward to meet the

outstretched hands – catching his foot on a splintered branch and coming down heavily, falling back into the black.

Then they were on him, hands on him, voices, soothing him, keeping him down, holding him up, hands on his back, gripping his arms.

*Look at that he's been hurt, look at the blood on his head. It's okay.*

*Shh, shh don't struggle now. We've got you, we've got you.*

He opened his mouth. The voice that came out was gritty and unused, but loud.

'I don't know where I am,' he said as clearly and loudly as he could, like someone demanding asylum at a border crossing. *'I don't know where I am.'*

## 6.

The vines had delivered up their fruits. Rolled their balls of seeds out into the night, found hands to lift them, mouths to taste. Now the vines retracted, shrivelled, their task complete. They twisted on the ground like dying snakes. Below, in the soil, the fine rootlets gave a shudder, shaking themselves out like the smallest most delicate hands, washing off this soil, this time. They had bowled their shiny fruit into the world, into the future. Peaceful, they rested. Worms knit among them. They would rot. In a soft ejaculation of ending, the spent cranium of the oldest woman shivered, crumbled, broke into powder. The place was done.

Up on high, the bridge shivered, twitched. The party-goers had left the candles burning when they wandered into their deep dream; now they were burning down to pools of hot wax. It irritated the skin of the bridge, it made it shudder. The flames guttered, the hot wax dripped between the seams of the concrete; one last wick-end, flaring, slipped down through the gap too, falling like a primitive firework, landing not far from the pile of oily rags where Roland once slept. The fire considered its position; sent out a tongue.

The bridge sighed, fatalistic. Felt the tickle of the flame.



It wouldn't have been a hugely long flight, ordinarily; but even though Gaby had the funds for a good ticket, at such short notice there were only seats on indirect flights, with long stopovers of six or eight hours in cities halfway across the world. She got a taxi very early to the airport, with hours to spare. All she wanted was to get this part done, to be in motion again, to be gone. it seemed right to be sneaking out of town under cover of darkness. When the taxi-driver dropped her outside the concourse she felt the cold in the bones of her hands, the handle of her suitcase digging sharply in, although it was almost empty.

The extra wait at the airport gave her ample time to lose her nerve. She

was so early, it wasn't yet possible to pass through security, so she sat on one of a row of conjoined plastic chairs with her single piece of luggage on her lap. Although her fingers slowly lost their blueness in the warmth of the check-in hall, they would not relax their grip on the handle of her bag. The rest of her body started to overheat in her heavy jacket, to sweat even, but she remained sitting clenched and still, unwilling to free her hands, to shuffle out of her coat and make herself comfortable. She wanted no further developments, no further steps in this process. It had taken so much will to get this far, she feared the entire effort might come undone if she now relaxed – if she unzipped or unbuttoned, or put down what she carried.

Eventually the early shift of ticket-checkers came to take their places at the counters. Gaby sprang to her feet and was first in line, staring hard and impatient while a sleepy lady prodded her computer awake with manicured fingers, long nails and lips painted red to match the airline livery. At last she let Gaby through with a cold professional smile and then it was on to the security check. Again she was the first there: she could take her pick of three different x-ray machines, three different uniformed friskers with electronic wands in their hands. Gaby stopped short. An impatient businessman behind her pushed ahead and she watched as his suitcase rolled through the apparatus. She could just glimpse the screen, and the contents of his briefcase exposed in unlikely pastel pinks and greens, like a microscope slide of suspicious bacteria. His poor sad folded pyjamas, his paltry papers, his electronic cables tangled and snarled like fishing line. Apparently there was nothing alarming there.

Gaby quailed. She put her bag down, and bought a little time by fiddling with the clear plastic baggies they provided for hand creams and fluids, pretending to be seriously considering and arranging her tubes of moisturiser. At the bottom, the black stone lay, wrapped in lacy underwear. Her hands brushed against its solidity. Surely still traces of blood on that serrated edge. The officers next to the machine were waiting for her, watching carefully, it seemed. They wouldn't miss it. It was just about the only thing in her bag, and heavy as hell. It would gleam on the x-ray screen, a wedge of menacing blackness, dense and vibrating, impossible to explain. She wondered if it was in fact illegal, to remove

an ancient artefact from the country. Probably, although she'd never heard of anyone being bust for stones duller than diamonds.

In one pocket of her jacket was her boarding pass, which she'd idiotically scrolled tight. She smoothed it out and read again the instructions on the back about aerosols, batteries, blades; about plant matter and meat. Not a word on there about rocks. Rocks were perfectly legitimate things to bring on a plane. Anyway, there was nothing she could do now about it now. The x-ray attendants were waiting for her, were watching her curiously, she felt. She felt around in the other pocket of her jacket, looking for keys or coins or other small things to offload.

Her fingers closed on something sticky and moist. Blood, was her first thought, but no; this was cool and slippery. Blood would have dried into a crust. She glanced at her fingertips. There was nothing visible on them – a slight dampness, a clear sheen of something – but when she brought them surreptitiously to her nose, the odour almost knocked her backwards. She shoved her hand back in her pocket, swallowed hard. It was unmistakable: the aggressive green scent of the broken cacti plants. And there – her finger delving, finding – was a chunk of what she now recognised as plant matter, sticky at one end, small enough to be concealed in a hand. She flinched as a prickle went into the quick of her fingernail.

She wasn't sweating anymore. She'd gone the other way: her skin felt cold and dry, drawn tight. All the blood, all the weight in her, gathered somewhere between her lungs and her stomach. And she started to shake a little. What would a chunk of plant look like to that all-seeing, all-piercing x-ray eye? It would probably be translucent, insubstantial but intriguing; it would look nothing like a knife or a gun. But it would seem worse than the stone axe, even more suspicious. Obviously not of human origin. Organic matter. Toxins. Drugs. And what if there were dogs? Dogs would sniff that pungence a mile away.

She refused to be stopped now. It was just a little chunk of the stuff.

She took a deep breath, turned away from the security guards and shrugged off the voluminous coat; as she did so pulling the fruit out of the pocket and bringing her hand to her mouth and stuffing it in and – oh god *horrible* – a

retching choke as she tasted the tartness – how could the flavor have changed so much? – and *the pain* the pain of the prickles on the soft membranes of her mouth but she crunched it with her teeth anyway, and then the coat was off her and she had to fold it up and shove it onto the moving belt because the man there was watching her with close attention. There must be something terrible going on in her face, a blotching or deathly pallor that she could not control, but with all her might she clenched her jaws and refused to let the pain show. And then all her possessions were riding away from her on the spooling belt and the woman on the other side was gesturing her forward and so she had to go. She swallowed her mouthful down like medicine and stepped through the all-seeing portal. For a moment she wondered if that scanning eye would see right inside her, see the alien organism now being forced down her pipes into her guts. The pain on the inside of her mouth, in her throat, was lacerating. As the woman passed her hands down the sides of her body, patting and pressing her thighs and her shoulders, she could not prevent a tear escaping her eye. It was nothing the woman hadn't seen before; she just clicked her tongue sympathetically and gestured her on. Gaby walked on through, teeth clenched over the smarting of the inside of her mouth, her throat.

But of course the stone had come up on the x-ray, and the second guard took a moment to open her suitcase. He passed his palms in between her folded t-shirts, her underwear, paging through them like the leaves of a cloth book, and when he found the stone he lifted it thoughtfully out. He had slender fingers and a gold-coloured watch looped loosely around his wrist. The ancient thing lay heavily in this modern palm, an old machine weighed against the new. Gaby pictured the rock coming down on the watch, springs flying. She knew already from the man's bemused smile that he was not going to be in trouble.

'And this? Are you going to bash someone?'

She smiled back, laughing easily. She wanted to say, 'Just a souvenir. To remind me of home.' But she found her sore mouth couldn't work its way around the words.

'Where did you get it?'

'In ... the bush,' she managed to cough out.

‘From the old people, neh? Homo Naledi, those monkey men.’ He wasn’t ignorant. ‘You know they say we come from them but I don’t think it can be possible.’

‘It’s just .... rock. Souvenir. For my ... mother.’

‘You should rather go for diamonds,’ he said, winking. ‘Not so heavy.’ Casually, he let the stone drop back into the suitcase, where it made a soft crater in the clothes. Dumped the underwear he’d removed back on top. Princess and the pea.

Gaby zipped the bag up easily, retrieved her jacket and walked on with dignity. Her mouth and throat were a furnace, and under the sting was something worse, was the pungent taste. It had seemed sweet at first, but now was bitter. She let the tears come freely now. But nobody paid any attention to that; nobody gave her a second look. She passed through passport control without demur. Maybe tears were not such a strange sight at airports. Maybe they were what was expected.

On the plane she had several gin-and-tonics in a row, and that at least numbed the pain on the inside of her cheeks. God knows, she thought, how things were getting on in her stomach, some toxic broth of strange juice and gin. Something flipped over and rumbled in her belly when she thought of it, so she tried not to, and ordered another. She seemed utterly ridiculous to herself now; what had she been thinking, putting that crap in her mouth? Pure panicked impulse.

It was a plane full of businessmen, with only a few women on the flight. Her guts were in turmoil, audibly rumbling and squeaking, which was embarrassing, as the young man next to her was particularly spruce in shirt and tie and a fresh haircut. She couldn’t meet his eye, nor could she bring herself to ask if she could clamber across his knees to visit the vile little toilets, which anyway always made her feel nauseous. At least he was slim, as was she, so there was not too much fleshly contact. She pressed herself against the cool plastic of the window, eventually lifting her feet onto the seat and hiding her face from him with her knees. Outside, a red laser line of dawn was advancing across the clouds.



Some time later, at twenty thousand feet, Gaby opened her eyes from a short, troubled sleep. Her stomach hurt; the plane stank, of farts and stale exhalations. Unusually so: her nose seemed supersensitive. She could smell peanuts on the breath of the sleeping man next to her, his aftershave, and in the air the traces of an airline meal that must have come and gone hours ago, while she slept.

She stared out at the light on the edge of the wing, winking red. The stone came into her mind. It lay above her, bundled in the overhead locker: sunk so deep for so long, now elevated to the rim of space. Some crime against gravity. She felt the tug of its bonds, fine lines of magnetic desire and regret, tugging it back down to earth, connecting this world to the other.

Already these were not altogether her own thoughts.

Twenty-five thousand, thirty thousand feet, racing as swift as a ghost or a witch through the dark heavens, the cabin so dim now she could not see her own hands, her own torso, the aeroplane penetrating higher and higher, into thinner and thinner air, up there where nothing lives.

This would be the last cogent thought Gaby would have for a while. She slept, and slept unusually long and deep, through two meals and several bouts of external turbulence, her body shutting down around the secret inside. As she slept, a new process was occurring, down in the lightless cavities of her body. Deep inside, the green force encountering the red blood, mingling, tasting, testing. Something stirring awake.

By the time Gaby herself woke again, as the lights came on in the aeroplane's fake pre-morning smelling of eggs, Gaby was definitely feeling rather peculiar. Below, a new landscape was taking shape. When she pushed up the window blind and saw the ground – ground of a peculiarly rich green, almost luminous, and *where* was she meant to be now? – she felt herself lurch towards it, as if falling through the window. The force of her desire to put feet down on the ground, any ground, made her head reel. She clutched at the armrests as if she were about to go spinning out of the seat.

The man next to her glanced at her worriedly. She was vaguely aware that he had in fact been watching her worriedly for some time now.

‘Are you sure you’re ok?’ he asked, as if continuing something, as if they’d been in the middle of a conversation. He was sitting strangely in his seat, pulling tensely away from her so that his seatbelt strained. He thinks I’m going to be sick on his suit pants, she thought, and she wanted to laugh; but that made her feel like actually retching. She turned her face quickly back to the window and concentrated on taking deep breaths, grinning fiercely at her own reflection. Something in her gut was itching to move, was adjusting its prickles and pincers. On they descended, down towards this richly, stickily gleaming green landscape, to an airfield that seemed barely solid, like it might be the surface of a bog or a green-scummed lake, like they were in a rocket ship about to vanish under the unstable surface of a swamp planet. It tugged sickly at the soles of her feet, at the skin on her palms. Something tried to force its way up her gullet, and gamely she swallowed it back down.

And then some parts were lost, some bits of time here and there some spaces, and then Gaby was standing in a gleaming concourse staring at a vast expanse of shining floor. Everything white and bright and marble smooth like a bathroom built for angels. A booming incomprehensible female voice, originating high above, was announcing important matters in a swooning rustling language that sounded like threatening song. Gaby pulled her head up, controlled the wobble, and before she knew it she was walking, feet rustling silently over the silky expanse of floor. She felt weightless, the soles of her sneakers barely touching the floor, as if she was sliding frictionless without volition. She could manage this, this was fine. Here over her shoulder was her bag. Her passport, in the pocket of her jacket. And in the other - yes! - the crumpled piece of paper which was very important, which was what? Boarding pass! Boarding pass! This would all be fine. Large black electronic boards on either side winked and shuffled their gleaming numbers. If she could just work it out, work out which way to walk and keep walking, everything she need to know was here, was being signalled to her.

She studied the strip of paper in her hand. It was scrunched up and slightly damp, as if she’d been mashing it in a sweaty fist. She studied it for ages,

eyes passing over the collection of letters and figures. She read it again and again but somehow couldn't quite comprehend where she was, where she was meant to be, how these instructions correlated to the shifting figures on the message boards. It was extremely important, she knew that, although also confusing, because there were in fact two pieces of paper, very similar; and here were the names of the cities, two cities, but which plane was going in which direction and where was she now? Her eyes wobbled and shook and the words blurred. Maybe if someone could help her, if she could ask that woman making announcements perhaps, or a woman with red fingernails and lips, if she could just find one of those? That was what they were there for? She stood reeling for a moment, keeping a tight grip on the slip of paper so she didn't fall over. That was important, one of the most important things.

And then she was in motion again, walking past a tall wall of glass, and through it on the far side were aeroplanes, near and far, wheeling along the ground in a slow arcing dance, and she paused to watch them for a moment, amused that they seem unable to lift free of the ground and fly. She turned to laugh about this with the slim man next to her – surely he'd been right there by her side a moment ago? – but the pale light coming through the window was wild, pupil-shattering, and she had to close her eyes. And when she opened them again she was moving but her feet were still, she was gliding, she held her arms out and watched the walls move past her without any effort, and that made her dizzy so she had to close her eyes again and then she was stumbling and almost falling to her knees as the moving walkway kicked her off its end and in a lucky lucid moment of self-preservation she staggered over to a row of steel seats and pressed herself down into one at the end, hanging on until the world stopped tipping and turning.

She knew she needed to sit here and work through this slowly, rationally. Take as much time as she needed. She should look at each boarding pass in turn. How difficult could it be to work this out? She wasn't a stupid person, she'd flown across the world before. Directly across from where she sat was another giant illuminated flight board, flickering and changing before her eyes, shuffling times. *Cancelled, cancelled* it said to her, *delayed, go to gate*. And then in a blink,

everything changed again, rearranged, nothing kept its place for long enough for her to grapple with. She needed to slow it all down. She wished for a pen, a whiteboard. Something that could be still in her hand for just for a moment.

She stood up spasmodically, sat down again. The boarding pass trembled in her grip. There was something in her that was pushing her on, something that rejected all these words – words printed on the boarding pass, words on the board, words on the direction signs suspended above her head from the high ceiling. Something inside was having an old-lady tantrum, stomping, insisting. It wanted old-fashioned things, it wanted sky, wanted earth beneath the feet. A *place*. It was looking out through Gaby's eyes at this bald bright air-conditioned space and petulantly thinking, *no*. This not a *place*. Gaby snapped her teeth together, pushed herself up from her seat and launched herself again into the flow of people.

She marched on, weaving, pausing, blundering. One curved hall led through into another. Walk, she told herself, walk. You need to get *somewhere*.

The flow of traffic decanted her into a large hall where moving paths of steel and rubber circulated endlessly, ponderous metal serpents with bags on their backs. This was the place for luggage, she recognised. For her luggage. What *was* her luggage? She had no memory of packing it – was it the green leather bag she'd taken, or the black? Where were her things? Panicked, she turned to the person standing next to her and it turned out to be her neighbour, the nervous guy off the plane, the one she'd nearly vomited on – or *had* she vomited on him, a hideous thought, but he seemed clean enough – and she was vaguely aware that actually he had maybe been alongside her all this time, a persistent shadow in the corner of her eye, following her anxiously through the airport ...

'Excuse,' she started, and was harshly reminded of the flaming pain in her throat again. She coughed and tried again. 'Excuse me?'

'If you just wait here, I'm going to call someone,' he was saying, as if continuing a conversation they'd been having all along. The poor guy's voice was tense, as if he was putting a lot of effort into sounding soothing.

'No, but,' she croaked, 'my *bags*.'

‘Just *wait*. Just wait *right here*.’ He sounded positively stern this time. For thing, she thought vaguely, look how sad he seems and tired, his hair all tousled. Again the anxious thought: had she done something to upset him?

‘You are not very well I think. Just stay *exactly here*. Do not move until I get back.’

Gaby sighed and glanced away, and when she looked for him again he was gone from her side. She focussed on one of the moving belts. She needed to keep watching it closely, she knew, watch and wait and be ready for when her bags came around.

She might have stood there for some time as the belt went round and round and round, growing familiar with the various totes and boxes and suitcases circulating, plucked off one by one but none for her, might even have gone up really close and crouched down with her hand trailing on the articulated rubber plates, fingers bump-bumping on their surfaces. A dog appeared, and busy little black and white number straining at a leash. She held her arm out to it in relief – it was lovely, what a playful healthy young creature, bright-eyed – thinking, come on then, here I am, sniff me out. Her balance was shot and she slumped sideways onto the floor and stayed sitting like that, hand out.

The drug-sniffing dog stopped dead ten centimetres away, cold in its tracks, as if it had just received a brutal command to halt. Its nostrils flared, its pelt shuddered. The animal’s handler tugged back on the leash and pulled the dog to heel and walked past Gaby without a glance; she was invisible. When she tried to rise from the floor she discovered that somehow she could not.

Time slipped again, and when she glanced around, the hall was emptied out. Nobody but her was still waiting; the belt still rotated but there were only three lonely bags riding it. She struggled to her feet. Her luggage! She reached out for a random bag as it passed by – a black Samsonite – half expecting her hand to pass right through the handle like a ghost’s. Instead her fingers hooked on, and wouldn’t let go, and she trotted along beside the moving belt in a panic of entanglement. She stumbled, and it felt easier to give up, give in, to fall upon the belt and let its motion carry her gently on, under the curtain of black rubber skirts, and on through the wall to the greater beyond.

You'd think that someone would take notice of all this peculiar behaviour, all this troubling stumbling around the halls of a major airport. But airports are curious spaces. Everyone in them's conducting a private odyssey, sleep-deprived, fed on queasy foods, anxiously tracking the clock in a strange time zone. You're on your own, exploring strange space; space distorted and dislocated by the supersonic speeds that have brought you there and left you unthinkable distances from all you know. Nobody knows who you're supposed to be. They can't tell how weird you're really being, until the strangeness lurches over into something unmistakable, intolerable. Some people, to be sure, are carefully watched in an airport, their shifty moves and suspicious demeanours logged and pursued; but Gaby, small and female and blonde and equipped with a business class ticket, however badly she abused it, was not one of these.

So it was that Gaby escaped too much notice as she slid and staggered through the halls of the airport, as the long minutes of her layover ticked by, flew past, crawled by, reversed. So it was, even, during a quiet interlude in the circulatory cycles of the airport, that she was able to hitch herself to the luggage belt and vanish through the portal, transported into the luggage handlers' world of mystery.

The dog observed it all, of course; but the border collie knew better than to go close to that girl again, that human with the deeply inhuman funk on her fingertips, coming out of her pores, gushing from her mouth and nostrils with every breath. This was not something the pup was foolish enough to confront. After all, she had her own obsessive interests to pursue, such as cocaine, which spoke so compellingly to her exquisitely and perversely trained nose.

The other set of eyes on Gaby that afternoon belonged to the spruce young man who'd sat next to her on the plane, and had attached himself to her in a protective manner. On the plane, she'd seemed vulnerable and intriguingly unhinged. As they exited the plane, she'd almost slipped on the steep steps down onto the runway, and had reached out a pale hand. He'd steadied her, and her silky hair had brushed across the lapel of his suit jacket. He was twenty-four and had a romantic soul.

But even to such an interested party, the blonde girl had been growing

steadily less present as he tracked her erratic movements through the airport halls. Every few minutes she'd switch off, turn away from him mid-sentence and amble off in a random direction, or stare absently at the wall for a moment or two and turn back and seem surprised yet again to see him. But also less present in that she seemed to be becoming less visible, less and less a real girl. Almost transparent. When he returned from his fruitless quest to find a medical professional to look after her, he saw from across the luggage hall how she was hooked off her feet and onto the moving belt, gracefully it seemed, like a fairytale princess blown on a breeze. He registered it distantly, not with any kind of alarm at a possible life-threatening emergency. When her body was pulled under the black plasticised flap of the machine and into the beyond he did not react, just stood there for a moment remembering with striking vividness how he'd longed to do that very thing when he was a little boy on visits to the airport. He half contemplated following her through himself, diving onto the carousel and letting it take him, before shaking his head and moving along, barely believing that what he'd seen had actually transpired. And of course he too had a gate to get to, a connection to catch, and nothing that happened in an airport felt real anyway. By the time he'd got through the gate and was seating himself in his own plane to another city on another continent altogether, he had really almost completely forgotten about the strange drifting girl. He plucked a single silvery hair from his lapel.

Although, being in a window seat, if he'd turned his head slightly to the side and looked out at the grey runway, between the tips of the wings he would perhaps have seen a slim figure making her way across the tarmac, crossing the complex diagrams of lines painted in red and yellow and white across the runways, heading out towards the open space where the planes turned and taxied, where in between their lanes there was green grass, and a big sky, and ground underfoot.

When Gaby got out there, out beyond the parked planes and back onto good fresh soil, the relief was vast and reckless. She urgently needed to empty herself out to make space for all this good cold air. She broke into a run, her gut churned

up, matter urgently needing out. Her heel sank into the soft crown of a molehill and she fell, twisting, saving herself with the heels of her hands and immediately convulsing and chundering out everything in her stomach; and there were the chunks of suspicious green in the bile-stinking spill before her nose. Oh, she thought in mild surprise, it's hardly digested, and then all thought was ground and rattled from her head by thunderous passage of a plane taking off, a plane so vast and monumental that it was like a city uprooted and trundling across the sky, or a piece of mountaintop sheared off; and up was down and she was slammed flat, face planted in the grass.

When the plane had passed overhead it left a wonderful silence in its wake, the deepest silence she'd experienced for ages, forever even. Her mouth was half in a molehill and she could taste the soil, and it tasted good to her, so much better than what had just come out; and the grass under her cheek was deliciously soft and lightly dewed – when last had she seen droplets of dew, dabbled them with her fingers? She pulled her bag over her eyes, and her knees up to her chest, and she drifted towards sleep. There was a perverse and familiar comfort in knowing, one way or another, she was in trouble again.

From a distance she looked harmless of course, picturesque even. A maiden in a meadow. The security officer who was flicking through the video screens in the command room paused for a second to observe the curled form on the grass, the blonde hair tossing lightly in the breeze like a child's, its colour catching the light as the sun came out for the first time that day. The security officer let the camera stay on the girl for a long time, longer than was operationally ideal, before wearily pushing herself back from the desk and preparing to sound the alarm. Pausing again, distracted for a moment, because there was something weird going on with the reception, some kind of fuzz or flicker in the grass by the girl's head. The officer lightly smacked the side of the monitor and the picture cleared. Might have to make a note of that if it started happening often. But everything was fine onscreen again.

She felt a little bad, to be the one to have to go and wake the girl from her sleep. And drag her in here and put her through the third degree, of course.



Do all the things that had to be done, the searching and the questioning and logging the incident and so on and so forth. You couldn't just let the people wander out among the planes, of course not. Not that it didn't happen some times. They were never meant to talk about it outside the job, what with all the security concerns, but it was surprising how easily people got lost in this place, or just ended up where they weren't supposed to be. Obsessed planespotters trying to get close. Drunks streaking down the runway. Stowaways climbing up into the wheelwells, frozen stowaways dropping back out. Tourists with intense flight phobia, flipping out. She'd seen it all. The officer sighed, shuffling the reports on her desk to find the items hidden under the drift of papers – a pair of latex gloves, radio, tazer, walkie-talkie – and made her way down to the interview room.

In the end they didn't keep her long, after all. Gaby, her head now as clear as a tuning fork, was almost sorry that they didn't. Sitting there in the little interview room with the airport cop staring at her and taking down her statement in heavy pen, she felt wonderfully serene and at home; for once quite calm, not jiggling her feet or pulling at the leash to be let go. It seemed to be dissolving, the tight knob of guilt that had been sitting in her stomach since the night she encountered the man under the bridge, and long before that too. The cop was asking her questions, gentle questions, why had she done that, what was she doing out on the field, what did she want, what was she looking for? They had nothing on her of course; her visa was fine, she was carrying nothing suspect or contraband, she could give them her mother's name and address. And she looked fine, if a little grass-stained. Her voice was still weird, but they were not to know that; if they'd thought to look inside her mouth, they would have found it swollen and angry red, but they hadn't.

'It was an accident,' she said. 'I was looking for the bathroom, and and were was this door half-open ... Yes, I took this sleeping pill before I flew, I'm not used to it, I don't normally do that. I think it kind of knocked me out. I'm fine now though.'

Easy easy easy. It felt like lying, as easy as lying, although it wasn't

exactly. She wished she could give the nice officer, who was scribbling futilely on a piece of paper with a used-up ballpoint pen, something better. The officer didn't know her, didn't know that she was not quite herself, that she was being different, slowed up, calm.

What it was, the thought came to her, crystalline and magnified like something seen through the lens of a pure drop of rain, was that this was the place she'd been seeking: this interrogation room, this quiet uniformed woman. It had been prepared for her. All she had to do was open her mouth and let it roll out of her: every bad thing. She let it form in her mouth once, twice – her mouth still sore from the prickles, still red and lacerated from them – but each time the confession died, breathed out of her without a sound. And then a third time, unexpectedly, it came rolling right out:

‘Can I – can I please just say something?’

The officer looked at her without evident enthusiasm.

‘A ... a confession.’

The officer sighed. ‘Crikey,’ she muttered.



Another house, another bedroom, another man sprawled in a bed waiting to wake up to a helluva headache. But with crucial differences: where Roland had been laid out on the ground, Andrew was up high, in an airy loft-like room with big windows open to a sparkling summer day, and the room was fragrant with the scent of plants.

Next to him on the bed sat Morne, a sprig of rosemary in his hand. Morne alone in himself, unobserved, watching and not watched. A prior observer might not recognise this still figure as the same old Morne – the fun one, the one who poured all those drinks and ran-not-walked and joked a-mile-a-minute and speed-talked his way into your space and clasped your arm and kissed your cheek and was taking your hand and shaking on it before you'd even realised a deal was on the table. This man here on the bed was entirely still. His crest of grey hair lay flat.

His face was emotionless, blank even; his mouth a flat line, his lids half-closed. But his eyes were clear and fixed on Andrew's face. You might think he was inert, a machine waiting to be switched on, until you saw those eyes. It was impossible to say what he was thinking. Whatever it was, he was entirely absorbed in the present moment; not planning ahead, not reminiscing. He might have been engaged in mental computations of boggling complexity, or composing a symphony; he might simply have been sampling the air, noting the molecules, the dust of pollen, the metabolised chemicals coming off the body of the man before him. He might be contemplating beauty, or recording the music of Andrew's breath in, breathout.

Andrew, in contrast, was deep in the mulch of the past, deep as deep can be, glad as a pig in the muck of it. He'd sweated heavily in the night and the sheets were damp, but he was yet to wake and be disgusted by the cooling moisture. His headache was nascent, not yet realised, biding its time until its host should awake. And he was happy. In the dream he was back in the best place, the first place, his place of origin. In the herb garden of his mother's house, two years old and naked, covered in good sweet mud from head to toe and putting more of it in his mouth and spitting it out; there was zero barrier between boy and mud, him in the soil and the soil in him. Music on his mother's little plastic radio and her reaching down a rough hand – her own skin, she never gardened in gloves – to wipe a clot of mud off his nose, laughing. He muttered delightedly in his sleep, swiped at his own face and laughed. His older sisters somewhere in the house, laughing. Everything green.

Morne did not laugh along. But his face did, perhaps, soften a touch. He leant forward and touched the herb gently to the sleeping man's nose. Andrew sneezed, and in the dream his mother's fingers turned to petals, soft Namaqualand daisy petals, butter yellow, brick red.

When Andrew did wake, an hour later, the discomfort of his real position became quickly apparent. He was shoved into a crack between mattress and wall, almost out the bed, and the sheets around him were an odorous wet bandage. He stayed very still for several minutes, but was immediately alert and cognisant of where

he was and the possibilities of what might have happened to get him there. First item of concern: he was naked.

There was no drowsy forgiving interlude between the warmth of the dream and chill of the real, just an instant plunge into anxiety and urgent strategising. First, the need to ease himself upright in the bed; the need to find his clothes; the need to get the hell out without further interaction.

His clothes had been folded up and neatly stacked on a chair, something he was almost certain he had not done himself. Not that he was a messy person, but these clothes had been squared away with a certain artfulness and care that he knew were not his own; his old work shirt and his cargo trousers had been tidied up by someone with knowledge of how to fold and preserve far finer fabrics. Impatiently he flapped them out of their folds and tugged them on. That was a bit better, although his shoes were still missing.

He became aware of someone singing in the background, the sound coming up through the open window on a well of sunshine. He peered out.

Down in white-paved courtyard, a man was doing yoga. Andrew recognised that this was, as he had suspected, Morne's luxurious house that he was in. Despite himself, he was transfixed by the sight of the man's body moving through its positions. The light was clear from a smooth pale-blue sky, and the man's skin was dappled by leaf-shadows. Morne's hair was silver but his body was smooth and muscular. He was doing a headstand, facing away from Andrew, and the upside-downness brought on a little surge of nausea. He swallowed hard. Morne neatly reversed himself and sat, arranging himself cross-legged, facing Andrew. He didn't glance up at the window, but Andrew got the distinct impression that the pose was for his regard: so perfectly lined up with the viewing window. He'd never really noticed Morne's body before. His own body felt shabby in comparison, sagging, battered, although surely he must be at least twenty years younger. It was slightly frightening to watch. Spooky, he thought.

Andrew took a step back away from the window, uneasy. Had he...? Had they...? It certainly would not be the first time he'd fallen into bed with the wrong person, but usually he had the grace to remember. And why the blackout, the headache, the weirdness? He had hardly drunk anything. The taste in the back

of his throat was acid and sweet, like rotten fruit. He shook his head. Never mind that now. Time to go.

As it turned out, it was not so easy to leave. The apartment was enormous and built on several levels, with eccentric stairwells and unexpected skylit courtyards. His headache suggested, quite brusquely, that he sit down in one for just a moment. He went down on his haunches, touching the new leaves of an exotic euphorbia he hadn't see before – it was always good for a hangover, this, to touch the little leaves. There were cacti here, too. Their alien anatomies seemed about right for an oddball like Morne. Andrew was not himself such a fan of cacti. There was something impersonal about them; you couldn't feel them looking at you, like you could with other plants. They were close-mouthed shut-eyed little bastards. Beautiful in their way, with their fat spirals, their radial symmetries, their skins marked with the toothmarks of their own unfurling blades; but there was something missing. These were plants that needed nothing from humans, beyond a little help propagating, a little help settling in. Popular, though: people liked the fact that you didn't have to do much with a succulent. Hardly even water them. And that was part of his complaint: he didn't like their self-reliance; there was no give or take, no relationship.

He heard a patio door open up and Morne was there in a cloud of delicious aromas.

'Top of the morning!' he said. 'Breakfast? Think you probably need some. I'm not letting you run away without something in your stomach.'

Morne's kitchen was weird. So clean. None of the implements and devices looked like they'd ever been used before. One pan had a skim of patina on it, as if it had been passed over a flame once or twice; but apart from that it might well have been a kitchen in a department store, set up for display. Andrew passed his hands over the pans and plates and pitchers, making them knock together lightly like hanging bells. He felt bad, touching them with his earthy fingers.

Breakfast was mushrooms on toast. Morne served it in an apron; at least he had shorts on underneath. But the toast was thick and crispy, the mushrooms fragrant and steeped in a creamy sauce heavy on butter and garlic. Andrew ate

humbly; his stomach was tender at first, but then his appetite came back strongly. He felt very much better already.

‘Wow,’ he said. ‘Thanks, that was amazing. What kind of mushrooms are these?’

Morne winked. ‘The good kind.’

The mushrooms were *so* good. He ate much more than he normally would, and asked for seconds, and wiped the plate with a piece of toast. When he was finished, Andrew felt silenced, as if the meal had filled in all the gaps where words once lay. Morne darted in and out busily while he was eating, not interfering. Each time he popped back in he looked a little different: clothes changed, the hair fixed, something different with his face, a brighter look. Did Morne wear eye make-up? Andrew wondered vaguely. At last he stood there in his usual presentation: a red Hawaiian shirt, shorts, sandals. Slipping on the Ray Bans.

‘I’ve got to go out,’ said Morne, ‘but hang around? You’re welcome to rest here for as long as you wish. Go back to bed. There are a lot of different bedrooms in this house, you can try them all. And have some more food, someone’s got to finish this lot.’ And then he was gone again.

It would have been easy for Andrew to stay longer, much longer; to stretch out on the cool linen couch and close his eyes and sink back into easy dreams. He thought of snooping, and put his head into one or two of the rooms; but he could tell there would be nothing interesting to find there. The decor, in a marine theme, was of a terrifying blandness. Drift-wood framed watercolour seascapes. Portraits of ships at sail. Small useless primitively carved sculptures of seagulls and sailboats, perched on metal stands. It could all have been bought at once from some wholesaler of nautical kitsch. There was a total lack of books on book shelves, of any kind of clutter or evidence of ongoing living. The kitchen, when he wandered back in with his dirty plate, was pristine as a show-kitchen, as if no one had ever been in there. He imagined Morne backing out of the room, mopping his footprints off the silver-flecked flagstones. Which was of course exactly what Andrew should do now; reverse his steps.

He let himself out the front door. The front yard was a sea of pale gravel.

Maybe, he pondered, Morne would be interested in hiring someone to do more interesting things with the space. An indigenous garden, with wildflowers, maybe. He could ask.

Andrew gave himself a harsh laugh. What now, you looking for a reason to come back? You want to be the guy's garden boy? Maybe clean his pool while you're at it, he mocked. And do whatever else he needs done. All the little jobs. Idiot.

He turned his mind away again and set his feet deliberately on the road home. He was starting get bits and pieces of memory back. Certain images that were starting to congeal into evidence that well, yes, maybe perhaps, in fact possibly certainly, he'd slept with the boss. Certain scenes playing out with that bedroom as backdrop. That bed. A slope of naked back. A picture of Morne's face, up much too close to his, with a look in his eyes that was far too intense, too serious, for anything except desire or hatred. Andrew shook his head in bemusement; he was not displeased. But it felt like something irreversible had happened; like he couldn't go back.

Andrew groaned and broke into a run. A hard run: sweat it out. Better than going home. But something was disrupting him, was breaking the focus of the run. Every now and then he got a whiff of it. He glanced over his shoulder, expecting to see Morne coming up behind him. The smell had changed, had gone deep green, getting in behind his tonsils like Vicks, like menthol, like spearmint; but not for human consumption. It came and went, and next time he passed through a wash of it he came to a halt. Strong here. Sniffing, he tracked it to an alleyway where somehow a stunted bluegum grew.

There in the shade, poking its blunt head up through the fall of leaf litter, was one of those plants. The same. Andrew kicked away the leaves around it, revealing a cluster, a family in hiding: five or six heads, some small and some taller, some rounded and some more phallic, clumped closer together. They were bigger than the ones at CitiGreen; the vines raised up the glossy fruits tall as his thigh; their spines were thicker, too, translucent grey like cat claws, with the thinner silvery hairs extending beyond each cluster and shining in the morning light like spider silk. There were dewdrops caught in the fibres. That familiar

green odour came up off them and it triggered a curious feeling in his skin, a prickling shiver, in his hands and cheeks down the skin of his back, as if he was a cat whose fur had been stirred to rise by some disturbance in the atmosphere. He started to salivate.

Despite himself he put out a hand to the fruit, their plumpness seductive. And again, of course, the prickles punished him, and the pain was worse this time, with a more unpleasant chemical charge, as if the bigger plants packed more punch. He jerked back his hand, swearing. Again and again, more and more idiocy.

At CitiGreen all was quiet and unremarkable at first. As he approached, the beds looked even bleaker and barer than he remembered though, almost black.

Something else, too: a new signboard. Must have gone up only that morning. It was facing away from him, showing its face to the traffic. Big, almost a billboard. When he went round to the front he took a moment to understand what it was saying, in such big red letters. COMING SOON, it said. *Three hundred new bays in the city centre!*

And there, in a neat architectural rendering, with gestures towards vegetation, the suggestion of a roof garden, was a gleaming four-storey parking garage, its stacked decks giving the impression of a layer cake, gleaming in the impossible sunlight of a future day. On the billboard, there was no bridge, no vegetable beds, no clapped-put tin shed, no garden, although all these things still existed alongside, in timid reality.

Stunned, Andrew took a step back.

Now he noticed the stench in the air: smoke, char. Looking down, he saw his boots were blackened with it. The legs of the billboard too, rose out of blackness. He raised his eyes and saw that the few remaining beds in CitiGreen were smoking. There hadn't been much left in the way of vegetation to burn here; a non-starter of a fire. The gate hung open and he went inside, the stench intensifying. Forensically, he traced the whorls of charred leaves back to their source. All trails led back inside, under the lea of the bridge, into the shadow. He hesitated.



This was not a safe place. Never had been, perhaps. It still felt warm in here, from the flames that had evidently passed through. Heat coming up from the ground. He could feel his skin growing gritty from the soot and when he looked down at his hands the twined tattoos were smudged with grey, growing illegible. He went deeper in to the darkness.

Roland's bed was gone. The bed was the epicenter: a back stinking pit, the heart of an old oven, a pit of stained cement reeking of incinerated flesh. There was a mass of something dark and glossy lying there, a horrible cocoon; imperfectly he made out black cracked sinews and the splinters of white bones. Andrew knelt, trying to will his eyes wider in the dark. The stench was from hell, roast flesh, cinders, cooling terror. He reached out a hand, then pulled it back. Then willed himself and reached out again to touch the fragments of bone he could see. Heat still came off the remnants, almost enough to singe his fingertips, if they hadn't been hardened by a life of work. A line of teeth, still white, still lodged in a jaw. He touched, touched, pulled it gingerly from the ash.

Gasped in relief to see the long dog-tooth. Then saw the curled canine form, the four folded limbs, the head laid down, coming clear from the ash.

For a moment had a reeling sensation of being bowed over the landscape like a bridge himself, his feet and his hands buried wrist deep in the soil, and under his fingers a million tiny lives curling, itching, talking, singing to each other; and the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet taking root, putting out feelers into the deep deep soil and finding down there other hands reaching up to grasp him, to pull him deeper. He swayed back on his heels, reached out to balance himself on the concrete strut that held the burned nest. And for a moment felt the life in it. The concrete still warm, like a living thing. He felt it shift under his palm.

And then with a sigh of enormous fatigue, the bridge came down on top of him, and broke across his back.



The thing is, the thing was. She'd been trying so hard. To be good, to stay clean, to *take responsibility*.

Last year, in the summer. Gaby had left school six months before – barely scraping through, and a year delayed, after a suspension for that pickpocketing incident which in fact had been totally accidental, not that anyone ever believed her – and had been floating, looking around her life, as the months wore on and the air grew steadily warmer and dryer around her. Gaby's mother was away again on business, somewhere in the world where it still rained.

It was the start of the really bad drought, after the three or four somewhat bad summers that had preceded it. Things were brighter than they'd ever been, brighter than anyone had ever seen them, flickering with white light as if the world were made of brushed steel. It gave Gabriela a tight, excited feeling, as if in that thin bright air she might be burning off a skin, emerging as something new. A different Gabriela.

For one thing, her mother had left her alone in the house, which was unprecedented. Always there'd been people around her, guardians, servants and minders. And Gabriela was staying in, being sober. No drinking, no smoking, no boys. Her mother phoned every day. Every evening Gaby would tell her on the phone: *everything is fine, everything is good here*.

*Really?* He mother would repeat, sceptically. And Gaby, eyes squinting in the general radiance coming through the windows, would laugh and tell her *yes, yes, don't worry*.

Every day, Gaby would consult the internet for dam levels, for tips and tricks on water saving. She dutifully saved her shower water, stopped bathing every day, caught the rare drops of rain and stored them away in sterilised containers. She'd never been this diligent about anything. She bought ten-litre jugs of bottled water at the shop instead of her usual bottles of white wine.

*Darling we can afford the penalty, for god's sake*. Her mother's voice was bored.

Oh.

*Just keep my lawn alive, that's all I'm asking. It is alive, isn't it?*

The lawn's alive.

The lawn was her mother's special thing. A large, perfectly square patch out the back of the house, of a rich and mossy green. From a distance it was possible to believe that it was cut from felt; you had to go quite close, get your face down into it, to make out the individual stems of grass, they were so fine, so soft, so uniform in colour and texture. It was like a beautiful carpet you tried not to walk on.

There wasn't much else to the garden. It seemed the gardener had been hired pretty much entirely to tend this immaculate square.

Lawns had been outlawed in the first days of the drought; everyone was required to pull theirs up, to replace them with gravel or rockeries. But Gaby knew her mother wasn't the only wealthy person to have stubbornly held on to their gardens, their swimming pools. Gaby and the gardener watched each other uneasily in the simmering days across the sweating green of the illegal lawn. He dragged the long hose around the perimeter, or set up the sprinkler in different positions throughout the day, tracking the changing angle of the swollen sun. It seemed the stalks were never allowed to be dry. Sprinklers, hoses: all banned too.

Gaby felt shamed, sitting inside the airconditioned coolness of the house, to watch the gardener sweating in the heat. His skin looked glassy with sweat, the sun glancing off him in sharp spears. The water shooting out of the hosepipe was a lance of light. He never once ducked his head to drink from the flow, she noticed.

It was on a day of insane high temperature – thirty-seven degrees by the old-style thermometer in the kitchen – that she couldn't stand it anymore. She brought him a glass of water, with ice cubes.

'Why don't you take the day off,' she asked as he drank. 'It's too hot.'

He looked at her cautiously, then gestured at the lawn. 'Your mother ...'

'It's ok,' she said. 'I'll deal with it.'

And she would, too; she would show her mother what she was capable of.

That afternoon, she brought out the tubs and bottles of water, arrayed them on the paving next to the lawn. The saved water from the shower stall, from

the washing machine. She found a watering can and walked back and forth, dribbling out a modest ration.

There wasn't enough water in the house for the job, not from her meagre showers, not from the grey water from the washing machine, which she barely used anyway – she had enough clothes to last her for weeks without repeating an outfit. She ordered ten 20-litre bottles of spring water to be delivered, and left them lined up next to the lawn, at the ready. She glowed with achievement. Arms burning with the exertion of lugging dozens of litres, she posted her mother a photo of the grass. That night she texted the gardener: *Take the week off. My mother says its ok.*

But she was Gaby. Focus was not her best thing. It only took a day or two for her interest to wane. She started to water only once a day. It was hard work. She couldn't help but notice that the grass was growing yellow in patches. And longer: she'd forgotten that cutting a lawn was also part of the deal.

The next day, the gardener sent a text to ask if he should come in to look after things; her immediate guilty impulse was to send him away again, quite curtly. She didn't want him to see the place like this. Nervously she dumped another forty litres onto the lawn, went out to buy more.

'It's looking fine, Mum. Stop worrying. And yes I'm fine, no I'm not drinking. I'm getting exercise, I'm sleeping ...'

It was true, she was sleeping, in the night but also through the hot parts of the day. Shallow dives into sleep, a few feverish hours at a time.

Later she would wonder if what happened, and her slight light-headedness throughout this period, was because of lack of sleep, and also because she indeed had not been drinking – not wine, but not much water either.

*Well darling, perhaps when this conference is over you can come out to meet me here, we could do something together here. Would you like that?*

'Yes! I would like that. So much.'

That conversation made her smile and smile. Her mother had rung late at night in America, early morning for Gaby. Gaby was up already because it was so hot – would turn out to be the hottest day of the year, of the decade in fact, thus far.

She felt so peaceful that she decided to give herself a small reward: one cigarette. She knew where to find them. The gardener kept a stash of singles in a wooden box behind the potting shed. She sat out back on the patio, considering the lawn, and had one single smoke. Just a few puffs, in fact, before she stubbed it out on the bricks. That was how good she was being.

And then before the heat of the day began, slipping back into her bed, a light sheet, the patio door cracked open an inch to let the air in. Such luxury. And she slept and slept; Gaby, the jiggly girl so hyperactive she could barely get two hours rest at a time without jolting upright in a panic. All through the long morning she swooned, a deep, long trance that kept her blacked out, sweating. The dreams were warm, jungle thick, forest deep, taprooted dreams. She walked along a shore stinking with rotting kelp. She lay under a broad pale sky, and pale grass-heads swayed above her and one was tapping her forehead with its hollow almost weightless rattle and she was breathing in tiny specks of gold and everything reeked of gold. She breathed in the gold air and it was like drowning, it was new air, different, not made for her to breathe, but breathe she did; she breathed in flame and she did not die.

It was well after noon when she woke to a strange orange light seeping through into bedroom from the patio doors, and an aroma that was first pleasant, like the memory of campfire nights ....

And then she was upright and awake and the stench was growing more and more powerful, sooting up the air, and she stood groggily from her bed to see through the French doors the lawn transformed into a carpet of coals, with a spreading fringe of flames.

The fire saw her standing there and came over to say hello; it was trying to feel its way in with its sly fingers, prying, waving. She stood there dumbly as they licked around the bottom of the patio doors. As the figure of the gardener ran out onto the field of coals, trying, it seemed, to beat out the flames with his feet, with his bare hands. She even reached her fingers to the door handle – but already it was too hot, and then the firemen were there and pulling her away.

And then she turned her mind away from what she'd seen.

Over the next hours, the fire destroyed the bedroom and the garden, and

fought its way off the property out the back, up onto the rocky forehead of the mountain, where in the course of things it would grow into a conflagration that would take a hundred men seven days to control, and kill thousands of small mountain creatures, and contribute to the eventual extinction of a certain minor species of Ericaceae, and give three firefighters severe smoke inhalation, almost killing one, and cost her mother more money than Gaby would ever find a way to ask about.

Later, in the sodden remnants of the destroyed house and garden, they'd find the blackened plaques of molten plastic which had been the stockpiled water-containers. The fire investigators would consider whether these had acted as magnifying glasses: the cubes of water, filtered to be super-clear, taking the unprecedentedly bright rays and focusing them on the ground, on the tinderbox tufts of dry, uncut lawn.

But a more likely theory was the cigarette butt they'd found just outside the patio doors; and this was what was ultimately named as the at the source of the fire. And so once more it was trouble, trouble, trouble; and a hundred hours of penance; and a mother who, it seemed, would now never speak to her again.

The gardener, they told her only much later, had been in hospital for weeks, the skin burnt off his hands. He'd come back to the house, apparently, because he'd run out of money; and he wanted his smokes.



The airport cop was looking at her flatly. She'd waited until Gaby had stopped speaking, and a long minute after that for good measure. 'That sounds pretty bad,' she said at length. 'So ... why are you telling me this?'

'Well, I ...' Gaby's voice, trembling at first, steadied. 'I mean, I'm confessing? I accept responsibility for my actions. I am ... sorry.' She stopped, feeling shaky and noble.

Now told, the story seemed unreal, faintly ridiculous, a bad movie, or something she might have made up. But it was true. Here in this quietly

functional room, with this cop lady who despite the gun and the cuffs and the uniform was the most ordinary-looking person in the world, she would be ashamed to spin a story.

‘And I also ... I also blamed the gardener. I said I’d seen him smoking. I acknowledge it. I lied. I acknowledge it. They didn’t believe me but still, I lied.’

‘Is this a crime? Are you’ – sigh – ‘sought by the police in your home country?’

‘What, um, no? I mean, I got community service, and that. But it’s done. I finished that.’

‘Well for crying out loud. Go say sorry to your mother. Go say sorry to the damn gardener. You think we don’t have anything better to do around here? I’m not a priest.’ She reached into a drawer for a pen. ‘Now,’ she said without enthusiasm. ‘Do you need to see a doctor?’

It took Gaby a moment to gather herself. She was blushing. ‘Ah, no. No, I feel totally fine now,’ said Gaby.

Gaby was starting to recognise the situation she was in here. She felt a dawning relief. She was being too much trouble. A situation she’d been familiar with her entire life. The officer was casting about for reasons to continue with her day, to not be sidetracked by this human annoyance. To call a doctor would no doubt take time, would be bothering someone else, would probably require some kind of paperwork, forms filled out, procedures to follow. The officer was at this moment weighing all of that up against the potential for trouble if, say, the young girl walked out of here and promptly keeled over and died. The chances of that happening when she was already on a plane, and thus not this officer’s responsibility.

Likewise, Gaby already knew there was no way she wasn’t going to be put on a plane and pronto; she wasn’t going to be detained. The incomprehensible boarding ticket was there in front of the officer, she was soothing it flat with her broad string fingers, she understood it perfectly, there was no chance in hell she was not making sure that Gaby was on the next plane out of Dodge.

‘You can’t go on to your final destination, though,’ she said. ‘You realise

that. We have to send you home.'

The officer did make the minimal effort to rifle one last time through Gaby's bag on the way out. She scooped up the stone tool. 'And I don't think we can let you take this back onboard,' she said. 'It's kind of ... a weapon.'

You could tell it appealed to her, the way she hefted it in her hand. You could tell she wouldn't mind having another loop on her belt, one that fit this rock just right. The officer placed it on the near corner of her desk and patted it possessively. 'Looks really old,' she said, and for the first time smiled. 'Take some weight off your back, at any rate.'

And that was true enough. With her almost empty bag slung on her shoulder and her empty belly, Gaby felt quite giddy with the lightness. (Stone dense with resentment, stranded up high on a desk on the seventh floor of the airport building, still pulling with desire to rejoin the core of the earth.) She laughed as the Officer guided her back across the terminal – and she hadn't been wrong to be confused: it was a long and complex crossing, involving escalators and a tiny train and elevators and finally, the gate, where the last of the flight crew was waiting impatiently to close boarding having obviously been instructed to wait, annoyed to have her on their hands. The flight was not the one she had wanted; it wasn't going on.

But Gaby resolved to be good as gold, to be no trouble, no trouble at all; to accept the vegetarian pasta, not to smoke or join the mile-high cub or ask for another gin and tonic, to sit quiet as a mouse until she was deposited where she was meant to go.

At the passport control at the other end, again there was one of those temperature scanners that probe your face for signs of infection, and she watched herself in the flaring image and expected to see a flaming signature of heat running down her throat; but there was nothing unusual, just the usual thin ghost staring back herself. When the passport guy asked her the relevant questions, her voice to her own ears was snappish; it hurt to talk. But perhaps this had the effect of making her seem more confident, more forceful. He let her through without demur, as if she were no trouble, no trouble at all.



When she came out the other end of the airport transit, she was not drained and jetlagged as one might expect, but bright-eyed and invigorated. She'd unburdened herself of various weights on the flight, but some strong weightless essence had entered her and she felt fine, felt bright and good like she hadn't for as long as she could remember. The airport was the same one she'd left, but it felt renewed.

But no Mr Franks. At the airport, a chauffeur was waiting for her. She wondered if this was some obscure snub by her mother. A little put out, Gaby handed him her pink handbag to carry.

The same highway, but feeling faster. Same city, full of different spaces. I've told a lot lies, she thought to herself. But I've lived some true things too.

If she were compelled to plot her storylines on a board, to number and explain them in good faith, it would require huge whiteboards the size of billboards, of sails, of the walls of a tall skyscraper. It would consist of numerous columns, data streaming down them, not in nice parallel columns but in branching currents, merging and multiplying, heading off sideways, tunnelling out of the white page and into three dimensions. But this now, this stream that she was entering, was one version of the true story. One true version, even, perhaps. She rode towards it optimistically.

They passed the CitiGreen turnoff without her realising it; perhaps because the bridge was no longer there. She may have noticed the smoke drifting across the road at that point, but it was hard to distinguish from the general pall. And she was distracted.

It took her a while, too, to realise that the car was not taking her back to the bay apartment, nor to the Clinic.

'Where are we going?'

The driver just nodded ahead; and a few minutes later they were turning up a familiar driveway. A house that looked much the same from the front, although she knew the back part had been extensively remodeled and repaired after the Incident. The electric gates opened at a stately pace and the car transported her up the wide driveway.

'We are here, miss. Your mother is expecting you.'

‘She came back?’

He nodded. ‘She did.’

Still Gaby sat, her bag clutched over her belly. The white front door had been repainted; before, it had had a coat of eggshell blue, which had blistered from the heat within. Nothing moved.

It was only now that she realised what had been bothering her about the driver. She frowned at the back of his neck. Something about the set of the ears.

‘I know you, don’t I?’

He replied without turning his head. ‘I’ve worked for your mother for a long time. I used to be in the garden.’ He paused. ‘You used to follow me around the garden, help me catch caterpillars. You were trouble.’ It was hard to catch his expression in the mirror, but it sounded almost as if he were smiling.

Her eyes shifted to his hands on the wheel. They were gloved, what she had thought was an affected part of the chauffeur uniform. The hands seemed fine; they seemed to move the wheel with firmness and precision, although perhaps a little stiff.

And she said nothing. Because what more could she say now? She was a trouble to the world. A ruination. Already the damage was starting again: already she’d made him drive her back here with his wounded hands.

There was a blockage in her throat, perhaps from the smoke they’d passed through. She coughed into her fist; and half expected to see in her palm a black-bright seed. But there was nothing; her hand was empty.



Lerato sat on the bed in one of the clinic rooms, hands clasped, listening to the shower going in the small bathroom.

She’d thrown out his old clothes, but the odour seemed to cling to her hands. For a while there, the overpowering waft of underbridge and underarm had been the solidest thing in the room. She’d had to strip the foul clothes off, the man limp in his arms, weak as a child. His clothes were so deeply grimed

their original colour was entirely indecipherable, and varnished in patches with dried blood. The trousers had come apart at the seams, like clothes cut off in an emergency ward to free the body. What a situation.

Given the general air of catastrophe at the bridge, when the vagrant lurched towards her and fell over at her feet, Lerato just assumed he'd dropped dead. As the morning light came up behind the bridge, it helpfully lit the scene, touching up the relevant spots of colour: the red gash on the man's tilted forehead, the blood coming down across his cheek and jaw in a sheet and into the collar of his ragged shirt.

When the ambulance guys arrived, they didn't do much except wipe up the gore and give Lerato a list of concussion warning signs to watch out for. Morne, of course, had by that point buggered off somewhere.

Shouldn't he go to hospital? She'd asked. They'd shrugged. It would be the public hospital, it would be hours of waiting, and for what?

Then they were off in their busy ambulance again, blinking brightly blue and red along the highway. The tall, filthy man – Roland – looked meekly at them, and began to sway again. She caught him just before he fell, brought him to the car.

Now the man was here, with her. He'd been in the bathroom for a mysteriously long time; it would show up on her water bill. Repeated cycles of gushing water, muted thumping sounds, long patches of concentrated silence, and then more water.

Room six, she thought. Empty now, seeing as that irritating young woman seemed to have absconded. He might get blood on the pillowslip, Lerato thought distantly. Soak in cold water.

She found herself watching the bathroom door-handle with some anticipation, waiting for it to turn.

Roland stood very still, just for a moment allowing himself to feel nothing but the laughable softness of the bathroom rug under his tar-battered toes. He'd stepped cautiously out of the shower some minutes before, but kept the water running – partly to mask the silence in his head, and partly out of an instinct to

conceal his movements from anyone listening. He lifted his eyes from his feet.

Too much stuff around him. Vague forms, white, bright. Glass and towels and rugs and porcelain and silver taps. And around that a further enclosing fuzziness, thick but full of suggestive shapes and figures, that lay between this room and all that had come before. The one clear space proved, when he glimpsed his own head swivelling, to be a mirror on the wall. He examined the damage, all of it, head to toes.

This was it, then. The story now. Seamed and gnarled and worn down to the sinew. The knot of his cock, dangling between narrow thighs. Skin burnt dark on the forearms and neck and face, the rest peeled-looking. He swung his arms and the figure in the glass moved like a loose-jointed puppet. He held still.

That face. His face was his father's now. The old man lurching back into frame: his stance, his hard hands, the set of his mouth. Except the expression not one his father had ever held: surprise. Impatiently, he adjusted. Buckling the eyebrows, souring the mouth.

He had not thought of his father's face for a thousand years.

There were clothes folded on a chair. For him? All white, like ... like a *cricketer*? Funny word. The pant-legs were too short and he pulled the socks up high to cover his calves. His teeth were clean and cool in his mouth. He ran his tongue over them, counting. Some missing, and the ones that remaining ached a bit. Probably a mistake to have used the toothbrush. No shoes. The soles of the old ones had peeled off his feet like bits of wet cardboard earlier, when the woman had humiliatingly undressed him. An old anger rose in a stiff wave in his chest. But no voices, now, to talk him down. He stamped the floor. It gave back no echo; it was as if all the confidential hollows in the earth had been filled with concrete. It was like the air had a different density here, in this building, whatever it was. Like some kind of jamming mechanism was at work, cancelling out the messages that Roland was accustomed to receiving from the ether. Once the world had once rustled with commentary; now it was mute. Once he'd been inside a million stories, but now he was on his own.

Roland swallowed his panic and pressed his fingers to the scar on his scalp; the pain was like a shot of coffee, and he came into focus. He put his hand

on the door; paused to rally himself. Then pushed it and stepped through into a room where a large plump-skinned woman was sitting. She rose to meet him.

Could it be ...? He reeled for a moment, dizzied by a kaleidoscopic vision – a thousand women, the face recurring, again, again, in every dream ... in silks in skins bloodied laughing burning ...

‘Would you like some tea?’

He shook his head and the vision furred itself back into the singular moment. He stared around the room. A cool room. Cold, almost. A new place. A woman he did not know.

‘Where am I? What’s going on here?’ His voice was husky from disuse, but growing stronger.

‘It’s a clinic. A place to rest, to get better.’

He shook his head again, still feeling the ringing numbness. ‘Are you a doctor? Can you look at my ears? Something’s up with them.’

‘I’m not that kind of doctor. I deal more with psychological issues. Bad dreams, memories. I have a technique ...’ She stopped herself short, hands raised to explain. ‘But you don’t want to hear about that. You must want to sleep? I’m sure ...’

‘No.’

‘No?’

Roland took in a deep breath. Something popped in his ears. ‘No. I will not sleep. Lady, I have been asleep a *long long* time.’ He reached out and took the pen from her hands. ‘And let me tell you, I have *a million memories*.’



A few days later, her handler let out Miri, the black and white sniffer dog, to relieve herself on the grass next to the loading bays. The dog handler was supposed to keep the animal on the leash tightly while they were outside, but actually he never did. He loved to see his girl run. Miri liked to chase up the birds on the grass, the pigeons and gulls that came to gather here; and the handler

considered this was probably a wise move, sensible even, something the airport authorities should thank him for. There were places where they hired in dog handlers and snipers and even trained hawks, he'd heard, to do the same, to keep the birds away from the planes. The grass here was unstable with mole-hills too, and a bit of dog-scaring could only be good for that too.

The small bitch, a slender breed of border-collie mix with an astoundingly fine sense of smell, hurtled across the lush grass. As she ran she computed everything in ultra high speed: the traces of birds and moles and the strong chalky scent of the paint they used to draw the runway lines and the overwhelming stench of diesel fuel from the planes. The interior atmosphere of the cabins burped out when the doors were popped open, a staggering stench of recycled air and farts and septic toilets and dirty clothes and stale belched-up airline meals; an exotic cacophony of human skin and clothes and sweat and breath, from every corner of the world, in wild symphony. It was a challenging environment for a dog of exquisite faculties, a bit overwhelming even; generally she liked to keep her plush nose down to the ground, busy with the good scents of grass and soil and other animal's piss and the tangy promise of plump mole bodies wiggling away just beneath the earth; she'd do her business efficiently and then leave.

But this time there was something else happening; something super distracting. Something that lanced right into the back of her already addicted brain and fiddled with the wiring there, all her elaborate training threatened by a new smell, a new drug, a big and bolder and more enchanting one than she had ever encountered before. At first it called her, and she ran into it headlong; and then a potent presence ordered her SIT STAY and she stopped dead in her track and LAY DOWN PLAY DEAD right there in the middle of the grass, nose wedged between her front paws, eyes dilated and staring at a spot on the grass directly in front of her nose. She shivered, she moaned to herself, she fell still.

Something was coming to life before her.

It came to the little collie dog in the form of her own kind. It came to her as a black dog, but vast, shapeshifting, fearsome, smelling of a thousand summers, smelling of old dog things from back in the days of wolves and jackals,

of dust and grass and blood. The sheepdog cowered and rolled back her head, showing her neck submissively. The apparition leaned forward and sniffed, delicately, only once; that was all that was needed. The small dog was a mere speck in the gigantic smell universe, the scent encyclopaedia that the long-muzzled dark one held beneath his pointed ears; she was easily absorbed and identified, easily understood.

Miri was a good dog. The dog spirit was not angry or displeased. It leaned forward and bestowed a single heavy lick along the muzzle. The smaller dog responded to the benediction, got gratefully to its paws, and for a while they played together, dog and dog ghost, nipping and circling. And then another huge plane came lumbering across the sky, and for a brief moment even these frolicking creatures were a little cowed by human ingenuity, by the dense weight and complex innards of this gigantic flying machine, and the sound of it turned the little dog's head – for her ears were marvels too, whorled gems of organic engineering, and the planes' noise hurt them – and when she turned back again, jiggling and jinking in a half-circle to rejoin the game, the great black dog was gone.

'Your dog's gone apeshit,' said the man at the window, where he was passing a cigarette around with the canine handler. 'You sure it didn't find anything in those bags?'

Indeed, Miri was jumping and twisting out there on the grass by herself, in an unusual way, running in fevered circles and then plumping herself down flat on the lawn. The canine control officer watched with a frown. 'Fuck,' he said. He stubbed the cigarette out hastily and set off at a jog across the grass, several intense concerns crossing his mind at once. If he'd fucked up a search; if the dog had been poisoned; if he'd get in trouble for obstructing the runway.

By the time he got up close to the hound, his anxiety had settled on the second option, because it did indeed seem as if the little dog was sick from something toxic. She was on her side, jaws gaping and tongue out, panting wildly. She rolled her black eyes back at him wildly. But when he snapped his fingers at her she was up on her paws again and came towards him smartly. He

hustled her back indoors into the lobby area as quickly as he could and then sat and examined her gums, her eyes, her paws. She seemed hyper, and there was some froth gathered in the corner of her jaw. He wiped it off with his fingers. Her fur was a bit matted and dirty with grass stains; he'd have to comb it out later. There was weird greenish stuff in her fur too, not just grass, some kind of other vegetable matter, slick green with black pips or seeds in it. It stank a bit. He put his fingers to his nose and grimaced. Bile, mixed with something pungent, almost like eucalyptus. He often wondered how this dog with her very refined sense of smell could stand the things she put her muzzle in sometimes. At least it wasn't shit, this time.

'Everything ok?' asked his superior officer, sticking his head in the door.

'Yeah fine no worries, she was just having a bit of a frisk.'

'Weird shit going on out there today. Boss's worried about access. That psycho girl who got outside. Think we need to watch it for a bit, keep that dog indoors.'

'Right, ok,' he answered absently. He hadn't even paid attention to the bother with the girl, yesterday. He generally didn't pay all that much attention to human beings.

The control officer was pleased to hustle home relatively early, catching a ride with the canine van that left after the early shift. He lived in a small room out the back of his brother-in-law's house. It was all he could afford on his current salary, but it had the advantage of having a bit of space between the main house and the converted garage where he lived, where he'd built a couple of wooden dog houses for the dogs he looked after. He was not a believer in dogs sleeping with their owners, and in his professional environment it was important that species rank and hierarchy was maintained; but nobody could say that Miri was ever uncomfortable. But something was up with that dog today. Usually, after a full shift, she'd be calm, ready to have her supper and settle down, but she was jumping about tonight, dashing into the corners on the way home, pushing her nose at things, tail wagging furiously, avid but distracted, looking for something that wasn't there.

He was tired himself, but he hated to see her so frustrated. 'Walk?' he



sighed, and of course she was ecstatic at the thought.

‘OK, just around the block.’

And so man and dog went for a walk, and Miri raced happily all the way to the quietly sighing, dirty-silver beach, where she touched noses with other dogs and was petted by a small child and seemed very happy indeed, frisking and shaking her coat; and the black seeds that had stickily adhered to her fur released their hold, and everywhere she ran she sent a spray of them out into the world, some transferred to other friendly nose-rubbing dogs; and each seed at length eagerly sought its place in the soil, worming down, working in, looking for the next place and the next, the place to bed down for another stretch of time, a year or a hundred, or a thousand even. Looking around for the others, for the bones and stones, for the things with stories. Some of them landed on soft soil. Some of them grew.

Old Lady Bones was there with them, fragmented, microscopic, oceanic, molecular. A tiny fragment of Old Lady Bones that had scraped off the third claw of the right front paw of Miri was circulating in the delicate puddle formed by the dog’s paw print on the silver beach, which was now filling ever so slowly with the salty liquor of the incoming tide, was spinning Old Lady round with a dancing crew of translucent spirochetes like a troupe of fragile glass ghosts, was filling and spilling out, was lifting and transporting her, out down to the breakers, where she would be thrashed and battered back and forth and eventually drawn out on deep lungful of water into the deeps, and out, and out, to find her way, eventually, via the oceanic tide roads, to another resting place.

## 7.

A little piece of land unfolds into many dimensions. Like this one here: what had been a flat sheet of ground was now mirrored, duplicated, raised up in many levels – three storeys of parking spaces, to be precise – and sunk equally deep, three levels down, identical floors of concrete painted with lines of yellow and white and red. The place had not yet been opened for cars; in the basement, workmen were still painting in the last of the exit arrows, still fitting the electronically operated ticketing machines. There would be no live employees on site, once it was all up and running.

Morne was up on the topmost deck, in the open air. At his feet, the lines unfurled, directing invisible cars into their places. He was higher than ever here, higher than he'd been on his own penthouse rooftop, and more alone. He stood because wasn't possible to sit on the edge of the drop here. The whole thing was ringed with anti-bird spikes, metal thistles that echoed in their form almost exactly the ant-vagrant strips that had been laid down around the base of the building, in just those areas where the green patches of lawn had been indicated in the hopeful diagram on the billboard. So he stood with his arms folded across his chest, uncertain. What now? He felt light, almost weightless; he'd had hardly eaten for the last few days.

You know what? He missed Andrew. Where had the bugger fucked off to? Just up and vanished. Could it be – it seemed an extraordinary idea – that Morne was *lonely*? Maybe it was time to go see Lerato again.

A squawk interrupted his train of thought. A large seagull had landed not twenty centimetres away, right on top of the spikes. Its leathery yellow webs seemed to fold easily over the spears, contemptuous. Morne laughed, squawked back. The gull ejected a splatter of white over the wall and eyed him from the side of its head. He was certain it was the same one, his old gull. Guilt Gull.

On impulse Morne put out a hand. He'd never tried to do this before, to touch. Astonishingly, the gull let him, let him rest his palm on the smooth slightly oily feathers. They trembled in the breeze. The gull turned its head,

ducking its red-spotted yellow bill left and right, but did not pull away.

Cautiously, he put out another hand, curving it around the bird's breast and neck. A bead of salty water dripped off the tip of the bird's beak. Staring into the yellow eye, he cautiously lifted the bird's body towards him. He almost stumbled back, it was so light: he'd expected a heavier burden. But the bird was light, light, like it was carved out of Styrofoam. Hollow bones, he remembered.

He closed his eyes and held the fragile body. Felt his own bones, so light, so light, lifted up so far from the earth's surface; heard the flutter of pale wings all around him in the air. Almost as if his own feet were lifting, the last lucky coins trickling from his pockets and scattering on the ground far, far below.



The foundations had been dug deep, really deep. All the old soil, centuries down, had been dug out, displaced, removed to distant locations. The old bones and dead roots minced fine and teased apart and scattered to the winds. Skeletons of hominids in fragments, sifting out of the back of the ten-tonne trucks that shifted the earth away, laughing through their shattered teeth before their consciousness dissipated finally into powder. Shell beads and fishbones and the charcoal of old hearths, blown all about, sifting in the sandy winds of a dried-out land. Leaving a cavern, a gigantic cube of air, sides sliced open to reveal the cakey layers of time. Bisected worms writhed; mole tunnels opened up to reveal their secret chambers; a rusty old set of leg-irons, released from the clay, tumbled down the side of the crater and landed on the damp basement layer, snapping open. Down there it was clammy, with little pools of moisture gathering; the water had been there all along, hiding. The ghosts of doves slipped from the splinters of their bones and fled into the upper air. There was an air of relief, and then, anticipation. A hole to be filled.

It hadn't been an easy job for the construction company. For one thing, there'd been the old collapsed bridge to clear away, the chunks of fire- and time-

distressed concrete big as small cars, some of them, twisted through with old rusted rebar. In the end they'd used some of the rubble to back-fill an irregular depression in the corner of the site, shovelling back chunks of the bridge and levelling it out.

Within this rubble, supporting all the tonnage balanced above, lay Andrew's body. Composed, arms twisted up in defence. The green man's body was still beautiful, spine bent in a taut curve, his bones broken but cleanly; intermingled with the burnt femurs of the dog now, a chimeric puzzle for a future archaeologist. His body was in the last stages of decomposition, the green tattoos unfurling, sloughing off, tinting the grains of soil with his juices. His hands cupped his belly, the last meal leaking out through the bones of the pelvis – leaving a handful of seeds, round and shiny, bright as buttons, ever the children of the world. Eager, but patient too. Maybe this was not their time, not yet; but they could wait, had waited before.

Being a new building, the parkade did not yet have a voice. But softly, softly, voices were gathering, starting to rustle in its dim corners. Every now and then, a motorist might hear, collecting their car late in the evening when the parking garage was at its most hollow and echoing, the frailest whisper reverberating from below: and old lady's laughter, the whisper of mould, a spider's sigh.

And the green man was starting to wake, to rouse from the shock of death and into the long dream.

Hello? He said, and waited for an answer.

An answer would come. It was a good little piece of ground.

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